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**NAVAL  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN THAILAND:  
MILITARY AUTONOMY OR CIVILIAN CONTROL?**

by

Warren Matthews

June 2005

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Aurel Croissant  
Brian Swanland

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**CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN THAILAND: MILITARY AUTONOMY OR  
CIVILIAN CONTROL?**

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Captain, United States Marine Corps  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis, addresses the level of civilian control over a once politically dominant Thai military. The thesis starts by presenting a history of the evolving political role of the Thai military from the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932 to the events of Black May in 1992. After discussing the events from 1992 until the present, the thesis focuses on the three main enablers for greater civilian control of the military; economic development, political parties, and the Monarchy. Next the chapter analyzes three different periods in Thailand's political development to determine trends in the level of military autonomy and civilian control. In this case the thesis found a trend of greater civilian control in both the political and institutional realms dating from the Prime Minister Thanom period (1963-1973) to Prim Minister Thaksin's administration (2001-2005). Finally, the thesis recommends policy proposals for the United States to implement to assist Thailand in consolidating gains made in democratic civilian control of the military.



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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. BACKGROUND

Thailand has experienced an average of one attempted or successful military coup every four and half years since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932.<sup>1</sup> However, the last attempted military coup occurred in February 1991 while the following 14 years were a “coup-free” period. That has led to the speculation, following the May 1992 protests, that military coups in Thailand are a thing of the past.<sup>2</sup> The fourteen years that have passed since the last military coup have seen monumental reforms in the Thai political system. These reforms have had major impacts on the military, the bureaucracy, the civilian leadership (to include political parties), and the monarchy. It is perhaps still too early to tell if the reforms implemented since the “Black May” incident in 1992 and the evolving roles of other increasingly powerful institutions in Thailand have made military coups in Thailand obsolete.<sup>3</sup> Yet by providing a theory grounded in the

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Crouch, “Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia,” in Larry Diamond et al., Eds., *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*. (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins), 1997, 213.

<sup>2</sup> See James R. Klein, “The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 1997: A Blueprint for Participatory Democracy,” *The Asia Foundation Working Paper Series*, <http://www.asiafoundation.org/Publications/workingpapers.html> (Accessed 26 Apr 05), 35-37; Surachart Bamrungasuk, “Thailand: Military Professionalism at the Crossroads,” in Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Military Professionalism in Asia*, (Honolulu, Hawaii: East-West Center) 2001, 77; Prawase Wasi, “An Overview of Political Reform,” in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 21; and Michael Kelly Connors, “Political Reform and the State in Thailand,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 29, issue 2, 1999, 203.

<sup>3</sup> On May 18, 1992 in Bangkok, heavily armed Thai soldiers attempted to disperse protesters who had assembled to protest the appointment of General Suchinda Kraprayoon as Prime Minister. Protestors resisted and the Thai troops opened fire. Over the course of the next three days repeated attempts were made to reassemble by the protestors; the Thai troops continued to attack and kill civilians. After 44 civilian protestors were killed and another 38 missing the Monarchy intervened, effectively ending the crisis. The King then appointed a civilian Prime Minister, Anand Panyarachun to head the government. The Thai military retreated from its overt role in Thai politics and returned to the “barracks.” For a further discussion on the events and causes of the 1992 democratic uprising see: James Ockey, “Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations,” in Mutiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001; Kevin Hewison, “The Monarchy and Democratization,” in Kevin Hewison, ed., *Political Change in Thailand, Democracy and Participation*, (London: Routledge), 1997, 58-74; Ji Ungpakorn *The Struggle for Democracy and Social Justice in Thailand*, (Bangkok: Arom Pongpangnan Foundation), 1997; and Michael Connors, “When the Dogs Howl: Thailand and the Politics of Democratization,” in Phillip Darby, ed., *At the Edge of International Relations: Postcolonialism, Gender and Dependency*, (London: Pinter), 1997, 125-147.



historical analysis of the ebbs and flows of Thailand's dynamic political environment this thesis will be able to provide a plausible and convincing answer to the question on whether or not there is civilian control of the Thai military (which would support the argument that the times of military intervention in Thai politics are over) or if the military remains an autonomous institution (which in turn would at least qualify that optimistic perspective).

## **B. RESEARCH SCOPE**

In order to analyze the current political situation in Thailand it is important to understand the past. I will take a historically informed look at the vibrant political landscape of Thailand starting in 1932. By looking at the evolving role of the military I will establish how other important political actors developed allowing for an evolving political climate that saw a once powerful military institution retreat from political dominance to the barracks in 1992. In order to understand the type of civilian control that is being established in Thailand today I will focus on some of the important changes that have occurred following "Black May" in 1992. These changes are integral as to whether or not the civilian leadership maintains control of the military or if the military remains an autonomous military actor. And finally I will touch on what the United States is doing policy wise in relation to civilian military relations in Thailand and make some recommendations on what policy makers can do to further objective democratic civilian control of the Thai military.

## **C. METHODOLOGY**

The methodology of this thesis is composed of literature research of books, theses, electronic documents, and newspaper articles. All of these research documents will be analyzed and evaluated in order to provide insight into whether there is civilian control of the military or if the military remains an autonomous institution. Based on a

case study of three different historical periods in Thailand's past this thesis will use David Pion-Berlin's concept of autonomy as an analytical framework regarding the question of civilian control or military autonomy. An empirical investigation into three different periods and three decision areas in Thailand's defense related issues will demonstrate the shift in civilian control and military autonomy. Finally, I will focus on some primary source documents of various U.S. government programs to help me analyze the policy options to suggest reasonable improvements to the current U.S. policy regarding Thailand's civil-military relations.

#### **D. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

Much of the historical analysis has been researched in great depth and this thesis is only looking to provide a relevant context in which the historical changes that occurred during and after the "Black May" incident of 1992.<sup>4</sup> This thesis' historical analysis will provide relevant examples of how and why civilian control and military autonomy have developed. The focus will then shift to three relevant periods in Thailand's political history to provide a case study concerning the shift in civilian control of the military. And finally, after taking the shift in civilian control of the Thai military into account various U.S. policies and policy options will be discussed.

Chapter II takes a brief historical look at the changing role of the military and the evolving political role of influential political institutions in the Thai political environment. This helps set the stage for the events in 1992 and the historic shift in power that culminated in the Thai military's retreat to the barracks.

Chapter III will focus on some of the changes that have occurred since the "Black May" incidents of 1992 and some of the influencing factors that forced the Thai military to accept these changes. I will argue that without the development of other powerful

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<sup>4</sup> See John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981; James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Alagappa, Mutiah, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 187-208; Kevin Hewison, *Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Participation*, (London and New York: Routledge), 1997; and Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, among many others for more in depth historical analysis.

institutions, namely the political parties, civilian leadership, and the monarchy it is unlikely the military would have been forced to return to the barracks.

Chapter IV will use David Pion-Berlin's concept of autonomy to set up an analytical framework to demonstrate how military autonomy has been transformed into civilian control. Using a case study of three different time periods in Thailand's political development to demonstrate how control in three important arenas has shifted from a level of military autonomy to civilian control.

Chapter V will evaluate current U.S. policies implemented to assist Thailand's civil-military relationship. Concentrating on these policies I will recommend changes that will assist the United States which is in turn helping Thailand to achieve a more democratic objective civilian control of the military.

## II. THE CHANGING POLITICAL ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN THAI POLITICS 1932-1992

### A. OVERTHROW OF THE ABSOLUTE MONARCHY

In June 1932, a constitutional system of government was introduced to Thailand when a group of military officers and civilian bureaucrats overthrew the absolute monarchy and established a guided democracy. The form of guided democracy the coup group established was a unicameral legislature composed of two categories of members—half elected and half appointed.<sup>5</sup> The original coup group consisted of not more than 70 people who are often referred to as “The Reformers.” The leaders of the coup came from four different groups: senior army officers, junior army officers, navy officers, and civilian officials.<sup>6</sup> The reformers staked their claim to legitimacy on nationalism and the inauguration of constitutional democracy.<sup>7</sup> This group initially received considerable support from workers, students, and other urban groups but the locus of power was a strong bureaucracy.<sup>8</sup>

Leading to the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, Thailand had seen the adulation of the King sharply decline from King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) to King Prajadhipok’s (1925-1935) reign. This could be blamed in part on the fact that King Chulalongkorn was seen as a farsighted competent king in contrast to Prajadhipok who was seen as leading a corrupt and overly extravagant monarchy.<sup>9</sup> This degradation of the King’s power was also possible because of the reforms of 1910, put in place by King Chulalongkorn, which strengthened the military. The strengthening of the military was in

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<sup>5</sup> Chai-Anan Samudavanija, “Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy,” In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds. *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 325.

<sup>6</sup> John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981, 59.

<sup>7</sup> R.H. Taylor, *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia* (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press), 1996, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Hewison, Kevin, *Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Participation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 11 and Chai-Anan Samudavanija, “Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy,” In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 325.

<sup>9</sup> John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981, 55.

response to the threat of European colonization. This strengthened military eventually developed as a viable oppositional institution able to challenge the dominance of the monarchy. The military leaders of the 1932 coup did not change the political and administrative systems created by King Chulalongkorn but transferred state power and patronage from the crown to shifting cliques of senior bureaucrats and military officers.<sup>10</sup> The Thai military then used the political and administrative systems established by King Chulalongkorn to play a dominant role in Thai politics over the course of the next sixty plus years.

Following the 1932 coup, the Thai military sought to institutionalize its grip on political power. Thailand held its first general election in 1933 but this was only a tool to legitimate the political system and process in which competition for power was not linked with the electorate but with the factions in the military.<sup>11</sup> Another way in which the military sought to portray itself as a democratizing force was demonstrated twice in 1933 when the military “rescued” the parliamentary regime.<sup>12</sup> But behind the façade of democratic institutions and processes the military retained its power by having the Military Council elect half the representatives in the unicameral legislature.<sup>13</sup> In addition, from 1934-1938 the military budget doubled and the military regime began to stabilize.<sup>14</sup> Despite the strengthening of the military regime there continued to be disunity in the military and among the civilian leadership.

A critical split occurred among the reformers that helped to foreshadow future Thai political developments. Pridi Phnomyong was the most influential civilian among the reformers and an important leader of the 1932 coup group. Pridi and his followers in

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<sup>10</sup> James R. Klein, “The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 1997: A Blueprint for Participatory Democracy,” *The Asia Foundation Working Paper Series*, <http://www.asiafoundation.org/Publications/workingpapers.html> (Accessed 26 Apr 05), 5.

<sup>11</sup> The Thai military first “rescued” the parliament from the high-ranking bureaucrats invited to head the interim government and then from a proroyalist rebellion. Chai-Anan Samudavanija, “Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy,” In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 326.

<sup>12</sup> James Ockey, “Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations,” in Mutiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 192.

<sup>13</sup> James R. Klein, “The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 1997: A Blueprint for Participatory Democracy,” *The Asia Foundation Working Paper Series*, <http://www.asiafoundation.org/Publications/workingpapers.html> (Accessed 26 Apr 05), 6.

<sup>14</sup> John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981, 106.

the civilian faction within the reformers presented an alternative ideology to the dominant military faction. However, the civilian faction within the People's Party did not develop into a broad-based political party because of the resistance of the more powerful military faction. As a result the civilian factions' power and influence slowly declined until the conclusion of World War II.<sup>15</sup> Plaek Phibunsongkhram (Phibun), the most influential military leader of the coup group, went on to become Prime Minister in 1938 and began to consolidate his hold on power. He not only strengthened the military's role in politics but sought to militarize Thai society just prior to World War II.<sup>16</sup>

## **B. POST WORLD WAR II DEVELOPMENTS**

The eventual political outcomes of Pridi and Phibun seem quite ironic considering whom they supported in the Second World War. Phibun threw his support, and hence the support of Thailand behind the Japanese. Pridi organized the "Free Thai" resistance movement and sought support of the Allies. With the eventual Allied victory Phibun was forced out of office but not out of politics. Civilians, influenced by Pridi, were able to take control of government. The promulgation of a new Constitution in May 1946 was an attempt by the civilian leadership of Pridi to establish new institutional arrangements to minimize the power of the military.<sup>17</sup> It was during this brief period from 1945-1947 that Thailand saw a fully elected Assembly and the rise of political parties. However, these political parties were promoted more as vehicles for personal patronage and not as institutionalized expression of social forces or political issues.<sup>18</sup> The division among the political parties along with rampant corruption and inflation (due in part to the War) caused immense instability. From August 1945 to November 1947 there were eight

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<sup>15</sup> Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy," In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 326.

<sup>16</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Mutiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 192.

<sup>17</sup> Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy," In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 328.

<sup>18</sup> John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981, 107.

cabinets and five different prime ministers.<sup>19</sup> The death of King Ananda, under uncertain circumstances along with inexperienced civilian leadership set the stage for another military coup in 1947. The coup although not led by Phibun, eventually enabled him to once again become Prime Minister. Pridi attempted a failed countercoup in 1949 and eventually went into exile in China. Despite the fact that Phibun supported the Japanese in World War II, Western powers were willing to support him based on his anti-communist ideology.

In 1955 after his world tour of Western democracies, Phibun officially sanctioned political parties.<sup>20</sup> State actors heavily influenced the stronger parties but opposition parties were allowed to form. Phibun began to pursue reform policies that opened up the opportunity for greater participation in Thai politics.<sup>21</sup> It was during this time that Thailand saw perhaps its longest protest march ever held (22 January 1956) and the establishment of a Hyde Park-style Speakers' Corner at Sanam Luang.<sup>22</sup> These modest political reforms were soon to be overturned under the leadership of Phibun's successor Prime Minister Sarit.

Phibun, having lost direct control of the military for quite some time was overthrown by a military coup led by General Sarit Thanarat. The reforms seen under Prime Minister Phibun toward the end of his regime were eventually suppressed by the conservative right of the elite civil society and the military. It was during the reforms of Phibun's last couple of years as Prime Minister that two prominent opposing factions were able to develop. Police General Phao Sriyanond and Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat represented two powerful institutions and a threat to Phibun's hold on power. This split between Phao and Sarit was originally viewed as an attempt by Phibun to maintain his

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<sup>19</sup> Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy," In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 328.

<sup>20</sup> James Ockey, "Civil Society and Street Politics in Historical Perspective," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 108

<sup>21</sup> James Ockey, "Civil Society and Street Politics in Historical Perspective," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 108.

<sup>22</sup> James Ockey, "Civil Society and Street Politics in Historical Perspective," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 107.

power by manipulating and balancing off these two factions.<sup>23</sup> However, with strong royal and popular support, Sarit was able to overthrow the Phibun regime in 1957, justified in part by Phibun's economic failure and his alleged links with the coercive police.<sup>24</sup> When Sarit took over, Phibun and Phao were sent to exile, and Sarit began to consolidate his power, effectively ending the competition for commercial power.<sup>25</sup>

### C. SARIT AND THANOM- MILITARY RULE

The Sarit era was characterized by political authoritarianism, economic development and massive corruption.<sup>26</sup> Initially attempts were made by Sarit to restore limited democracy. After the 1957 coup the constitution was temporarily suspended and a caretaker government was appointed. An election was held in 1958, but as a result of the inability of the government to control the internal strife and the deteriorating economic conditions, Sarit staged another coup in 1958.<sup>27</sup> Prime Minister Sarit abrogated the constitution, dissolved the assembly and banned political parties. Two important factors influencing political development during this period continued to be fighting communism and promoting development. The political developments prior to Sarit staging his coup in 1958 led to the common perception that democratic processes led to inherent instability and were a detriment to economic progress. Therefore the common justification used by one military regime after another has been "national security," and an important part of security was stability.<sup>28</sup> And with the rising threat of

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<sup>23</sup> Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy," In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 329.

<sup>24</sup> Busakorn Suriyasarn, "Thai Military in Politics: Return to the Barracks?" <http://www.busakorn.addr.com/mil/mil-body.htm>, (Accessed 24 Apr 2005).

<sup>25</sup> James Oekey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Mutiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 193.

<sup>26</sup> John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981, 112.

<sup>27</sup> Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy," In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 329.

<sup>28</sup> Busakorn Suriyasarn, "Thai Military in Politics: Return to The Barracks?" <http://www.busakorn.addr.com/mil/mil-body.htm> (Accessed 4 December 2004).



external forces, mainly communism, the military was able to garner support from the stability conscious elite class. Sarit also had close ties to the United States and business enterprises which helped him facilitate economic development.

Prime Minister Sarit was able to increase the power he inherited by way of the 1958 coup with the Interim Constitution in 1959. The Interim Constitution established an all-appointed constituent assembly and also gave tremendous power to the prime minister.<sup>29</sup> Instead of using democracy as a means of legitimacy, Sarit sought economic development, fighting communism, and promoting the role of the Monarchy to garner support. As part of his economic development strategy Sarit began to emphasize private enterprise and began to take the state out of economic competition with civil society. As part of his National Development Plan, Sarit brought in huge amounts of American rest and recreation money and foreign investment and encouraged civil society to compete for it, and in doing so he effectively depoliticized civil society.<sup>30</sup> The second way in which Sarit was able to legitimize his grip on power was through the fight against the communists. During the Sarit period the military experienced continued growth and an expanded role, as the military took over much of the counterinsurgency efforts from the police.<sup>31</sup> And finally to balance the blowback to his tightening grip on power Sarit promoted a greater role for the monarchy and restored many of its ceremonial functions. As a prominent Thai scholar points out, Sarit made it possible, without perhaps intending, for the monarchy to grow strong enough to play an independent role after his death.<sup>32</sup> Sarit under the auspices of the Cold War struggle against communism used development, the counter-insurgency, and the monarchy in an effective way to strengthen his grip and in turn the military's grip on power.

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<sup>29</sup> Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy," In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 329.

<sup>30</sup> James Ockey, "Civil Society and Street Politics in Historical Perspective," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 120.

<sup>31</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Mutiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 194.

<sup>32</sup> Thak Chaleomtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotism*, (Bangkok: Bannakit Press), 1979, 334.

Thanom, a faithful follower of Sarit, assumed the post of Prime Minister upon Sarit's death. Thanom continued the anti-communist struggle through economic and political development. Development was seen by U.S. and Thai policymakers as crucial to the counterinsurgency; consequently many programs were aimed at rural areas with the military taking the leadership role.<sup>33</sup> During the 1960's Thailand saw an impressive annual increase of about 7% per year in GNP (Gross National Product).<sup>34</sup> Thanom's military regime benefited from this exceptional growth and with the advice of some more liberal minded advisors began to allow a more democratic process to evolve. A constitution was drawn up in 1968 with elections held in 1969. The Democrats, an opposition party of the ruling United Thai Peoples Party (established by the military shortly after legalization of political parties in 1968) had done well in the elections. There was wide swing of the pendulum in the direction of reform.<sup>35</sup> Demand for constitutional reform was demanded across all spectrums of society to include the King, professionals, teachers, students and workers.<sup>36</sup> Thanom, responded by associating his opposition to communist insurgency, by reestablishing military rule in 1971, banning political parties, abolishing the constitution, and dissolving the legislature. After continued corruption and repression, Thailand saw its first mass uprising in 1973. It is estimated that over 250,000 Thais protested the military government calling for restoration of constitutionalism and electoral democracy.<sup>37</sup> The military attempted to

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<sup>33</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Mutiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 194.

<sup>34</sup> John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981, 114.

<sup>35</sup> Terence C. Lee, "The Causes of Military Insubordination: Explaining Military Organizational Behavior in Thailand," Working Paper Presented at the 46th Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association Honolulu, Hawaii, March 2005, <http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/docs/wp/wp0508.pdf>, (Accessed 8 May 2005), 29.

<sup>36</sup> John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981, 115.

<sup>37</sup> R.H. Taylor, *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia* (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press), 1996, 17.

violently suppress the uprising; killing 75 protestors.<sup>38</sup> The King, dissociated himself from the violence, and the military was forced to cede power.

#### **D. 1973-1980- TIMES OF INSTABILITY**

During the time between the 1973 uprising and a bloody massacre which occurred in 1976, Thailand saw one of the few periods prior to 1992 in which civilian leadership was controlling Thailand. The military, however, still played a significant role behind the scenes. Many have looked back to this period as the time in which civilian leadership began to take root. Development in Bangkok and in the provinces brought about changes in the social structure; labor, the provincial business elite, and the middle class all expanded greatly.<sup>39</sup> In 1974, a constitution was approved and free elections were held in 1975. With opposition allowed to develop, a great divide occurred between the left and the conservatives. This divide eventually played itself out when Thanom, the former prime minister, returned from exile. This political divide eventually resulted in the bloody events of October 6, 1976, in which 43 protestors were massacred on a soccer field.<sup>40</sup> For the first time in Thai history, an army coup was presented to the public as a blow for moderation and accommodation, as well as for the restoration by stages of a parliamentary regime.<sup>41</sup> With the support of the King, a new government was formed under the prime minister ship of Thanin Kraivichien, a civilian Supreme Court Judge. Thanin was a passionate anti-Communist; he established a regime that was in many ways

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<sup>38</sup> On October 13, more than 250,000 people rallied in Bangkok before the Democracy Memorial, the next day troops opened fire on the demonstrators, killing seventy-five, and occupied the campus of Thammasat University. King Bhumibol intervened and a compromise was reached: Thanom had resigned as prime minister but would remain as supreme commander of the armed forces. For further discussion see: David Morell "Thailand," *Asian Survey*, (Feb., 1973), 162-178; and Frank C. Darling, "Student Protest and Political Change in Thailand," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 47, no. 1 (Spring, 1974), 5-19.

<sup>39</sup> Benedict R.O'G Anderson, "Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol 9, Issue 3, (July-September) 1977, 13-30.

<sup>40</sup> Thongchai Winichakul, "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past: The Ambivalence Narratives of the October 1976 Massacre in Bangkok." In *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Thai Studies*, (Chang Mai: Chang Mai University), 1996, 276.

<sup>41</sup> R.H. Taylor, *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia* (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press), 1996, 19.

more repressive than those of the military.<sup>42</sup> The military once again stepped in on October 1977 and staged a coup based on the premise of returning the country to an elected polity. The military agreed that the longer the Thanin government was in power, the sooner the communists could achieve victory. The only way to minimize this threat was to remove the repressive government from power and return to open politics.<sup>43</sup> And a general election was held on schedule in April 1979. Following the upheaval seen in the 1970's, the 1980's produced steady progress for the democratic process in Thailand.

## **E. PRIME MINISTER PREM'S RULE**

From March 1980 to 1988, General Prem Tinsulanon a retired army commander ruled as prime minister of Thailand. When Prem came to power, Thailand was still fighting a communist insurgency. Based on the recent failure of the United States in Vietnam, there were several factions within the military held the belief that the best way to fight communism was through democracy.<sup>44</sup> A strategy used to suppress the CPT (Communist Party Thailand) was building democratic institutions and this policy had the support early on from various factions within the military to include The Young Turks and the Democratic Soldiers.<sup>45</sup> Democracy was viewed as a weapon against communism, and therefore the military sought to promote it, but also control it by maintaining control over key positions.<sup>46</sup> Eventually, the two coup attempts in the

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<sup>42</sup> Sarachart Bamrujsuk, *From Dominance to Power Sharing: The Military and Politics in Thailand, 1973-1992* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>43</sup> Sarachart Bamrujsuk, *From Dominance to Power Sharing: The Military and Politics in Thailand, 1973-1992* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>44</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Alagappa, Mutiah, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 197

<sup>45</sup> See Sarachart Bamrujsuk, *From Dominance to Power Sharing: The Military and Politics in Thailand, 1973-1992* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 116-120; Alagappa, Mutiah, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 197; and Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy," In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 352.

<sup>46</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Mutiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 197.

1980's resulted in part from differences over the nature and pace of democratization.<sup>47</sup> Conscious of his vulnerability to challenges from one military faction or another, Prem increasingly relied on parliamentary support and made a series of alliances with civilian political parties.<sup>48</sup> The increasing influence of civilian leadership contrasted with the decreasing military influence. This was evident in 1983, when the military was unable to block the implementation of constitutional provisions preventing serving officers from being appointed as cabinet ministers or from sitting in the lower house of the National Assembly.<sup>49</sup> The number of military seats in the senate slowly diminished, and civilian politicians, gradually took over cabinet ministries that had earlier gone to (retired) military officers.<sup>50</sup> It was in this period that Prime Minister Prem was able, in small ways to challenge military hegemony by leveraging certain factions within the military along with support from civilian leadership to counteract threats from opposing military factions. With the critical support of civilian leaders in the parliament and the Monarchy, Prime Minister Prem was able to retain power during the coup attempts of April 1, 1981 and September 9, 1985.<sup>51</sup> The period of Prem's rule thus brought a new balance under semi-democratic institutional arrangements in Thailand's political environment; satisfying the interests of the bureaucracy, the army (or certain factions of it), political parties, and the monarchy while slowly adapting to increasing pressure for democratic reforms.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Chia-Anan Samudavanija, *The Young Turks*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) 1982, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Harold Crouch, "Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia," in Larry Diamond et al., Eds., *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*. (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins) 1997, 223.

<sup>49</sup> Harold Crouch, "Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia," in Larry Diamond et al., Eds., *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*. (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins) 1997, 223.

<sup>50</sup> Anek Laothamatas, "Business and Politics in Thailand: New Patterns of Influence," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, (April 1988), 454.

<sup>51</sup> Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, "The Monarchy and Constitutional Change since 1972," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 66 and Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy," In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 335.

<sup>52</sup> Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy," In DIAMOND, Larry, Linz Juan, and Lipset, Seymour Martin, eds. *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 337.

## F. THE ABORTIVE 1991 COUP

Following inconclusive elections in July 1988, on August 9, Chaitchai Choonhavan-a party politician (leader of the Chart Thai Party, which had won the largest number of seats in Parliament) and a long retired army officer- was named to head a six-party coalition government. Whereas Prime Minister Prem had skillfully managed the factions within the military as an effective counter balance, Prime Minister Chaitchai was not as adept. The governments prior to PM Chaitchai recognized the political strength of the military including its ability to carry out coups and to control the mass media (TV and radio stations), and made efforts to avoid such conflict as much as possible.<sup>53</sup> PM Chaitchai however, was willing to test the strength of the military with an attempt to dismiss the military leadership. It was the planned dismissal of General Suchinda Kraprayoon that helped trigger the 1991 military coup.<sup>54</sup> The Chaitchai government had developed a reputation for excessive corruption, while its relations with the military deteriorated helping to unite a once divided military.<sup>55</sup> Without a faction within the military, the monarchy, business elites, or the public willing to support him, the attempt by Prime Minister Chaitchai to challenge the military failed; and the military successfully carried out the coup on 23 February 1991.

The Thai military perhaps using its last chance to overtly hold on to power attempted to manipulate the 1992 elections.<sup>56</sup> This in combination with General Suchinda's broken promise (made during the 1991 military coup) that he would not

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<sup>53</sup> See Yoshifumi Tamada, "Coups in Thailand 1980-1991: Classmates, Internal Conflicts and Relations with the Government of the Military." *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol 33, No. 3, December 1995, 36.

<sup>54</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Alagappa, Mutiah, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 198.

<sup>55</sup> Harold Crouch, "Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia," in Larry Diamond et al., Eds., *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*. (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins) 1997, 224.

<sup>56</sup> Following the coup, General Suchinda closed the parliament and replaced it with a junta called the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC). He then appointed a civilian, Anand Panyarachun, until elections could be held. After a new semi-democratic constitution was written, the military formed a political party called Sammakhitham (Unity). The Sammakhitham party emerged as the dominant party, and businessman with a questionable background (Narong Wongwan) as Prime Minister. With Narong forced to step aside, General Suchinda resigned from the military and assumed the post of Prime Minister despite his earlier pledge that he would not.

assume the Prime Ministership led many to consider the military as corrupt as the civilian leadership it overthrew. This step backwards in the democratic process was met by fierce resistance from the masses. It could be argued and was perceived by some that for the first time the protesters were not left wing students but a large majority was the urban middle class. The call for electoral democracy was widespread and with capable civilian leadership and intervention of the King, civilians began to exert real control and began to challenge the military for the dominant political role for the first time since 1932. The disgrace the military felt, domestically and internationally regarding the massacre in 1992 should not be underestimated in importance as an impetus for their eventual withdrawal from Thai politics.

## **G. CONCLUSION**

The military was the most politically influential institution in Thai politics from 1932 until the 1992 massacres. As touched on earlier due to the forward thinking King Chulalongkorn, Thailand developed a strong army that was an integral component of the Thai state and its ability to resist colonization. From the coup in 1932 until their withdrawal from politics following the 1992 massacre the Thai military has always sought to provide stability as a priority and democracy as a legitimizing force. Army and navy officers, key actors in the original coup to overthrow the authoritarian monarchy, sought legitimacy through establishing a constitution and an electoral process. This electoral process was often either directly manipulated by the military or indirectly by appointing Senate and cabinet members to keep the elected members of the House in check. The political supremacy of the armed forces early in the formative years is clearly reflected in the composition of the Cabinet, which between 1932-1958 was comprised of nearly 75% of prior military members.<sup>57</sup> This stranglehold on power was further illustrated by the numerous coups. During this period there was a relatively constant cycle: the formation of “group,” the strategic deployment of force, the rewards of the coup, and division over the spoils.<sup>58</sup> The military’s dominant influence in the Thai

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<sup>57</sup> John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981, 114.

<sup>58</sup> John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981, 128.

political system during this period can be attributed to an absence of political institutions to put a check on their power. Early on in the process the military sought to consolidate not just its grip on its political power but also on its own forces by stationing the bulk of their forces in Bangkok. This concentration of troops to the First Region (Bangkok) would be critical in mobilizing troops for use in military coups.<sup>59</sup>

The military's willingness to want to appear legitimate actually enabled an environment in which opposition parties could develop. Starting with the concept of guided democracy all the way until the overthrow of a "corrupt" Chatichai government the military framed its role as a "protector" of the Thai state. Unlike other states dominated by military rule where the military would often entrench itself in the bureaucracy, this was not the case in Thailand. The Thai military co-opted the bureaucracy and needed a legitimizing role to maintain its dominant position. The Thai military, as part of a legitimizing strategy would allow opposition certain political space but resort to reversing course if it felt the opposition was getting out of hand. A strategy the military developed to maintain legitimacy but also maintain its grip on power was to establish its own political parties to promote the pro-military candidates. This strategy also gave legitimacy to the political process by showing the military, at times was willing to work within the system to affect change. An example of this occurred in 1955 with the establishment of the Serimanangasila Party and in 1968 with the United Thai People's Party.<sup>60</sup> The development of these parties was in direct response to the advances made by opposition parties. Ultimately, if those advances were too great it would lead to the military re-exerting its dominant political power and in several cases banning political parties completely. But by allowing political space, slowly institutions capable of challenging the Thai military began to develop.

The Thai military has always sought to portray itself as a democratic force. The military sought to use democracy as a tool to retain or legitimize its grip on power; but by opening up the system it allowed those unhappy with the process a legal outlet to attempt

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<sup>59</sup> Daniel, E. King, "Thailand in 1995: Open Society, Dynamic Economy, Troubled Politics," *Asian Survey* 36 (Feb 1996), 137.

<sup>60</sup> R.H. Taylor, *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia* (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press), 1996, 186.



to exert influence. This need to appeal to the masses would play a critical role following the 1992 massacres. The prior massacres in 1973 and 1976 could be written off by the military by referring to the protesters and their leaders as being “outsiders.” The 1992 massacre was different in that a large middle class mobilized to protest military involvement and fight for a return to the electoral process. To many, the military had overstepped its authority and could not resort to calling the forces of the protest “communists.” This would have profound effects in the years following 1992. The military was seen by the masses as a counterproductive institution in Thailand’s progress towards democracy.

### III. THE EVOLVING CIVILIAN MILITARY RELATIONSHIP IN THAILAND SINCE 1992

#### A. THE POST-1992 POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Almost fourteen years have passed since the events of “Bloody May” forced the Thai military to retreat to the barracks. Since 1991, Thailand has not experienced an attempted or successful military coup. During this period the Thai military has experienced a historic change in its political role. The international and domestic pressures against military intervention have increased to the point where the costs of a military coup exceed the costs of toleration of civilian control. As Thailand continues its transition to a liberal democracy, the mode of civilian military relations will continue to play a crucial role in the process of democratic stabilization and consolidation.

A major challenge faced by “third wave” democracies such as Thailand is the need to prevent the military, displaced from its once privileged position under dominant military rule from reasserting itself.<sup>61</sup> Thus, so-called “civilian control” of the military becomes a core element in the process of establishing sustainable<sup>62</sup> and viable democracy. In a recently published research note, Greg Foster has described the complex relationship between democracy and civilian control in the following way: “It is a fundamental premise of democratic civilian relations that civilian control of the military is clearly possible without democracy, but democracy isn’t possible without civilian control of the military.”<sup>63</sup>

In the study of democratic transitions in general and democratization in Thailand specifically, social scientists have tended to neglect systematic analysis of how politically

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<sup>61</sup> Harold Crouch, “Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia,” in L. Diamond et al., eds., *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 207.

<sup>62</sup> Adam Przeworski, Susan C. Stokes, and Bernard Manin, eds. *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1999.

<sup>63</sup> Gregory D. Foster, “Civil-Military Relations. The Postmodern Democratic Challenge,” *World Affairs*, Vol. 167, no. 3, 2005, 91-100; Peter D. Feaver, “Civil-Military Relations,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, no. 2, 1999, 211-241; Felipe Agüero “Democratic Consolidation and the Military in Southern Europe and South America,” in: Gunther, Richard et al., *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 1995, 124-166; and Samuel J. Fitch, *The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 1998.

powerful militaries can be placed under civilian control.<sup>64</sup> However, especially in young democracies such as Thailand, which are established on the legacies and rudiments of long-lasting military rule, “keeping the military out of politics” and “keeping civilian authorities from drawing the military into politics” are major challenges.<sup>65</sup>

In order to analyze the prospects of the Thai military from intervening to assert its once dominant role I will focus on the events surrounding the “Bloody May” incident through current developments and how they have affected the military’s coercive force potential and presumably less-democratic predilections,

Thailand, following the events of 1992, was seen as in the second stage of democratic transition, having successfully passed through the first stage. The first stage, transition, aims at the installation of a democratic government. In analyzing Thailand this thesis is concerned mainly with the second stage of democratization, namely the consolidation of democracy. A democracy may be regarded as consolidated if its presence is accepted by the population (sustainable legitimacy) and if political actors assume institutions created in the first stage will last indefinitely.<sup>66</sup> And as Thailand moves towards democratic consolidation issues such as civil-military relations require increased attention to ensure continued democratic advances. Recognizing the increased roles of both the business community and the monarchy will allow my research to focus on some of the changes that have occurred which forced the military to accept a reduced role in Thai politics and to adopt the concept of civilian control of the military by democratically elected civilian leaders.

In this chapter three prime causes accounting for the changing role of the military in Thai politics will be analyzed:

- socioeconomic development, particularly economic growth and subsequent social and economic structural changes

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<sup>64</sup> Aurel Croissant, “Riding the Tiger. Civilian Control and the Military in Democratizing Korea,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 30, no. 3, 2004, 357-382.

<sup>65</sup> Philippe. C. Schmitter, “Forward,” in: Constantine P. Danopoulos and Daniel Zirker (eds.), *Civil-Military Relations in the Soviet and Yugoslav Successor States*, (Boulder: Westview Press), 1996, pp. ix-xxi.

<sup>66</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell, “Transitions, Continuities, and Paradoxes,” in Scott Mainwaring, et al., *Issues in Democratic Consolidation* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 18.

- related to the first factor, the emergence of (provincial) business as a political force which, for the first time in post-1932 Thai politics, strengthened the formation of a viable counter-power to the military's power – autonomous political parties
- the changing role of the institution of the monarchy and, as the human face of that institution, the ebbs and flows of political influence of King Bhumipol, the reigning monarch since 1946.

These external factors rather than military internal variables such as factionalism and intra-military power relations, account to a very significant degree for the course of events following the massacres in 1992. Internal military factors and other external factors were significant in forcing a changing role in the political role of the Thai military. However, the analysis conducted in this chapter is an exercise in 'partial explanation' of the causes of greater civilian control of the military following the 1992 massacres.

This chapter will attempt to explain three of the most important domestic factors in creating and supporting an environment able to support civilian control of the military. These three factors were chosen because – as most scholars of civil-military relations in Thailand seem to believe they are the most influential factors that shaped the necessary institutional arrangements for greater civilian control of the Thai military since 1992. Economic development caused the development of a business class in Thailand. This business class, which had become increasingly influential, was able to assume the dominant political role in Thailand with the assistance of another Thai institution, the monarchy. It wasn't until 1992 that Thai business groups were willing to challenge the military vice co-opt them. This is where the monarchy and its legitimacy with the Thai people played a critical role. Without the monarchy, it is unlikely the military would have retreated to the barracks in 1992, and allowed a competing institution (civilian leadership representing business interests) to gain and maintain greater control of the military.

## B. THAI CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS SINCE 1992: OVERVIEW

The historical legacy of a dominant political role for the Thai military has been challenged by a variety of institutional and constitutional changes since the “Bloody May” massacre in 1992. As General Wimol Wongvanich, the new Army Chief after the 1992 uprising, said: “The present world emphasizes three issues: democracy, human rights, and environmental protection.”<sup>67</sup> Democracy was accepted by civil society, as well as by political society, as a requirement for Thai politics.<sup>68</sup> It was clear to the military it needed to change its political role and abandon its most utilized tool, military coups, to gain political power. The typical pattern for a military coup to take place, for a military dictatorship to be installed, for certain basic changes and appointments to be made which the army had wanted, and for the army then to hand back gradually to a civilian administration appears to have finally been broken.<sup>69</sup> Following the events of 1992 three important factors and institutions have helped to control military coups and in turn check the military’s political power: (1) economic factors, (2) political parties, and (3) the monarchy. Due to these powerful checks on the military’s power several important institutional changes were implemented and it appears the vicious cycle of military coups in Thailand has come to an end.

The dominant role of the Thai military in politics has been affected by a changing political environment. Examples of this include; the disgrace felt by the military following the 1992 massacre, the resulting constitutional changes in 1997, the rising influence of political parties, and the gradual strengthening of civilian leaders to include

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<sup>67</sup> General Wimol Wongvanich’s statement at “The Meeting of Civil Affairs Officers,” The Army Auditorium, October 16, 1992, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Sarachart Bamruajsuk, *From Dominance to Power Sharing: The Military and Politics in Thailand, 1973-1992* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 150.

<sup>69</sup> Elliot Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Thailand’s Turn* (New York: St Martin’s Press), 1994, 40.

the King.<sup>70</sup> Since 1992 institutions external to the military have implemented policies which have seriously impacted and curtailed some of the military's powers. Immediately following the massacre in 1992 Prime Minister Anand was able to do away with the Capital Peace-Keeping Command an integral tool the Army chief had that gave him access to control TV programs and authority over the Navy and the Air Force in times of crisis.<sup>71</sup> For riot control, the use of military forces, as in other democratic countries now requires cabinet authorization. The civilian government has also been able to cut the military budget as a consequence of the financial crisis of 1997 (with the consequence of reducing an illegal source of military income from commissions for arms purchases), reduce the number of military attaches in Thai embassies, and to have a greater role in allocation of resources (e.g. the government took back the proceeds for military-owned radio stations).<sup>72</sup> The Chuan government also revived a committee in the Ministry of Defense that oversees the purchase of all weapons and was able to reduce increases in the military budget at a level below the average increase in other ministries.<sup>73</sup> Other critical institutional changes implemented in the 1997 Constitution include a democratically elected Senate, an elected Prime Minister, and active duty military can not serve on the cabinet or in the Senate. The appointed senate positions and previous constitutions allowing for an appointed Prime Minister were powerful tools in the past for the military to gain and maintain political control. The democratic process has made some clear gains in implementing some institutional changes necessary to move towards democratic civilian control of the military but Thailand still faces many challenges.

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<sup>70</sup> Among some of the changes affecting the military included reforming the appointments to political positions; Senators after 1997 were elected vice appointed and the Prime Minister could no longer be appointed but had to be an elected member of parliament. For further discussion on the constitutional changes and the impact on the Thai military see: James R. Klein, "The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 1997: A Blueprint for Participatory Democracy," *The Asia Foundation Working Paper Series*, <http://www.asiafoundation.org/Publications/workingpapers.html> (Accessed 26 Apr 05) and Michael Conners, "Framing the 'People's Constitution,'" in Duncan McCargo, *Reforming Thai Politics*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 37-56.

<sup>71</sup> Sarachart Bamruajsuk, *From Dominance to Power Sharing: The Military and Politics in Thailand, 1973-1992* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 148.

<sup>72</sup> Carolina G. Hernandez, "Good Governance of East Asia's Security Forces," *Conference Paper DCAF* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2002), 24.

<sup>73</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Alagappa, Mutiah, ed. *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 199-201.

The historical legacy of the Thai military of launching coups and engaging in business and corruption are among many obstacles that must be overcome in developing a more Western-style professionalism. Several problems that must be addressed before the transition to objective civilian control of the military can occur include a defined military role, the promotion process, and the development of competent civilian leadership in military matters. Since the defeat of the Thai communist insurgency in 1984 and the end of The Cold War the Thai military has been lacking in a clearly defined “enemy.” As stated by Huntington a clearly defined external military mission is critical to successful democratic civilian control of the military.<sup>74</sup> The constitution of Thailand has stipulated the following missions for the Royal Thai Armed Forces: (1) To defend the country and sovereignty (2) to maintain internal stability in the country (3) to maintain peace and order in the country (4) to assist in the development of the country.<sup>75</sup> The fourth mission of development has been a focus of the military following the defeat of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) but this developmental role helps to blur the line between a military and political role for armed forces. To begin to establish a defined mission Thailand implemented defense reform, which was approved by the Defense Council in 1999, formulated partly on the basis of scenario planning.<sup>76</sup> Although this method has been around in more advanced countries for quite a number of years, it is still relatively new and challenging concept for Thailand’s military forces.

A major challenge facing the civilian leadership since 1992 has been implementing reforms to reduce the size of the military and reform the promotion process. The size of the Thai military together with paramilitary forces in 2003 numbered more than 314,000 troops.<sup>77</sup> By comparison the military in the Philippines, with a population of 87.8 million versus 65.4 million in Thailand, is comprised of

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<sup>74</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “Reforming Civil-Military Relations,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 6, Issue 4, (October 1995), 16.

<sup>75</sup> Teerawat Putamanonda Gen (Ret.), “Thailand’s Security Environment,” <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/symposia/Pacific2002/putamanondapaper.htm> (Accessed November 12, 2004), 4.

<sup>76</sup> Teerawat Putamanonda Gen (Ret.), “Thailand’s Security Environment,” <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/symposia/Pacific2002/putamanondapaper.htm> (Accessed November 12, 2004), 4.

<sup>77</sup> Data from 2003, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed 23 May 2005).

106,000 troops.<sup>78</sup> In addition to its overall size the Thai military has far too many generals. By July 1998 there were 1,859 generals-616 without responsibilities-and based on increased class size of the military academies there appears little relief in sight.<sup>79</sup> In 1997, Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai attempted to help resolve this problem by extending an early retirement package offered by his predecessor yet this program was not very effective in solving the problem.<sup>80</sup> Senior generals were not willing to give up their very profitable and influential positions for the sake of retirement. The promotion process and the appointment process continue to be seen as an entitlement vice an institutional need; a shift in the nature of promotion would contribute substantially to the civilization of the military.<sup>81</sup> Until the civilian leadership is able to challenge the military on military issues, such as promotion and troop strength, legislative oversight and hence civilian control will be in question. The Thai parliament has not sufficiently empowered itself to exercise civilian control and oversight over the fundamental problem of the size and the promotion process of the military.

Elected civilian leaders of the Thai Parliament generally lack the capacity to debate military affairs, especially at the strategic and tactical levels.<sup>82</sup> As a result it has been very difficult for the parliament to have an effective control over military issues, such as defense budget, weapon acquisition programs, and arms deployment policy. The economic crisis of 1997 did allow for some budget cuts, forced the service commanders to appear in person in front of the defense committee to defend their budgets, and scrapped some major arms acquisition projects but the important issue of supply and

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<sup>78</sup>Population data from the CIA World Fact Book, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html>, (Accessed May 23, 2005) Troop data from 2003, Bonn International Center for Conversion, Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), (Accessed May 23, 2005).

<sup>79</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Mutiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 202.

<sup>80</sup> Carolina G. Hernandez, "Good Governance of East Asia's Security Forces," *Conference Paper DCAF* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2002), 25.

<sup>81</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Mutiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 203.

<sup>82</sup> Surachart Bamrungsuk, "New Strengths-Old Weaknesses: Thailand's Civil-Military Relations into the 2000s," (Hong Kong: Department of Politics and Public Administration The University of Hong Kong, 1996), 27.



budget remains a pressing concern in Thai civil-military relations.<sup>83</sup> In most major democratic countries, there are civilian-led independent research institutions that concentrate on military and security affairs.<sup>84</sup> Civilian experts, civilian think tanks, and a vibrant political discussion is lacking in Thailand. Although both houses of the Thai Parliament have Armed Forces Committees, they lack the technical knowledge about military and security issues leading to the inability of the parliament to discuss military and security affairs.<sup>85</sup> For effective civilian control of the military Thailand needs more than just the willingness of the military to retreat to the barracks. It also needs a competent civilian leadership to participate and dictate effective control to meet the security needs of the state.

### **C. ECONOMIC FACTORS, POLITICAL PARTIES, AND THE MONARCHY**

The environment necessary to facilitate and allow the necessary reforms to establish a dominant civilian role in Thai politics continues to be influenced by three important factors: (1) economic factors, (2) the political party system, and (3) the monarchy. The slow evolution of these factors and institutions are critical to the democratization process and exert pressure on the military to take a more subordinate role in Thai politics.

#### **1. Economic Factors**

With participation from the urban middle classes and increasingly powerful business groups after the 1992 uprising, many observers came to believe that they were

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<sup>83</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Mutiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 201.

<sup>84</sup> Surachart Bamrungsuk, "New Strengths-Old Weaknesses: Thailand's Civil-Military Relations into the 2000s," (Hong Kong: Department of Politics and Public Administration The University of Hong Kong, 1996), 26.

<sup>85</sup> Surachart Bamrungsuk, "Thailand's Road to Civilian Control: Changing Place for the Military," a paper prepared for the PDGS (Program on Democratic Governance and Security), National Democratic Institute, Washington, D.C., 2002, 10.

and continue to be the main social forces of democracy.<sup>86</sup> Thailand prior to 1992 had experienced a period of steady economic growth. Gross National Product per capita increased from \$360 in 1975, \$801 in 1985, to \$1840 in 1992.<sup>87</sup> This economic boom brought rapid change that transformed Thailand from a rural, overwhelmingly agricultural society, to an urbanizing society where non-agricultural pursuits began to dominate.<sup>88</sup> This change clearly established an environment in which not only the middle class but the business elites began to pursue political goals through the electoral process. Economic growth gave more opportunity for businessmen to participate in politics. In the past, they were behind the scenes, giving support, especially financial support to political candidates. But in the 1992 elections, they came out openly as candidates or members of political parties.<sup>89</sup> In 1992, the military numbered 152 out of 260 Senate members, but in 1996 the military got only 48 seats; where as 46 businessmen and 81 civilian bureaucrats were appointed.<sup>90</sup> And finally when the senate was elected in 2000, retired military officers won only 18 of 200 seats.<sup>91</sup> In addition to the constitutional changes calling for an elected senate it is clear in Thailand that economic development has created an alternative civilian source of patronage that has also diminished the importance of the Thai military's patronage. The business elites and the capital class clearly were an agent of change towards greater civilian control of the military in the years following the 1992 massacre.<sup>92</sup> Increasingly businessmen and the capital class turned to political parties to solidify their grip on political power.

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<sup>86</sup> For example see the chapter on "Towards Civil Society," in Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand: Economy and Politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), 367-382; and William F. Case, "Can the 'Halfway House' Stand?" *Comparative Politics* 28 (Jul 1996), 455.

<sup>87</sup> World Bank, *World Table 1994* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 1994, 340-341.

<sup>88</sup> Kevin Hewison, "Responding to Economic Crisis: Thailand's Localism," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 144.

<sup>89</sup> Sarachart Bamrujsuk, *From Dominance to Power Sharing: The Military and Politics in Thailand, 1973-1992* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 162.

<sup>90</sup> Sarachart Bamrujsuk, *From Dominance to Power Sharing: The Military and Politics in Thailand, 1973-1992* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 161.

<sup>91</sup> This figure is derived from the military ranks that accompany the names of members of the senate on the Web page of the parliament ([www.parliament.go.th](http://www.parliament.go.th)) and does not include enlisted ranks.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Ungphakorn, "Business Vows it Must Not Happen Again," and Kowit Sanandang, "Business and Military Can't be Bedfellows," in *Catalyst For Change* (Bangkok: Bangkok Post, 1992) 73-76 and 77-79.

The economic growth of Thailand faced a serious challenge with the Asian financial crisis of 1997. The crisis did however present an opportunity for the Chuan leadership to implement greater control and introduce some reduction in the military's budget. A new plan was introduced to reduce troop levels by 72,000 men over a 12 year period.<sup>93</sup> In addition equipment procurement was to be centralized under the Defense Council, and there were attempts to reduce the number of military officers sitting on this important body.<sup>94</sup> Although these plans were met with varying levels of resistance it demonstrated both the civilian leadership's willingness to confront military reform and the impact economic factors had on civilian military relations. It can of course be argued that the reform measures introduced by Chuan following the financial crisis were as much about cost savings as about subordinating the military to civilian political control.<sup>95</sup> Either way, economic factors have increased in importance in influencing the relationship between the civilian elites and the military. As Thailand becomes a more economically advanced and dynamic state the military will continue to be influenced and perhaps controlled to a greater extent by civilian leadership acting in the interests of increasingly powerful business groups.

In sum Thailand experienced economic growth and social change which gradually eroded the political role of the military. With economic development came increased criticism of the military domination of politics.<sup>96</sup> This economic growth brought about social change that ultimately undermined the military's capability to run the country and legitimize its rule. Ansil Ramsay observed that political participation in decision making in Thailand began to extend to the business elite, who began to play a major role in Thai Cabinets and in economic decision making.<sup>97</sup> The consequence was the rise of the middle class and business elites which lead to an outlet for their political voice: party

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<sup>93</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 17 May 1999.

<sup>94</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 28-29 July 1998.

<sup>95</sup> See Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press), 2005, 132.

<sup>96</sup> Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy," In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 356.

<sup>97</sup> Ansil Ramsay, "Thai Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," (Paper presented at the Third U.S.-ASEAN Conference, Changmai, Thailand, January 7-11, 1985), 4.

politics. This in turn helped to weaken the social, economic, and political power of the military. The eventual rise of party politics led to the erosion of bureaucratic encapsulation of certain core institutions of economic policy-making and weakened the political power of the military.<sup>98</sup> The following section of this chapter will analyze the rise of party politics and the expansion of business interests.

## 2. Political Parties

Political parties in Thailand are an evolving institution in Thailand. Political parties were first seen in Thailand back in 1945-46 more as vehicles of personal patronage, not as the institutionalized expression of social forces or political issues.<sup>99</sup> The military, prior to 1992, had spent decades promoting development and democracy.<sup>100</sup> It was during times of democratic advancement when political parties were sanctioned and promoted. Political parties eventually developed as a means to marshal funds and appropriate power amongst the powerful civilian factions.<sup>101</sup> Political parties, as part of the political process, allowed the wealthy business class a legitimate tool to begin to exert greater influence.<sup>102</sup> The close links between civilian politicians and the business sector allowed for the development of political parties that grew in opposition to the once dominant military.<sup>103</sup> Political parties were a legitimate oppositional tool in the Thai political landscape when the military began its retreat to the barracks in 1992.

Thailand witnessed three large influential parties emerge in the 1970's that played an influential role during the transformation from a semi-democratic state to a more

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<sup>98</sup> On economic development and democratization see Harold Crouch, "Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia," in Larry Diamond et al., Eds., *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*. (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins) 1997, 207-232 and <sup>98</sup> Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi democracy," In Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds. *Politics in Developing Countries*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, Inc.) 1995, 349-365.

<sup>99</sup> John L.S.Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981, 107.

<sup>100</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Mutiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 206.

<sup>101</sup> James Ockey, "Change and Continuity in the Thai Political Party System," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43 no. 4, 2003, 664.

<sup>102</sup> James Ockey, "Change and Continuity in the Thai Political Party System," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43 no. 4, 2003, 675.

<sup>103</sup> James Ockey, "Change and Continuity in the Thai Political Party System," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43 no. 4, 2003, 664.

democratic state.<sup>104</sup> Only one party, the Democrat Party formed in 1946 predates the uprising in October of 1973.<sup>105</sup> The Democrats have been described as a centralist party with left leaning tendencies.<sup>106</sup> In the past the Democrats agenda has had its programs described as “soft socialism,” a package of cautious economic reform, higher taxes, subsidized crops and land redistribution.<sup>107</sup> The other two large parties were formed in 1974, the Chart Thai and the Social Action Party. Chart Thai was formed by three relatives of Field marshal Phin Choonhavan, who had been a key supporter of Marshal Phibun.<sup>108</sup> The Chart Thai was formed on a firmly pro-business line. The third party the Social Action party was based on rural land reform and no longer retains any representation in the parliament. But these three parties began to establish an outlet in the political process for civilian leaders to begin to affect change in opposition to the military.

Throughout the last half of the last century Thailand experienced rapid urbanization and modernization, which in turn led to a more prominent middle and business class. This growth in the middle class parallels the growth of political parties. In 1981 a law was indeed passed requiring candidates to campaign under party banners.<sup>109</sup> It is no surprise then that these urban elites sought an outlet for their voice. An interesting trend since 1988 has been the gradual growth of the largest parties coinciding with the departure of the military from the cabinet in that same year. (See Table 1)<sup>110</sup> This has meant more rewards and greater control of the military for civilian politicians.<sup>111</sup> Thai political parties in spite of all their shortcomings have served a valuable outlet as an outlet for opposition forces to project their voice within the political system.

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<sup>104</sup> Elliot Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Thailand's Turn* (New York: St Martin's Press), 1994, 41.

<sup>105</sup> Daniel King, “Thailand: Toward Democratic Stability,” *Journal of Democracy* 7.1 (1996), 111.

<sup>106</sup> “Thaksin Ready for Victory,” *Asia Times*, February 5, 2005, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/GB05Ae03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/GB05Ae03.html) (Accessed May 23, 2005)

<sup>107</sup> Elliot Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Thailand's Turn* (New York: St Martin's Press), 1994, 42.

<sup>108</sup> Elliot Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Thailand's Turn* (New York: St Martin's Press), 1994, 42.

<sup>109</sup> Elliot Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Thailand's Turn* (New York: St Martin's Press), 1994, 42.

<sup>110</sup> James Ockey, “Change and Continuity in the Thai Political Party System,” *Asian Survey*, Vol 43:4, 2003, 675.

<sup>111</sup> James Ockey, “Change and Continuity in the Thai Political Party System,” *Asian Survey*, Vol 43:4, 2003, 670.

Table 1. Size of Largest Political Party in the Thai Parliament<sup>112</sup>

Parliament	Largest Party	Seats	Second Largest Party	Seats	Combined Seats	Total
1988	Chat Thai	87	Kitsangkhom	54	141	357
1992a	Samakkhitham	79	Chat Thai	74	153	360
1992b	Democrat	79	Chat Thai	77	156	360
1995	Chat Thai	92	Democrat	86	178	373
1996	New Aspiration	125	Democrat	123	248	393
2001	Thai Rak Thai	248	Democrat	128	376	500
2005	Thai Rak Thai	375	Democrat	96	471	500

The 2001 election helped reshape Thailand's electoral landscape. The January 2001 elections pitted the Democrats and its incumbent Chuan against the new and rising Thai Rak Thai party. Advocating reform for the rural voters and after many accusations of vote buying Thaksin and the Thai Rak Thai prevailed in the general elections. Thai Rak Thai, the current dominant political party in the Thai parliament was founded by Thaksin in July 1998, acquired much of its political base by recruiting former MP's and members of existing political factions.<sup>113</sup> An example of this occurred in early 2002 when the New Aspiration Party (NAP) led by former army Chief Chavalit Yongchaiyudh was effectively taken over in early February by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party following a poll of its members.<sup>114</sup> That move effectively neutralized Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's rivals in the ruling Thai Rak Thai (TRT)

<sup>112</sup> James Ockey, "Change and Continuity in the Thai Political Party System," *Asian Survey*, Volume 43 no. 4, (2003), 669; and Electionworld.org, <http://www.electionworld.org/thailand.htm>, (Accessed May 24, 2005).

<sup>113</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 126.

<sup>114</sup> Oxford Analytica, "Thailand: Thaksin Consolidates Power," <http://libproxy.nps.navy.mil/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=567851891&sid=3&Fmt=3&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD>, (Accessed May 24, 2005).

Party and consolidated his control over parliament.<sup>115</sup> In March 2002, Thaksin presided over a residual grand coalition of Thai Rak Thai, Chart Tai and Chart Pattana- essentially, the entire parliament with the exception of the Democrats.<sup>116</sup> Thaksin's first administration was a melting pot of former politicians, owners of large businesses, and various political activists.<sup>117</sup> Going into the 2005 elections Thaksin's TRT and its political allies continued to constitute an overwhelming base of 338 seats in the 500-seat House of Representatives of the National Assembly, and the prime minister was set up to continue to dominate the political agenda.<sup>118</sup>

Thaksin's relationship with the military differs from previous administrations in that Thaksin and his TRT party have set out to convert the military into a direct source of political support, a major component of his power base.<sup>119</sup> Thaksin's consolidation of power appears to be unchecked for the near future as demonstrated by Thai Rak Thai's overwhelming victory at the polls in 2005 and its hold on all but two of the key minister posts.<sup>120</sup> With Thai Rak Thai gaining 375 of the 500 seats in parliament, and with the Democratic party only having a good showing in the south, it appears Prime Minister Thaksin will continue to be the most influential political actor in the near future.<sup>121</sup> The Democratic Party did not do well in Bangkok despite predictions of a strong showing and the recent election of a Democratic governor. Whether or not the Democrats can pick up the pieces and remain a viable oppositional party remains to be seen. Regardless,

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<sup>115</sup> Oxford Analytica, "Thailand: Thaksin Consolidates Power," <http://libproxy.nps.navy.mil/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=567851891&sid=3&Fmt=3&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD>, (Accessed May 24, 2005).

<sup>116</sup> McCargo, Duncan, "Democracy Under Stress in Thaksin's Thailand," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (October 2002) 118.

<sup>117</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 134.

<sup>118</sup> Charles E. Morrison, *Asia Pacific Security Outlook 2004* (Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2004), 176.

<sup>119</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 134.

<sup>120</sup> Election results from Electionworld.org, <http://www.electionworld.org/thailand.htm>, (Accessed May 23, 2005); Minister positions data from EIU Newswire, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=2&did=802842521&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=3&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1116983618&clientId=11969#fulltext>, (Accessed May 23, 2005). The two Minister positions not held by Thai Rak Thai are the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Sports and Tourism, both held by members of the Chart Patthana party.

<sup>121</sup> Election results from Electionworld.org, <http://www.electionworld.org/thailand.htm>, (Accessed May 23, 2005).

Thaksin's firm grip on power and his ability to consolidate his hold on power has the potential to threaten the democratic process and can hamper the progress of objective democratic civilian control of the military.<sup>122</sup>

### 3. The Monarchy

With the retreat of the military to the barracks in 1992 it becomes important to analyze the monarchy, an increasingly influential institution that helped enable civilian leadership to begin to exert greater control of the military. On several occasions between 1973 and 1991 the palace "positioned" itself in such a way as to restrain certain actions of military groups, which would have toppled the ruling government, caused bloodshed, or precipitated unpredictable crises.<sup>123</sup> This section will take a look at the changing role of the institution of the monarchy and, as the human face of that institution, the ebbs and flows of political influence of King Bhumipol Adulyadej, the reigning monarch since 1946.

"First of all, he is a god," said the kingdom's leading novelist, when asked what the king stands for. "He is a sacred being. Secondly he is the 'Big Father' or head of the family...And he is the godhead of Thai nationalism. He is more than a symbol. He is an actual godhead to Thai pride, nationalism, and vanity."<sup>124</sup> As one of the three pillars of Thai society along with Nation and Religion, the King has exerted varying levels of influence on the Thai political system.

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<sup>122</sup> Keeping the military out of politics is only one half of the story. The other half is to protect the military from "political abuse and the partisan demands of government leaders" (Douglas L. Bland, "Discovering Westminster: The Transformation of Civil-Military Relations in Eastern Europe," in: David Haglund, ed., *NATO's Eastern Dilemma*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993); see also Larry L. Watts, "Reforming Civil-Military Relations in Post-Communist States: Civil control vs. Democratic Control," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2002, 54-70) Samuel Huntington, Smith and Welch and others discuss this problem under the topic of *subjective* and *objective civilian control*. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1957; Smith, Arthur K. Smith and Claude Welch, Jr., *Military Role and Rule: Perspectives and Civil-Military Relations*, (North Scituate: Duxbury Press), 1974. According to Huntington, subjective control has been identified with the maximization of the power of particular governmental institutions, particular social classes and particular political actors over the military. *Objective civilian control* is based on the principle of political neutrality of the armed forces and its "non-involvement in low partisan politics".

<sup>123</sup> M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "Some Reflections on the Thai Monarchy," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 2003, 307.

<sup>124</sup> Elliot Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Thailand's Turn* (New York: St Martin's Press), 1994, xix.



King Bhumipol is the constitutional monarch of Thailand. Unlike all of the colonized states in Southeast Asia, Thailand has maintained a constitutional monarch. Born in 1927 he was not formally crowned as Rama IX until 1950. His brother King Ananda Mahidol assumed the throne from 1935-1946 and was mysteriously shot dead in 1946 at the age of 21.<sup>125</sup> It was after this tragedy that the young Bhumipol became King. On his return from Switzerland in December 1951, Bhumipol was the first mature King to take up permanent residence in Thailand since the abdication of his uncle, King Prajadhipok, in March 1935.<sup>126</sup> Between 1951-1957, the King had to accept the constitutional role prescribed by the amendment of the 1932 Constitution in 1952, which basically defined the monarch as ruler placed above politics, whose main duty was to do whatever the government told him- a ceremonial ruler or, put less kindly a figurehead or a 'rubber stamp,' to be used whenever necessary by the ruling elite.<sup>127</sup>

His 59 years on the throne have seen a transition from a young powerless King to an influential force in Thai politics. The king's first real foray into the political arena was under Sarit in 1958. Sarit encouraged the king, who had been restricted in his appearances by previous regimes, to tour the provinces, eliciting reverence and respect from up-country people.<sup>128</sup> However, after only a few years the King stood up and overruled Sarit forcing him to surrender a frontier temple back to Cambodia.<sup>129</sup> A small gesture but one that showed he wasn't a puppet of the military even early in his public responsibilities. This was the start of a political institution that has played a critical role in checking the military's role at critical junctures in the democratic process.

His influence was gained through steady leadership in times of crisis. His first opportunity came in 1973; it was due in part to his intervention that Thanom and Praphas were forced to leave the country while he attempted to restore order. He appointed a

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<sup>125</sup> Kobkua Sumwannathat-Pian, "The Monarchy and Constitutional Change since 1972," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 61.

<sup>126</sup> Kobkua Sumwannathat-Pian, "The Monarchy and Constitutional Change since 1972," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 61-62.

<sup>127</sup> Kobkua Sumwannathat-Pian, "The Monarchy and Constitutional Change since 1972," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 63.

<sup>128</sup> John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981, 112.

<sup>129</sup> Elliot Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Thailand's Turn* (New York: St Martin's Press), 1994, 52.

civilian academic as prime minister and convened the National Assembly.<sup>130</sup> It can also be argued that by the time Prem had come to office in the 80's he was influential in the failure of two military coups, one in 1981 and the second in 1985. The young Turks had not gained the legitimacy necessary to succeed in their coup in part for failing to receive the requisite consent from the king.<sup>131</sup> It is also during times in which the constitution is abrogated or a parliament abolished and the people's mandate reverts to the King. This occurred in 1991 following the coup and with the King's appointment of Anand Panyarachun as premier.<sup>132</sup> It was also enacted following the massacres of 1992 when the king publicly reprimanded Suchinda and his opponent Chamlong while having both men kneel, an act which gained credibility with the masses. It was more than just a symbolic measure; it was a powerful visual force to demonstrate the King's influence in Thai politics. King Bhumipol Adulyadej had assumed the role of popular sovereignty in bestowing a legitimate right to rule upon otherwise democratically illegitimate regimes.<sup>133</sup> In 1980's the military had to take special head of the monarchy as it was the one institution that could lend legitimacy to any political faction; the failed April 1981 and September 1985 coups to topple PM Prem confirmed that any attempt to overthrow the government which did not receive royal sanction would fail.<sup>134</sup> The public powers of the King emanate not from a written constitution, but from the affection, devotion, and trust that the Thai people have for him.<sup>135</sup> The military's tool to gain and retain power, the military coup now needs approval from the monarchy.

The King, through careful political intervention at crucial times has helped shape the role of the monarchy as a powerful institution. It is only through adept statesmanship and his character, which allowed him to strengthen his limited powers in order to advance democratic principles and development of Thailand as a modern state. The King has been able to act as a powerful actor checking the power of the military at critical

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<sup>130</sup>Elliot Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Thailand's Turn* (New York: St Martin's Press), 1994, 53.

<sup>131</sup> William F. Case, "Can the 'Halfway House' Stand?" *Comparative Politics* (Jul 1996), 454.

<sup>132</sup> Elliot Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Thailand's Turn* (New York: St Martin's Press), 1994, xviii.

<sup>133</sup> Kobkua Sumwannathat-Pian, "The Monarchy and Constitutional Change since 1972," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 57.

<sup>134</sup> Case, William F., "Can the 'Halfway House' Stand?" *Comparative Politics* (Jul 1996), 455.

<sup>135</sup> Kobkua Sumwannathat-Pian, "The Monarchy and Constitutional Change since 1972," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 63.

junctures in Thailand's past. This was due in no small part to his individual ability to develop the goodwill of the people without overstepping his boundaries of his limited powers. There are some questions concerning the succession of the throne. Some are calling his first-born son as the rightful heir to the throne. But many question the crown prince's behavior and manner as not befitting of the next King of Thailand.<sup>136</sup> Many intellectuals and powerful forces within the system are calling for his second daughter to assume the throne. This instability could cause the delicate political balance to be disturbed.<sup>137</sup>

In the past it was the Thai military pulling the strings of power, it now appears as if the monarchy and PM Thaksin, through Thai Rak Thai, appear to be competing institutions using the military as a tool to maintain and gain influence in the Thai political arena. This was demonstrated in 2002 during the dispute over the United Wa State Army (USWA).<sup>138</sup> The USWA, who were the principal manufacturer and peddlers of methamphetamines destined largely for the Thai market, had the tacit support of Myanmar's ruling military clique.<sup>139</sup> Given the Thaksin administration's warm relations with the Burmese generals and the Thai army's preference for tough stance against the USWA clashes were inevitable.<sup>140</sup> A tense relationship between the army chief General Surayud and Prime Minister Thaksin developed.<sup>141</sup> General Surayud had been appointed as Army Commander-in-Chief during the second Chuan government (1997-2001) due to

<sup>136</sup> M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "Some Reflections on the Thai Monarchy," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 2003, 307.

<sup>137</sup> Elliot Kulick and Dick Wilson, *Thailand's Turn* (New York: St Martin's Press), 1994, 61.

<sup>138</sup> As a result of the USWA aligning themselves with the Burmese Army in its 1994-95 battles against the Shan United Army (a rival faction of the USWA and the Burmese Army), the Wa gained territory near Doi Laem and Mong Kyawt (within Myanmar's currently defined borders), close to the Thai border. After the Shan United Army surrendered and was driven from the region in hard-fought battles, the Government of Myanmar ordered the Wa to vacate the region. The Wa defied the order and, with eventual government acquiescence, occupied the area, referred to as their Southern Military Region (SMR) or Southern Military Command. The Government of Myanmar tolerates the Wa, due to the USWA's significant military force, a standing cease-fire agreement and the illicit revenues generated by USWA indirectly benefit the Myanmar Government. Source: Global Security.org, www.globalsecurity.org, (Accessed June 1, 2005).

<sup>139</sup> Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Thailand: Democratic Authoritarianism," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 2003, 283.

<sup>140</sup> Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Thailand: Democratic Authoritarianism," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 2003, 283; and Duncan McCargo, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 137.

<sup>141</sup> Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Thailand: Democratic Authoritarianism," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 2003, 283.

his special links with former Prime Minister Prem. Prem's support for General Surayud's hard-line stance on the USWA was seen as reflecting the King's own views, given his calls for the need to combat the drug threat.<sup>142</sup> Prime Minister Thaksin was able to effectively transfer Surayud and replace him with a supporter by shrewdly announcing the annual military reshuffle a month earlier than normal.<sup>143</sup> Surayud was then appointed as the privy councilor in charge of security and development following his retirement in 2003 and sent a clear signal that he was looked upon with great favor in royal quarters and could be interpreted as a rebuke to Thaksin.<sup>144</sup> Although the monarchy came out on the losing side of the political struggle, it demonstrates that as an institution the monarchy exerts greater influence over the Thai military than it had in the past. Thaksin's skillful political maneuvering also illustrates greater civilian control of the military.

With the King getting on in age it will be interesting to see if his successor retains some of the hard fought influence he has been able to attain. The *Economist's* survey of Thailand in its early 2002 March edition suggested that the monarchy's future role fall firmly under the Constitution.<sup>145</sup> This met stiff resistance from the Thaksin administration and the issue was effectively banned.<sup>146</sup> The splits between Thaksin and the monarchy begin to present a new stage in the political process in Thailand. The monarchy has been a stabilizing force for the steady advancement of the electoral and constitutional process and in turn greater civilian control of the military. It is clear that civilian control of the military was enabled in part by the role of the monarchy. What remains to be seen is whether the monarchy will be able to counteract greater subjective control of the military on the part of Prime Minister Thaksin.

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<sup>142</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 150.

<sup>143</sup> Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Thailand: Democratic Authoritarianism," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 2003, 284.

<sup>144</sup> *Royal Gazette*, General Announcement Edition, Issue 120, Special Segment 134, November 20, 2003; and Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 150

<sup>145</sup> Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Thailand: Democratic Authoritarianism," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 2003, 284

<sup>146</sup> The ban was *de facto* on the understanding that the Thai authorities would confiscate the edition in question from newsstands if it enters circulation. Consequently, *The Economist* decided not to circulate its Thailand Survey; see Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Thailand: Democratic Authoritarianism," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 2003, 285.

## **D. CONCLUSION**

The obstacles faced by the military in contemplating another coup brought about by economic factors, the development of the business class and political parties, and the monarchy have increased. The political parties (with support from the business class) and the monarchy are two vital institutions that have grown in relative strength to the military. Their ability to counterbalance the legacy of a strong military was extremely important to the development of a civilian leadership which could effectively rule Thailand. As Thailand continues in the second stage of democratization towards consolidation civil-military relations will play an important role in whether or not progress is made. When the Thai military retreated to the barracks in 1992 the problem of civil-military relations was not solved. As the events since 1992 indicate Thailand still faces immense challenges if it is to achieve the type of objective civilian control seen in the more developed democratic countries of the world. While it is a positive sign that Thailand has not witnessed an attempted or successful military coup in fourteen years there are still questions to how it will react in times of unforeseen crisis. To better determine the level of civilian control and military autonomy in Thailand the next chapter will analyze three different periods in Thailand's civil-military development.

## IV. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF MILITARY AUTONOMY IN THAILAND

### A. DEFINING MILITARY AUTONOMY

Democratic civil-military relations mean that the military is subordinated to a democratically elected civilian government through various constitutional and institutional mechanisms. One strategy to analyze the *degree* to which that task has been accomplished is to take a historical perspective and to compare what Pion-Berlin in a seminal article has called the “institutional” and the “political autonomy” of the military in various periods of Thai history including the most current years.<sup>147</sup> By taking a historical perspective on the Thai military’s changing political role and applying David Pion-Berlin’s analytical model the analysis brought forward in this chapter will be able to determine the degree of civilian control that exists in Thailand today.

Therefore, in a first analytical step, it is critical to define military autonomy. Autonomy refers to an institution’s decision-making authority. As Pion-Berlin clearly points out in his research, there is both an institutional and political dimension of military autonomy. Institutional autonomy refers to the military’s professional independence and exclusivity.<sup>148</sup> Military political autonomy refers to the military’s aversion towards or even defiance of civilian control.<sup>149</sup> The degree of political autonomy is a measure of the military’s determination to strip civilians of their political prerogatives and claim these for itself.<sup>150</sup> The important distinction being that institutional autonomy within the military is not necessarily a barrier to civilian control and can act as a means by which

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<sup>147</sup> See Pion-Berlin’s “Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America.” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992).

<sup>148</sup> David Pion-Berlin, “Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 84.

<sup>149</sup> Bengt Abrahamsson, *Military Professionalism and Political Power*, (Beverly Hills: Sage), 1972; and Guillermo O’Donnell, “Modernization and Military Coups: Theory, Comparisons and the Argentine Case,” in Lowenthal and Fitch, eds., *Armies and Politics in Latin America*, rev. ed., (New York: Holmes & Meier), 1986, 96-133.

<sup>150</sup> David Pion-Berlin, “Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 85.

the military guards its core professional functions.<sup>151</sup> The unique structure of the military will naturally cause the military to remain somewhat independent of civilian policy makers and the institutional structure of the military is inherently exclusive.

Having defined institutional and political autonomy it is important to establish criteria to determine what issues are rooted in the professional institutional sphere and what issues fall under the political realm. For an issue to be classified as institutional it must cover the core or internal professional functions of the military. A measurement of political autonomy would include issues based on political content and character. In between the institutional and political sphere is a gray area where issues have both professional and political content.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, there is a spectrum along which some issues are more institutional in nature and others which are more political in nature. This chapter will focus on two primarily institutional issues and two political issues.

Using a snapshot in time during three different periods in Thailand's history and determining the levels of autonomy this chapter will establish both where civilian control of the military stands today and whether trends can be determined. Much like the countries Pion-Berlin studied in South America, Thailand has emerged from a period of extended authoritarian military rule.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, there is some valuable insight that can be gained from using similar issues used by Pion-Berlin in his analysis of South American countries. Pion-Berlin argued that in post military authoritarian period the armed forces of South America should be able to exert greater control over their internal decisions and less control over ostensibly political ones.<sup>154</sup> To specify the factors that contributed to different levels of autonomy Pion-Berlin organized his data on military autonomy by country and decision site.<sup>155</sup> His study on autonomy selected five countries

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<sup>151</sup> David Pion-Berlin, "Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 85.

<sup>152</sup> David Pion-Berlin, "Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 95.

<sup>153</sup> See Pion-Berlin's "Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America." *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992).

<sup>154</sup> See Pion-Berlin's "Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America." *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 84.

<sup>155</sup> In Pion-Berlin's study a total of 12 different issues were studied and 5 countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Peru).

that had all recently emerged from long periods of authoritarian rule.<sup>156</sup> Next, Pion-Berlin chose twelve different areas to analyze that represented functions that were critical to defense and/or reflected points of contention between the government and the armed forces.<sup>157</sup> He used a qualitative assessment to determine the level of autonomy in each country and on each issue. Pion-Berlin determined based on his study that the armed forces remained significant political actors in the post authoritarian period but they have had greater success in guarding “core” professional functions vice those on the “periphery” in the democratic order of South America.<sup>158</sup>

This study focuses on four different issues, two primarily institutional autonomy issues and two primarily political autonomy issues. Having chosen two issues closely related to the institutional sphere of influence and two issues dealing with political issues and applying a historical perspective this study will be able to determine trends in the level of institutional and political autonomy of the Thai military. The chosen criteria in the domain of institutional autonomy are (1) personnel decisions and (2) force levels; concerning the political autonomy of the military, they are (3) military budgets and (4) military reforms.

## **1. Personnel Decisions**

Promotion, retirements, and appointments help to shape the professional and ideological direction of the armed forces.<sup>159</sup> Levels of autonomy pertain to the amount of discretion the military enjoys in making personnel decisions.<sup>160</sup> If the civilian government can approve, reject, or independently recommend personnel decisions, then

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<sup>156</sup> The countries Pion-Berlin collected data on were: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Peru; see David Pion-Berlin, “Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 87.

<sup>157</sup> The twelve decisions sites he selected were: Senior and Junior level personnel decisions, force levels, military education, doctrine, reform, budgets, arms production, procurement, defense organization, intelligence gathering, internal security, and human rights. David Pion-Berlin, “Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 87.

<sup>158</sup> David Pion-Berlin, “Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 99.

<sup>159</sup> David Pion-Berlin, “Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 87.

<sup>160</sup> David Pion-Berlin, “Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 87.



military autonomy is low. If the military establishes its own lists of promotions and dictates most of the military appointments, then military autonomy is high.

## **2. Force Levels**

Generally, the Thai military would prefer a larger force to a smaller one to justify a greater budget. Democratic civilian governments would prefer smaller less costly forces.<sup>161</sup> The level of military autonomy in this issue is a measure of whether troop levels have increased, declined, or remained the same during the different periods in Thai political development.

## **3. Military Budgets**

Civilian leaders confronted with scarce economic resources and pressures from various sectors of society would prefer to reduce military budgets when possible-and where such a move would improve their political position.<sup>162</sup> The civilian leadership must provide a military budget that will help reduce the military's participation in rent seeking and other economic activities. Enormous profits from illicit activities facilitated the Thai military from giving up or agreeing to a reduction of their share of political power.<sup>163</sup> But on the other hand, is the civilian leadership willing and competent enough to exert budgetary reductions when necessary?

## **4. Military Reforms**

Where civilians are unable to influence the reform process, military autonomy is at its highest.<sup>164</sup> Deployment of troops, appointment to the senate, and military missions

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<sup>161</sup> David Pion-Berlin, "Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, no. 1 (Oct 1992), 87.

<sup>162</sup> David Pion-Berlin, "Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 88.

<sup>163</sup> Carolina G. Hernandez, "Good Governance of East Asia's Security Forces," *Conference Paper DCAF* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces), 2002, 17.

<sup>164</sup> David Pion-Berlin, "Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 88.

are some examples of areas of reform that can be measures to what institution has the decision-making authority.

While each of the four aforementioned issues each have both political and institutional content; personnel decisions and force levels tend to be on the institutional side of the professional-political spectrum and military budgets and military reform have the strongest political content. Personnel decisions and force levels represent internal or core professional functions of the Thai military. The promotion, appointment, and reduction of troops are closely linked to the military's professional "center."<sup>165</sup> On the other hand, military budgets require policy decisions about the allocation of governmental resources which naturally involve a great deal of political content. Likewise, military reform requires a great deal of political will on the part of civilian leaders to effectively implement changes in the armed forces. Therefore, the level of military autonomy in both the personnel decision and troop level areas represent a greater indication of institutional or professional autonomy; and military budgets and military reform are issues which are more political in character.

Covering both variants of military autonomy, these four issues will provide a basis to analyze the varying level of control and decision-making authority exerted by the military in the institutional and political realm.

Having chosen the categories in which to analyze where the decision-making authority rests it is important to select different periods in time in Thailand's history to draw a diachrone comparison, which is a sine qua non for drawing any conclusion about the changes (or degree of continuity) that civil-military-relations in Thailand have experienced since 1992. I have chosen to examine three different periods in time in Thailand's history:

1. The first period this chapter will analyze is the period of 1963-1973. With Thanom as Prime Minister, this political era represented an authoritarian military regime prior to the student uprising in 1973 and subsequent calls for democratic reform.

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<sup>165</sup> David Pion-Berlin, "Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Oct 1992), 92.

2. The next era that will be examined is the period after the “Black May” incident in 1992 until the election of Prime Minister Thaksin in 2001. This period in Thailand’s political development witnessed a greater role for civilian leadership in the political environment.

3. Finally, this chapter will analyze Prime Minister Thaksin’s reign from 2001-present. The current period demonstrates a consolidation of political power under an increasingly influential civilian Prime Minister.

## **B. MILITARY RULE DURING PRIME MINISTER THANOM’S REIGN (1963-1973)**

Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn was a staunch anti-Communist who oversaw a decade of harsh military rule in Thailand, from 1963 to 1973. This period in time was before Thailand had seen massive civil demonstrations and there was no doubt the military was in control.<sup>166</sup> Prior to PM Thanom, Thailand was led by Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, another military authoritarian leader. Prime Minister Sarit was a military dictator, who during his rule (1959-1963) was able to develop an effective program of peace and prosperity for Thailand.<sup>167</sup> However, after only four and a half years of rule Sarit died after a short illness.<sup>168</sup>

On December 9, 1963, the King appointed General Thanom Kittikachorn to succeed Sarit as premier.<sup>169</sup> Thanom, who ruled from 1963-1973, continued much of the same foreign and domestic policies as Sarit.<sup>170</sup> Retaining the cabinet that he inherited from Sarit, Thanom focused his efforts on seeking to maintain political stability; promoting economic development, especially in security-sensitive areas; raising the

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<sup>166</sup> David Morell, “Thailand: Military Checkmate,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (Feb. 1972), 162-167.

<sup>167</sup> Donald. E Nuechterlein, “Thailand After Sarit,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 5, (May 1964), 843-844.

<sup>168</sup> Donald. E Nuechterlein, “Thailand After Sarit,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 5, (May 1964), 842.

<sup>169</sup> Royal Thai Government, <http://www.thaigov.go.th/general/prime/thanom42.htm>, (Accessed May 25, 2005).

<sup>170</sup> Donald. E Nuechterlein, “Thailand After Sarit,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 5, (May, 1964), 846-847.

standard of living; and safeguarding the country from the communist threat at home and abroad.<sup>171</sup> His political downfall was brought about by the massive civil demonstrations of 1973.<sup>172</sup>

This period represents the last military regime prior to the democratic uprising of 1973. James Ockey argues that prior to 1973, because civilians rarely governed for more than a year at a time civil-military relations were a non-issue.<sup>173</sup> Yet since 1973 the military has not governed without an elected parliament for much more than a year at a time.<sup>174</sup> Therefore, this section will analyze the Thanom period in order to measure the level of political and military autonomy under an authoritarian regime prior to the democratic reforms following 1973.

## 1. Personnel Decisions

Personnel decisions clearly fell under the control of the military. Thanom, after being appointed as premier, retained his post as Minister of Defense and assumed several other positions previously held by Sarit, including Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and Commander-in-Chief of the Army.<sup>175</sup> Field Marshal Thanom, General Praphat Charusathien, Air Chief Marshal Thawee Chulasap, General Krit Sivara, and Police General Prasert Ruchirawong continued to hold approximately the same positions

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<sup>171</sup> “Thai Politics and Foreign Policy” *Thailand: A Country Study*, (Washington, D.C., Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress), 1981, 56.

<sup>172</sup> In December 1972, Thanom announced a new interim constitution that provided for a totally appointed legislative assembly (200 were military officers and police and 99 were civilians). This led to protests in May and June of 1973, where students and workers demanded a more democratic constitution and genuine parliamentary elections. By early October new protests erupted following the detention of eleven students arrested for handing out antigovernment pamphlets. Eventually the protests grew in size and scope as students demanded an end to the Thanom Regime. On October 13, more than 250,000 people rallied in Bangkok before the Democracy Memorial, the next day troops opened fire on the demonstrators, killing seventy-five, and occupied the campus of Thammasat University. King Bhumibol intervened and a compromise was reached: Thanom had resigned as prime minister but would remain as supreme commander of the armed forces. In consultation with student leaders, the king appointed Sanya Dharmasakti (Sanya Thammasak) as interim prime minister, with instructions to draft a new constitution. For further discussion see: David Morell “Thailand,” *Asian Survey*, (Feb., 1973), 162-178; and Frank C. Darling, “Student Protest and Political Change in Thailand,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 47, no. 1 (Spring, 1974), 5-19.

<sup>173</sup> James Ockey, “Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations,” in *Coercion and Governance*, Muthiah Alagappa, ed., (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 207.

<sup>174</sup> James Ockey, “Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations,” in *Coercion and Governance*, Muthiah Alagappa, ed., (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 207.

<sup>175</sup> Donald E. Nuechterlein, “Thailand After Sarit,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 5, (May, 1964), 846.

of power from the time Thanom succeeded Sarit until the military coup in 1971.<sup>176</sup> Following the coup until the overthrow of Thanom in 1973 the coup leaders tightened their grip on personnel decision making.<sup>177</sup> In addition to personnel decisions involving the military, Thanom was also able to appoint family members to powerful positions in the government. This was demonstrated with the appointment of his brother Police Major General Sanga Kittikachorn as the Deputy Foreign Minister in 1969.<sup>178</sup>

## 2. Force Levels

During the period of 1963-1973, Thailand faced a challenging internal and external threat in the form of communism.<sup>179</sup> As an example, in 1970 slightly more than one-half of the provinces in Thailand experienced various levels of insurrectionary activity.<sup>180</sup> In addition to the domestic communist insurgency the situation in Indochina perhaps helped justify larger number of troops. Armed forces per 1000 people increased from 2.8 in 1963 to 5.8 in 1973.<sup>181</sup> In 1963, Thailand maintained a force of 85,000 troops; by the time Thanom was forced from office in 1973, the armed forces numbered 233,000.<sup>182</sup> An almost three fold increase in the number of troops demonstrated a firm control of the military on the issue of troop levels.

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<sup>176</sup> David Morell, "Thailand: Military Checkmate," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (Feb., 1972), 159.

<sup>177</sup> David Morell, "Thailand: Military Checkmate," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (Feb., 1972), 166.

<sup>178</sup> Clark D. Neher, "Thailand: Toward Fundamental Change," *Asian Survey*, Vol 11., No. 2, A Survey of Asia in 1970: Part II (Feb. 1971), 132.

<sup>179</sup> Clark D. Neher, "Thailand: Toward Fundamental Change," *Asian Survey*, Vol 11., No. 2, A Survey of Asia in 1970: Part II (Feb. 1971), 135-136.

<sup>180</sup> Clark D. Neher, "Thailand: Toward Fundamental Change," *Asian Survey*, Vol 11., No. 2, A Survey of Asia in 1970: Part II (Feb. 1971), 135-136.

<sup>181</sup> For comparison, Malaysia, facing a similar threat of ground forces infiltrating from Vietnam saw the number of armed forces per 1000 people increase from 1.57 to 5.91 during the same period. World Military Expenditures and Arms Trade 1963-1973, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) 1975, 45 and 59.

<sup>182</sup> World Military Expenditures and Arms Trade 1963-1973, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) 1975, 59.

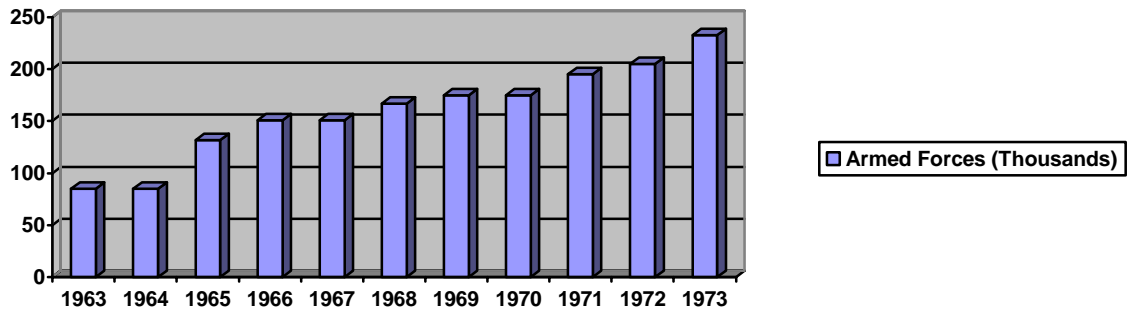


Table 2. Military Forces 1963-1973<sup>183</sup>

This steady increase in force levels will provide a measure to compare against the period following the 1992 massacre and Prime Minister Thaksin's reign.

### 3. Military Budgets

Despite an annual increase of 7.6% of Gross National Product; military expenditures increased by an average of 13.9%.<sup>184</sup> Military expenditures increased as a percent of Gross Domestic Product increased from 2.4% in 1963 to 3.4% in 1973.<sup>185</sup>

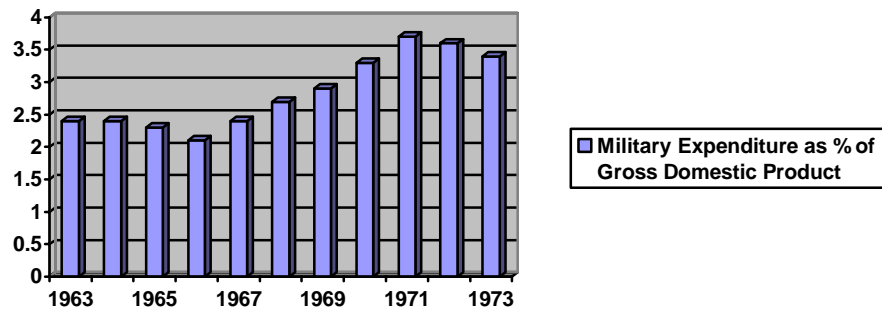


Table 3. Military Expenditure as % of GDP 1963-1973<sup>186</sup>

<sup>183</sup> World Military Expenditures and Arms Trade 1963-1973, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) 1975, 59.

<sup>184</sup> World Military Expenditures and Arms Trade 1963-1973, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) 1975, 59.

<sup>185</sup> World Military Expenditures and Arms Trade 1963-1973, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) 1975, 59.

<sup>186</sup> SIPRI Yearbook 1975, (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), 1975, 130-131.

Two critical factors: a domestic and international communist threat and U.S. support put little pressure on Prime Minister Thanom to reduce military budgets from 1963-1973. The United States sent 437 million dollars in military aid and arms to Thailand during this period.<sup>187</sup> An example of this economic support was a \$200 million payment by the United States for Thailand to send troops to Vietnam in 1967.<sup>188</sup>

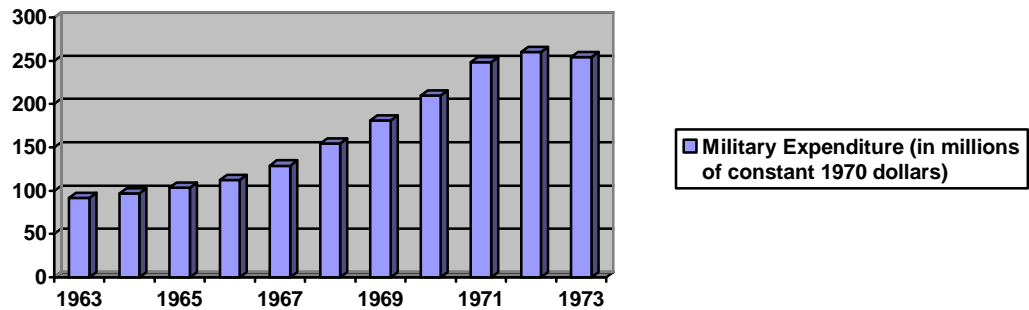


Table 4. Military Expenditure 1963-1973<sup>189</sup>

Clearly the Thai military exerted great control over the military budget during the Thanom period. In 1971, an attempt was made by the legislature to implement a small decrease in the military budget the military responded by dismissing the legislature and proceeded to rule by decree.<sup>190</sup> Even accounting for increases in the Thai economy the military was able to experience a relatively larger increase in their share of the budget.

<sup>187</sup> World Military Expenditures and Arms Trade 1963-1973, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) 1975, 69.

<sup>188</sup> Clark D. Neher, "Thailand: Toward Fundamental Change" *Asian Survey*, Vol. 11, No. 2, (Feb 1971), 136.

<sup>189</sup> SIPRI Yearbook 1975, (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), 1975, 130-131.

<sup>190</sup> Michael L. Mezey, "The Functions of a Minimal Legislature: Role Perceptions of Thai Legislators," *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 4, (Dec., 1972), 690.

#### 4. Military Reform

During his tenure as Prime Minister, Thailand was ruled under repressive military rule with a small disorganized fragmented opposition.<sup>191</sup> The communist threat and strong authoritarian control kept opposition to military domination in check. Certain political reforms were implemented to include the 1968 constitution.<sup>192</sup> But these reforms and the process of development were viewed more as “tools” against the threat of communism than as substantive reforms in civilian control of the military.<sup>193</sup> Throughout his reign Thanom sought to maintain strong military control in both the political and military domains, therefore no military reforms were implemented. Even minor attempts at forms of military reform met stiff resistance. This was demonstrated in 1971 when the military in response to attempted budget cuts staged a coup to protect their power base and reassert their political dominance.<sup>194</sup> With the coup the Government announced the failure of its “constitutional experiment;” martial law was declared, the legislature was closed, the parties were disbanded, and a military junta asserted complete control of the nation.<sup>195</sup> Throughout the Thanom period the government reminded the legislature that it existed by the grace of the army.<sup>196</sup>

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191 David Morell, “Thailand,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 13, No. 2, (Feb., 1973), 166-169.

192 David Morell, “Thailand,” *Asian Survey*, Vol.13, No. 2, (Feb., 1973), 172.

193 James Ockey, “Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations,” in Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 193-194.

194 In November 1971, Prime Minister Thanom executed a coup against his own government, the 1968 constitution was suspended, political parties banned, and military rule was imposed on the country. Under the new regime, executive and legislative authority was held by a military junta, the National Executive Council. Heading the council was Thanom, who retained the office of prime minister; Field Marshal Praphat Charusathian, his deputy prime minister; and Narong Kittikachorn(Thanom’s son). For more on the 1971 coup see: David Morell, “Thailand: Military Checkmate,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (Feb., 1972), 156-157.

195 Michael L. Mezey, “The 1971 Coup in Thailand: Understanding Why the Legislature Fails,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 13, No. 3, (Mar., 1973), 306.

196 Michael L. Mezey, “The Functions of a Minimal Legislature: Role Perceptions of Thai Legislators,” *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 4, (Dec., 1972), 689.



## C. POST-1992 ERA I

In contrast to the Thanom reign the post-1992 period saw greater civilian influence in military matters. Yet the military maintained a certain degree of autonomy. The Thai military was however, forced to undergo some major changes following the “Black May” incident in 1992. As demonstrated earlier this was due in part to the rising influence of civilian leadership. Whether or not the changes during this period became institutionalized and implemented effectively will be touched on further when examining the administration of Prime Minister Thaksin.

### 1. Personnel Decisions

Attempts were made during this period to reform certain aspects of personnel decisions. Although Chuan Leekpai never intervened in the military promotions exercise during his first term the successive governments of Banharn Silpa-archa (Jul 1995-Dec 1996) and Chavalit Yongchaiyudh (Dec 1996-Nov 1997) took more of an interventionist approach to the process.<sup>197</sup> During the second Chuan government (1997-2001), Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai did however take the unusual step- especially for a civilian who had never served in the military- of also assuming the post of Defense Minister.<sup>198</sup> It was also during Chuan’s second term that he and his army chief Surayud attempted to expand an early retirement project for senior officers; though there were few takers it demonstrated a degree of political will on the part of the government to tackle personnel issues in the military.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Chavalit was a retired military general. Suchit Bunbongkarn, *Thailand: State of the Nation*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 1996, 64-65.

<sup>198</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 132.

<sup>199</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 132.

## 2. Force Levels

General Wimol Wongawanich, who became Army Commander-in-Chief immediately following the events of May 1992, came under pressure to reduce the size of the armed forces.<sup>200</sup> In 1994 the Thai military witnessed a reduction of 41,000 troops from the previous year.<sup>201</sup> The troop levels remained at this reduced level of roughly 250-260,000 personnel until surprisingly enough 1998. Despite Thailand feeling the effects of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis armed forces personnel levels increased from 266,000 in 1997 to 306,000 in 1998.<sup>202</sup> Once again a new plan was introduced by Chuan Leekpai to reduce troop levels of 72,000 men over a 12 year period in order for the military to better allocate resources in order to modernize the force.<sup>203</sup> Yet the military was able to resist these proposed changes and troop levels returned to the pre-1992 levels in 1998 through 2001.<sup>204</sup> The ability of the military to continue to increase troop levels despite the severe economic hardships witnessed by Thailand demonstrated the amount of control the military maintained over its institutional domain of force levels.

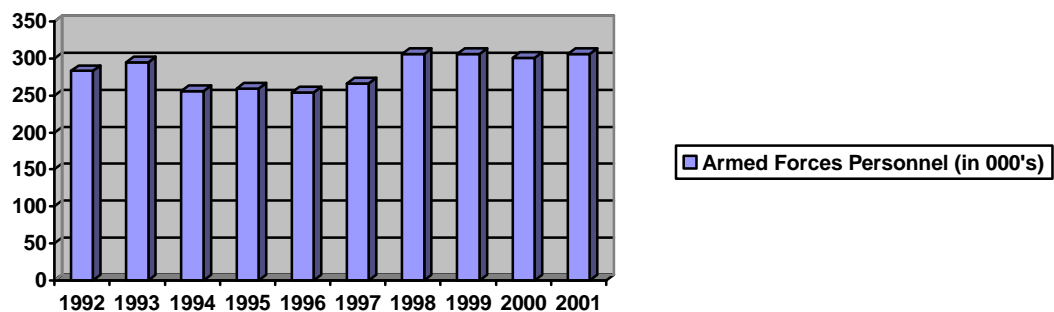


Table 5. Troop Levels: Thailand 1992-2001 <sup>205</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 131.

<sup>201</sup> Bonn International Center for Conversion, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed May 28, 2005).

<sup>202</sup> Bonn International Center for Conversion, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed May 28, 2005).

<sup>203</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 17 May 1999.

<sup>204</sup> Bonn International Center for Conversion, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed May 28, 2005).

<sup>205</sup> Bonn International Center for Conversion, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed May 28, 2005).

### 3. Military Budgets

The combination of the crisis of 1992 and the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 allowed for a “perfect storm” of allowing civilian leadership in Thailand to begin affecting a cut in the military budget. The pressure exerted by both the civilian leadership and civil society because of the economic downturn following the crisis forced the military to accept a reduced budget. The share of the national budget allocated to the military had shrunk gradually from 18%, allocated in the 1980s, to about 11-12% in the mid-1990s and 9% in 1999-2000.<sup>206</sup> Thailand’s military expenditures decreased from 2784(million in constant US dollars) in 1996 to 1773 in 2001.<sup>207</sup> In addition, the 1997 constitution sought to remove the control of the profitable Channel 5 and various radio stations from the military and place them under civilian government control. The second Chuan government (1997-2001) also revived a committee in the Ministry of defense that oversees the purchase of all weapons and was able to reduce increases in the military budget at a level below the average increase in other ministries.<sup>208</sup> This created an environment in which the military was forced to accept parliament’s decision to reduce military expenditure during the period following the events of May 1992.

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<sup>206</sup> Asia Times April 7, 2005. [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/GD07e01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/GD07e01.html) (Accessed April 9, 2005).

<sup>207</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed May 29, 2005).

<sup>208</sup> Surachart Bamrungskuk, “Thailand’s Road to Civilian Control: Changing Place for the Military”, a paper prepared for the Program on Democratic Governance and Security, (Washington, D.C.: National Democratic Institute), 2002, 10.

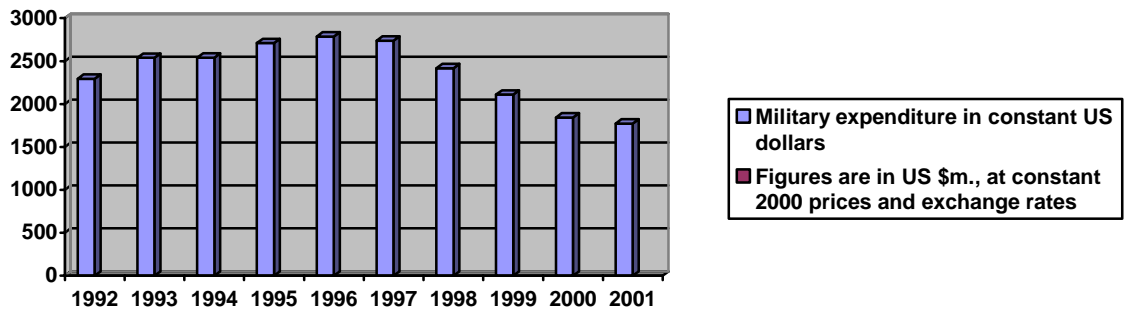


Table 6. Military Expenditures 1992-2001<sup>209</sup>

#### 4. Military Reform

It was during this period that Military reforms began to be seriously discussed. Although many of the proposed reforms lacked “teeth” or were not implemented as proposed, the rising influence of civilian authority in realm of defense policy can begin to be demonstrated. During his tenure as Army chief, Surayud, with the support of former PM Prem and PM Chuan, actively pursued a program of military reform and led a crackdown on “mafia colonels” who abused their rank to engage in criminal activity.<sup>210</sup> Another example of proposed reform was an attempt by PM Chuan to put the supreme commander of the armed forces and the chief of the major service commands under the defense permanent secretary and to restructure the Defense Council by reducing its size and thereby reduce the military representatives by more than half.<sup>211</sup> Eventually, the command structure that emerged was one preferred by the military and the Defense Council had the supreme commander as chair, but it demonstrated a willingness of civilian leaders to begin to call for reform.<sup>212</sup>

<sup>209</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed May 29, 2005).

<sup>210</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 132.

<sup>211</sup> Carolina G. Hernandez, “Good Governance of East Asia’s Security Forces,” *Conference Paper DCAF* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces), 2002, 22.

<sup>212</sup> James Ockey, “Thailand: the Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations”, in Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 199-200.

#### **D. POST-1992 ERA II: THE TERM OF THE FIRST THAKSIN GOVERNMENT (2001-2004)**

Thaksin's Shinawatra's rise to power backed by popular support among the country's rural population the dynamic between civilian leaders and the military appears to be changing. Where before the generals held the reigns of power, the prime minister is now calling the shots and has integrated the military into his power base.<sup>213</sup>

Thaksin appears to have changed his tactics in dealing with the military. Thaksin's provoking the military publicly can be traced back to 1996. Thaksin, who was a member of parliament at the time, strongly opposed a military satellite project, due in no small part to his own self interest in civilian satellite projects, and made comments inciting the military. The Army radio in turn attacked Thaksin and said that because of his interest in commercial satellites he was obstructing the military satellite program.<sup>214</sup> And since assuming the Post of Prime Minister several high profile political rows between him and the military have developed. In 2002, Prime Minister Thaksin shrewdly reappointed General Surayud from the post of army chief in a de facto demotion. General Surayud was seen to have the support of General Prem and in turn the monarchy but his increasing disputes with Thaksin over drug-combating efforts led to the reshuffle.<sup>215</sup> But Thaksin perhaps has come to the realization that co-opting vice competing with the military will be more conducive to his consolidation of power.

Since being elected in 2001, PM Thaksin has set out to transform the country's three branches of the armed forces - the Royal Thai Army, the navy and the air force - into another branch of his power base. The approach he used to achieve such a goal involved meddling with the military's internal promotions. In 2003, Thaksin appointed his cousin as commander in chief of the Army. This has been combined with placing 35 of his cadet school classmates to key military posts, creating for himself a remarkable

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<sup>213</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 121-165.

<sup>214</sup> "Military Satellite: Hot Political Project," in *Matichon Daily Newspaper*, March 21, 1996, 2.

<sup>215</sup> Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Thailand: Democratic Authoritarianism," in *Southeast Asian Affairs* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 2003, 283.

base of loyal supporters, several of whom commanded key frontline troops.<sup>216</sup> His personalization of the military is a dangerous precedent and not conducive to objective civilian control of the military.

### **1. Personnel Decisions**

Prime Minister Thaksin has played a significant role in the appointment of key posts within the military. Early on in his term, he appointed no less than 53 Army generals to posts as advisor to the prime minister, basing these appointees at Ban Phitsanlulok.<sup>217</sup> These positions help to strengthen Thaksin's patronage and support from the military. As touched on earlier, Thaksin has pushed some members of his own family and no fewer than 35 of his former cadet-school classmates collectively known as "Class 10", up the seniority ladder in the army and, to a lesser extent, in the navy and the air force. In doing so, he has shaped a powerful new clique that owes a lot to him and little to ability and seniority.<sup>218</sup> Prime Minister Thaksin has also used the annual military reshuffle as an excuse to dismiss opposition and strengthen his base of support. Thaksin's removal of Surayud, who disagreed with Thaksin over the Burma drug war issue, allowed Thaksin to not only dispose of perceived opposition but also opened the door for Chaisit Shinawatra's (Thaksin's cousin) appointment to Army Commander. As early as the 2002 military reshuffle the extent to which Thaksin was succeeding in politicizing and centralizing all decision making powers relating to the military in the prime minister was clearly being demonstrated.<sup>219</sup> And with his recent landslide victory in the 2005 elections, it seems likely that Prime Minister Thaksin will continue to consolidate his control over the decision-making authority over personnel decisions within the military.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 147.

<sup>217</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 151.

<sup>218</sup> Asia Times, April 7, 2005. [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/GD07Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/GD07Ae01.html) (Accessed April 9, 2005)

<sup>219</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 147.

<sup>220</sup> Asia Times, April 7, 2005. [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/GD07Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/GD07Ae01.html) (Accessed June 3, 2005).

## 2. Force Levels

Modernization of Thailand military structure requires a reduction in unnecessary military personnel in order for resources to be better spent on more effective defense equipment.<sup>221</sup> Yet it does not appear Prime Minister Thaksin is ready to confront the Thai military on this issue. Troop levels actually increased in 2003, from 306,000 to 314,000 troops.

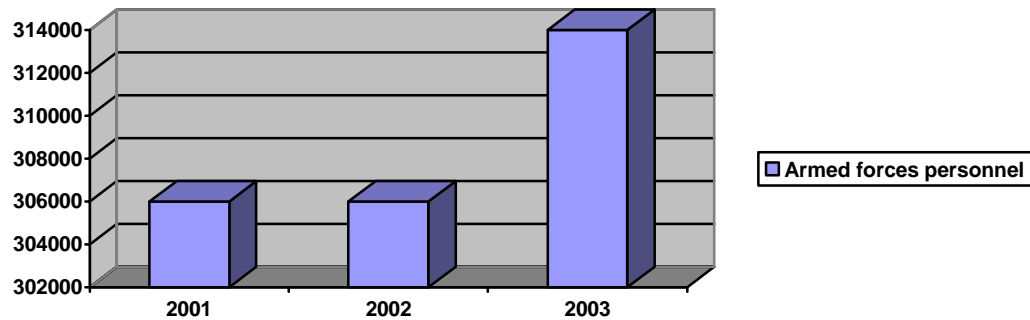


Table 7. Armed Forces Personnel 2001-2003<sup>222</sup>

In 2004, about 70 percent the Thai military budget was allocated for personnel and administrative expenses, and only 5-10 percent was likely to be invested in new defense equipment.<sup>223</sup> It is clear that the Thaksin administration must reduce the size of the armed forces which has become increasingly bloated. Yet it appears as if Thaksin would rather secure support from the military than challenge it; particularly in one of the military's institutional domains.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> General Teerawat Putamanonda (Ret.), "Thailand's Security Environment," <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/symposia/Pacific2004/putamanondapaper.htm>, (Accessed June 2, 2005)

<sup>222</sup> Bonn International Center for Conversion, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed May 28, 2005).

<sup>223</sup> Kitisorn Sookpradist, "Thailand," Defense Aerospace Equipment, Thailand, International Trade Administration, Industry Sector Analysis, 2004, [http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/doclist?\\_m=800c06c53a620fd6e1ebb0db1819bf4d&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&\\_md5=56d3b45e653a30871450c69fe0dd0c1f](http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/doclist?_m=800c06c53a620fd6e1ebb0db1819bf4d&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&_md5=56d3b45e653a30871450c69fe0dd0c1f), (Accessed May 28, 2005).

<sup>224</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 151.

### 3. Military Budget

Prime Minister Thaksin's support for increased military spending has only helped bolster his support from the military. Since 2001, Thaksin has increased the military budget, lifted the embargo on military procurements that had been in place since the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and approved the entire army's spending list for the 2005-13 period.<sup>225</sup> Yet a careful analysis shows that the military budget as a percent of Gross Domestic Product, military funding has actually decreased from 1.48% in 2001 to 1.43% in 2003.<sup>226</sup> During 2003, Thai economic growth reached a post-crisis high of 6.7%, and for the years 2001-2002 the economic growth for Thailand averaged 5 percent.<sup>227</sup> Yet military spending increased by 1.7% from 2001-2003.<sup>228</sup> This demonstrates that with a developing Thai economy Thaksin has been able to continue to increase military spending yet still divert increased resource to other government programs.

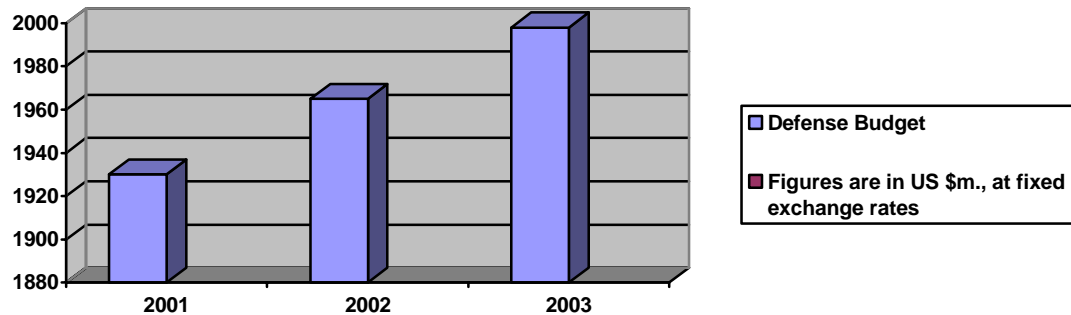


Table 8. Military Expenditure 2001-2003<sup>229</sup>

<sup>225</sup> Asia Times, April 7, 2005. [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/GD07Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/GD07Ae01.html) (Accessed April 9, 2005).

<sup>226</sup> Ministry of Defense--Compiled by: U.S. Commercial Service, U.S. Embassy, Bangkok, Thailand, [http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?\\_m=31303e5ef7b29faeabc5f9a263762c01&\\_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&\\_md5=9f355f9290495fbeb093845cc563d19a#refpt\\_Defense\\_Budget](http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?_m=31303e5ef7b29faeabc5f9a263762c01&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&_md5=9f355f9290495fbeb093845cc563d19a#refpt_Defense_Budget), (Accessed May 25, 2005).

<sup>227</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed May 29, 2005).

<sup>228</sup> Ministry of Defense--Compiled by: U.S. Commercial Service, U.S. Embassy, Bangkok, Thailand, [http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?\\_m=31303e5ef7b29faeabc5f9a263762c01&\\_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&\\_md5=9f355f9290495fbeb093845cc563d19a#refpt\\_Defense\\_Budget](http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?_m=31303e5ef7b29faeabc5f9a263762c01&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&_md5=9f355f9290495fbeb093845cc563d19a#refpt_Defense_Budget), (Accessed May 25, 2005).

<sup>229</sup> Ministry of Defense--Compiled by: U.S. Commercial Service, U.S. Embassy, Bangkok, Thailand, [http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?\\_m=31303e5ef7b29faeabc5f9a263762c01&\\_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&\\_md5=9f355f9290495fbeb093845cc563d19a#refpt\\_Defense\\_Budget](http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?_m=31303e5ef7b29faeabc5f9a263762c01&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&_md5=9f355f9290495fbeb093845cc563d19a#refpt_Defense_Budget), (Accessed May 25, 2005).



Though willing in principle to support military requests for increased spending, Thaksin has sought to gain personal control of such allocations, ensuring that all such requests would be channeled through him.<sup>230</sup> Thaksin has shown little inclination to reel in the military with budget cuts; instead it appears that he has used his power in controlling the budget process to further his influence and patronage.

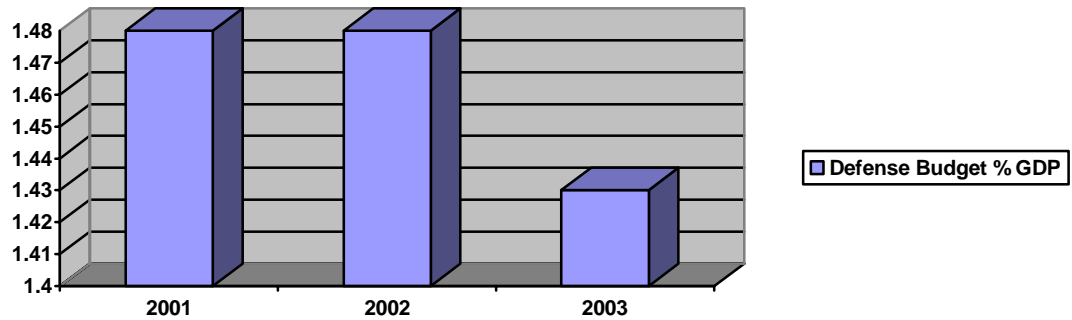


Table 9. Defense Budget % GDP 2001-2003<sup>231</sup>

#### 4. Military Reforms

Although it appears Thaksin may have the decision-making authority and possibly sufficient control of the military there seems no will on his part to implement needed reforms; particularly troop levels and the promotion process. Perhaps based on his earlier confrontations with the military or his private sector business experience that has involved collaborating with vested interests rather than challenging them, there has been little pressure to reform the military. And of the reforms Thaksin implemented, they appear to be a step backwards. The direct politicization of the promotion process, cabinet reshuffles aimed at centralizing all decision-making powers relating to the military, and the creation of a network of supporters within the armed forces has not moved the reform process closer to developing objective civilian control of the Thai military. The military no longer has to be so discreet or defensive about its relationships with the holders of

<sup>230</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 147.

<sup>231</sup> Ministry of Defense--Compiled by: U.S. Commercial Service, U.S. Embassy, Bangkok, Thailand, [http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?\\_m=31303e5ef7b29faeabc5f9a263762c01&\\_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&\\_md5=9f355f9290495fbeb093845cc563d19a#refpt\\_Defense\\_Budget](http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?_m=31303e5ef7b29faeabc5f9a263762c01&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&_md5=9f355f9290495fbeb093845cc563d19a#refpt_Defense_Budget), (Accessed May 25, 2005).

economic and political power; the period of quasi-penance following the May 1992 events seems to be over, and Thailand may be reverting to a kind of pre-reform mode of civil-military relation.<sup>232</sup> The difference being that the pendulum has swung and the military is being used as an instrument to consolidate one man's grip on power.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Having analyzed three very distinct periods in Thailand's history it is clear to see some trends that have developed regarding the military's autonomy in the political and institutional realms. The shift has been from a strong dominant military with a great deal of autonomy with little to no opposition of competition from civilian leaders to a more dominant civilian leadership. By analyzing four critical factors; personnel decisions, troop levels, military budget, and military reforms it can be demonstrated the decision-making authority in the institutional decision sites has not shifted as much as in the political autonomy sphere of influence. The following table clearly demonstrates the evolving shift:

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<sup>232</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies) 2005, 135.

Table 10. Qualitative Assessment of Military Autonomy

		Thanom Period 1963-1973	Period after Black May 1992-2001	Thaksin's Administration 2001-2005
<b>Institutional Autonomy</b>	Personnel Decisions	H	M	L
	Troop Levels	H	M	M
<b>Political Autonomy</b>	Military Budget	H	M	L
	Military Reform	H	M	L

\*These are relative, not absolute figures used to determine the Thai military's level of autonomy in the decision-making ability in the corresponding categories. Levels of military autonomy based on a qualitative assessment; H=High, M=Medium, L=Low.

The analysis clearly demonstrates a shift over time in the military's autonomy in both the institutional and political spheres of influence. The Thai military still maintains a level of autonomy within the institutional decision areas but the trend seems to indicate a greater level of civilian control in the political realm. During the Thanom period the military had a high level of autonomy in both the institutional and political spheres of influence. This is in contrast to the situation today under Prime Minister Thaksin where the level of relative military autonomy has decreased.

Table 11. Assigning a Numerical Value to Military Autonomy

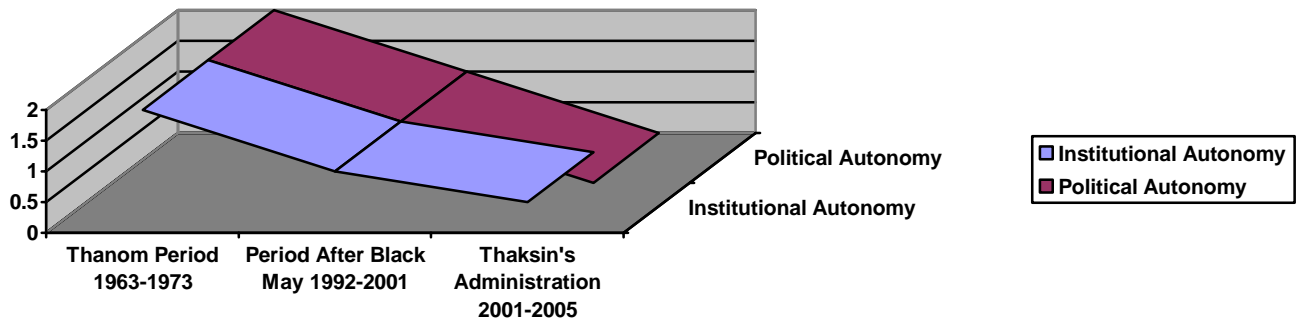
		Thanom Period 1963-1973	Period after Black May 1992-2001	Thaksin's Administration 2001-2005
<b>Institutional Autonomy</b>	Personnel Decisions	2	1	0
	Troop Levels	2	1	1
<b>Political Autonomy</b>	Military Budget	2	1	0
	Military Reform	2	1	0

\*From the previous table qualitative assessments of military autonomy were assigned a numerical value. These are relative, not absolute figures used to determine the Thai military's level of autonomy in the decision-making ability in the corresponding categories. Levels of military autonomy based on a qualitative assessment; High=2, Medium=1, Low=0.

The data suggests that the decision-making authority has shifted away from the military; particularly in the political realm. The military's control over professional functions and internal reforms remain at a higher level. This is demonstrated by the resistance to reduce troop levels. Although there are some generally positive trends in the level of civilian control of the military because of Thaksin's willingness to co-opt and secure support from the military as a means to strengthen his power base there are some also some concerns. As Thaksin continues to try to convert the military into a direct source of military support and a major component of his power base the focus will shift into what type of civilian control is being implemented.<sup>233</sup>

<sup>233</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies) 2005, 134.

Table 12. Level of Military Autonomy Over Time



\*Note: A 2 indicates a relatively high level of military autonomy and a 0 indicates a relatively low level of military autonomy.

"The re-politicization of the military is very dangerous for Thailand and for Thaksin himself; he cannot handle it," said Professor Ukrist Pathmanand, assistant director of the Institute of Asian Studies at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University and co-author of the book *The Thaksinization of Thailand*.<sup>234</sup> The shifting of decision-making authority from the military to the civilian leadership would at the surface appear to be a positive trend towards more democratic civilian control of the government. Yet this positive trend has the distinct possibility of being high jacked along the way and turned into a subjectively controlled military by an authoritarian leaning prime minister. The next chapter will analyze and recommend policy options available to the United States that can assist Thailand in achieving a more democratic objective control of the Thai military.

<sup>234</sup> Asia Times, April 7, 2005. [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/GD07Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/GD07Ae01.html) (Accessed May 26, 2005).

## V. U.S. POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. US POLICY AND THAI CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Current trends indicate that since the events of “Black May” in 1992 the civilian governments in Thailand have exerted greater control over a once autonomous Thai military. Having looked at the evolving role of the Thai military in the political process this chapter will now explore what policy options are available to U.S. policy makers to assist Thailand towards strengthening civilian control and developing stable civil-military relations. It is then important to analyze what policy options the United States should implement to help Thai civilian leaders consolidate control of the military. After developing policy recommendations this chapter will discuss how these policies may be implemented, and the impact that they may have.

Thailand, and its future as a stable democracy, plays a vital role in the strategic interests of the United States. U.S.-Thailand relations are of great interest to America because of Thailand’s status as a long-time military ally with ongoing relevance to U.S. logistical operations in Iraq, a key country in the war on terrorism in Southeast Asia, and a significant trade and economic partner.<sup>235</sup> As a major non-NATO ally in the Global War on Terror, Thailand has been a key supporter of the current administrations policies; as demonstrated both by the government’s decision in 2003 to contribute troops to Operation Iraqi Freedom and by actively participating in counterterrorism measures in Southeast Asia.<sup>236</sup> In addition to relying on support from the Thai government the United States has an interest in seeing a stable democracy emerging in Thailand.

In order for the United States to be able to depend on Thai support and stability it is important for policy makers to understand the reforms taking place in the Thai political system and the possible implications on future U.S./Thai relations. As part of the Global War On Terror (GWOT) the Bush administration has preached the importance of

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<sup>235</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery, “Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations,” CRS Report for Congress, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress), January 13, 2005, 1.

<sup>236</sup> Paul Chambers, “U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11: A New Era in Cooperation?” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, (Dec 2004) Vol. 26, Issue 3, 467-470.

spreading liberty. A stable liberal democratic system in Thailand is in America's interest because stability and economic development along the lines of the American democratic model are likely to produce closer alignment of similar interests in a global environment. Thailand's progress towards developing into a stable liberal democratic state depends on competent democratic civilian control of the military. In order to develop a coherent strategy for Thai civilian-military assistance, U.S. policymakers must first understand the political dynamics and the evolving role of various political groups in Thailand, particularly the military.

## **B. U.S. POLICY OPTIONS**

According to Samuel P. Huntington, a key aspect to improving civil-military relations is the restructuring of militaries toward military missions.<sup>237</sup> Prior to the defeat of the communist insurgency in 1984 Thailand's military was able to orient itself towards military missions. From 1932 to the defeat of Communism a clearly defined threat helped dictate a military mission for the military. As part of the strategy to defeat communism the military focused on development.<sup>238</sup> After the defeat of communism in the early 1980's the Thai military had no clearly defined enemy and was struggling to find a new mission.<sup>239</sup> Domestic security issues are better suited for lightly armed police and intelligence forces. That is why it is important Thailand has recently been designated as a major Non-NATO ally by the United States. By designating them as a Non-NATO ally it will open up access to Excess Defense Articles on a grant basis under section 516 of the Foreign Assistance Act in FY 2005.<sup>240</sup> EDA grants will advance interoperability, counterterrorism, counter narcotics and coalition peacekeeping goals while enhancing

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<sup>237</sup> See Huntington, Samuel P. "Reforming Civil-Military Relations," *Journal of Democracy* 6, (1995), 10-13.

<sup>238</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Muthiah Alagappa, *Coercion and Governance*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 206.

<sup>239</sup> James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Muthiah Alagappa, *Coercion and Governance*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 206.

<sup>240</sup> . Emma Chanlett-Avery, "Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations," CRS Report for Congress, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress), January 13, 2005, 17.

U.S. influence and access.<sup>241</sup> The more important aspect of being designated a major Non-NATO ally is it will give the Thai military an external military mission. Thailand in the past has sent peacekeeping troops to East Timor, Afghanistan, and Iraq. With the designation the United States can continue to seek viable military missions for the Thai military. This mutually beneficial relationship will force the Thai military to focus on an external military mission and will allow the United States a critical role in help developing that mission.

Thailand has gone through various crisis and military coups but overall has remained a picture of stability in a volatile region. As the control of the military has evolved in Thailand it can perhaps be used as a model for neighboring Southeast Asian countries. Myanmar, Philippines, and Indonesia have all struggled with civilian-military control. Thailand could be a helpful participant in the dialogue and an exemplary model for these neighboring countries having moved towards civilian authority over its once politically dominant military. Civilian members of the Armed Forces Committees from both houses of the Thai parliament could host conferences to discuss security issues with civilian contingents from the perspective countries. The interaction between civilian leadership in the various countries will promote greater awareness of the role civilians have to play concerning military and security issues. Civilian leaders from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand could also discuss what reforms and strategies have been effective in exerting control over the military. It may however be in the U.S.'s interest to act as a moderator in these talks to ensure positive aspects of civil-military relations are the goal and not simply collusion among nations struggling with control of the military. The National Defense College of the Philippines has indicated its interest in hosting postgraduate courses for Asian officers with the assistance of foreign donors.<sup>242</sup> This multilateral approach of using dialogue and conferences with countries struggling with civilian military relations will allow Thailand to offer assistance to countries in its region and provide insight into what structural changes are making their own transition

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<sup>241</sup>Federation of American Scientists, <http://www.fas.org/asmp/profiles/aid/aidindex.htm#Program%20Descriptions> (Accessed Dec, 1 2004)

<sup>242</sup> Eduardo Lachica, "Examining The Role of Foreign Assistance in Security Sector Reforms:" Working Paper Series, Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, Nanyang University, Singapore, June 2003, 18.



more or less effective. Successful countries such as the United States, Malaysia, and Singapore could also be included in these conferences to offer an objective model for Thailand to strive for.

The United States has funded various programs in the past to help develop a professional military and help strengthen civilian control of the military. Among the programs funded by the United States include International Military Education and Training (IMET), economic support funding, peacekeeping operations funding, counter narcotics funding and anti-terrorism funding. For a relatively modest investment in IMET, the U.S. has been well rewarded by the exposure of thousands of Thai military students to the “U.S. military establishment and the American way of life, including democratic values, respect for internationally recognized norms of human rights, the concept of civilian control of the armed forces and respect for the rule of law.”<sup>243</sup> In the short term future it looks as if modest increases are expected in IMET funding. In FY 2004 Thai IMET funding was 2.45 million US dollars and FY 2005 request was 2.5 million US dollars.<sup>244</sup> In addition to IMET the U.S. plans to increase funding to the International Narcotics and Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) programs. Increased funding in already established programs will help assist Thailand in moving towards objective civilian control of the Thai military.

As bilateral trade increases between the United States and Thailand, this economic development can be used to help influence the democratic reforms taking place in Thailand. With two way trade between Thailand and the United States close to \$21 billion U.S. dollars a years this leverage can be used to help encourage democratic gains.<sup>245</sup> As a Free Trade Agreement is in the process of being launch various US trade concessions could be directly tied either to democratic reforms or more specifically civilian/military control reforms. By forcing the Thai military and the civilian leadership, specifically Thaksin to accept external pressure to implement domestic reforms would

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<sup>243</sup> Eduardo Lachica, “Examining The Role of Foreign Assistance in Security Sector Reforms:” Working Paper Series, Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, Nanyang University, Singapore, June 2003, 3.

<sup>244</sup> Federation of American Scientists, <http://www.fas.org/asmp/profiles/aid/aidindex.htm#Program%20Descriptions> (accessed Dec. 1, 2004)

<sup>245</sup> U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27790.htm> (Accessed Dec. 4, 2004)

only be likely to occur if they were tied directly to economic opportunity. This carrot and stick approach tied to the bilateral Free Trade Agreement between the two countries could allow the stronger U.S. position to dictate positive reform of the civilian military control relationship.

International institutions and influence can play a significant role in helping move democratic reforms forward in Thailand. The United States can look to increase World Bank and International Monetary Fund funding to Thailand. By helping to strengthen the institutions within Thailand established by the 1997 Constitution to include the Constitutional Court, National Counter Corruption Committee, and the Election Committee; the chances of domestic manipulation of democratic advancement would be less likely.<sup>246</sup> It is important to strengthen these democratic institutions to make it less likely the Thai military or the civilian leadership will revert to more authoritarian tendencies.

A final option the United States would have in assisting the civilian Thai leadership in obtaining objective democratic control of the military would be to “Trust the Thais.” Although this is choice is more of an attitude vice a policy, it is still an option. In choosing this option the United States would be leaving the progress of civilian control of the military to the influential political actors within Thailand. If the assessment of the United States was that enough structural changes have been made for the functioning of a democratic military under civilian control in Thailand then this option may be a viable option. A status quo could develop and the United States could just monitor progress vice trying to influence it. By providing assistance only when assistance is sought the United States can play a supportive role only when called upon. The obvious drawback would be less direct influence and direction by U.S. policy makers.

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<sup>246</sup> Articles 255 to 270 of the 1997 Thai Constitution established the Constitutional Court to adjudicate on any matters concerning the interpretation of the constitution. Articles 291 to 307 established the National Counter-Corruption Commission with extensive powers to scrutinize the financial affairs of politicians and their families, including the right to propose the Senate remove politicians from office. Articles 136 to 148 established the Election Commission, an independent body with sweeping powers to oversee the electoral process, including the rights to investigate questionable elections and if necessary to order new elections. Duncan McCargo, “Introduction: Understanding Political Reform in Thailand,” in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Reforming Thai Politics*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2002, 10-11.

In analyzing the policy options available to the United States much of the focus was on bilateral policies. With the exception of using the Thai civilian/military relationship as a model, all of the proposed policies focus on the Thai-US relationship. The problem with developing more multilateral approaches with the regional leaders particularly China and Japan is that their civilian military relations are either deficient or 180 degrees out from the United States' position. That does not mean these nations would be excluded, it just means the United States and its policies would play the dominant role with multilateral relations on the periphery.

### **C. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT**

In order to achieve objective civilian control over a professional military Thailand faces two major obstacles. The first obstacle is the legacy of military control of the political process. The second is the fragile state of democracy in Thailand. It is important to the United States as it implements policies to strengthen civilian control of the military to keep in mind continued democratization in Thailand is also necessary. Thus two strategies are necessary when implementing chosen policies. A short term focus and a long term focus. The short term policies will focus on reducing the military's direct political influence. The longer term strategies will focus on strengthening the authority and competency of the controllers themselves, the civilians.

The best policy option to focus on based on the previous policy options would be to continue funding established programs to include IMET, ICIT, INCLE, and FMF among others. Although not all of the other policy options would be discarded. Several other policies could be implemented to help supplement the chosen policy. An example of this would be to encourage Thailand to engage in multilateral conferences using their civilian military model as a model to neighboring countries but this would not be the focus of my chosen policy. The focus of my chosen policy would be to increase funding to programs already in place and restructure the programs to make them more effective. This combined with short and long term goals will have a dramatic effect in moving Thailand towards democratic civilian supremacy over the Thai military.

By providing additional assistance in programs designed to strengthen civilian control of the military the United States could help assist Thailand in consolidating some of the gains made and allowing further reform. Some of the implied goals the United States would achieve in providing additional assistance to Thailand are to enhance our influence in a strategically important region, strengthen Thailand's effort to combat terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and other international crime and reinforce military cooperation with a treaty ally.<sup>247</sup> The increased funding would call for a civilian coordinator in Thailand on the ambassador level with funding control to manage and implement a comprehensive program integrating a variety of civilian and military federal programs. These programs would be developed with both a short and long term goals directly linked to funding requirements. I will discuss some of the programs tied together through this coordinator and then focus on the short and long term goals they will seek to achieve.

The preferred policy of increased funding offers training opportunities to both the Thai military and the Thai civilian leadership with an emphasis on achieving democratic civilian supremacy. The United States Coordinator on Thai Civilian/Military affairs will have both a Department of Defense element and a civilian USAID component to provide a clear agenda on various programs already in place and funded by the United States. In the past there has not been a clear agenda tying all the different programs together to have a comprehensive impact on Thai civilian military relations. In order to strengthen civilian control of the military you cannot ignore the civilian side of the equation. Two important goals often overlooked when focusing on civilian military affairs are enhancing the expertise of civilian officials in military matters and bolstering the effectiveness of lightly-armed police for internal security.<sup>248</sup> In addition to monitoring the short and long term goals of the Thai civilian military funding the Coordinator would ensure the civilian programs complemented the military programs.

The Department of Defense element will continue to focus on IMET funding, Expanded IMET, FMF, Center of National Defense, and designating Thailand a major

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<sup>247</sup> U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27790.htm> (Accessed Dec. 4, 2004)

<sup>248</sup> Claude E. Welch, *Civilian Control of the Military: Theory and Cases from Developing Countries* (Albany: State University of New York Press) 1976, 2.

Non-NATO ally. This element will continue to highlight the needed reforms and continued progress with a heavy focus on the Thai military. IMET in addition to encouraging a more professional Thai military officer also improves interoperability and fosters US-Thai relationships among the militaries. The expanded IMET program would and should focus on Human Rights issues both for the military and the police. The increased FMF funding complements other security and counter narcotics-related programs in Thailand by enhancing the Thai military's ability to combat terrorism, improving its interoperability with U.S. forces and increasing its capacity to control Thailand's porous border with Burma.<sup>249</sup> It will be important for the Coordinator to ensure the military's focus is on the external threats and leave the internal security to the enhanced police force. Under the umbrella of the Department of Defense the United States would increase funding to Thailand for the Center of National Defense in Hawaii. Thai civilians would take courses focusing on defense management skills, civil-military relations, budget operations, and defense spending. Only after civilians are adequately knowledgeable in military affairs are they able to sufficiently debate and control military funding and control. Tied into the increased funding would be the designation of Thailand as a major Non-NATO ally. As touched on earlier this could play a crucial role in establishing an external mission for the Thai military. This external mission could help to force some needed structural changes to perhaps include reducing the number of troops stationed in and around the capital by forcing the military to cope with mission oriented logistics. The focus on the Thai military in helping to continue to reform the Thai civilian military relationship would fall under the Department of Defense much as it has in the past. This element to be more effective as Thailand continues to develop must work with the civilian element to build a seamless agenda.

Samuel Huntington has warned that "future problems in civil military relations in new democracies are likely to come not from the military but from the civilian side of the equation."<sup>250</sup> With the further "privatization" of the military under Prime Minister Thaksin it is easy to see why Huntington would make such a prediction. Having

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<sup>249</sup> U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27790.htm> (Accessed Dec. 4, 2004)

<sup>250</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "Reforming Civil-Military Relations," *Journal of Democracy* 6, (1995), 10-13.

proposed a policy of increased funding to established U.S. funded programs a key factor in that success is the civilian element. The civilian element of programs improved to improve civilian-military relations in Thailand would fall under the guidance of USAID. Among the key challenges for states undergoing a transition from military rule to more open, transparent systems is how to get defense right after years of military rule.<sup>251</sup> Fortunately, this is something USAID has experience in. USAID plays a special role in analyzing and improving civil-military relations. The role of USAID in Thailand will be to focus on the necessary civilian programs necessary to improve democratic civilian supremacy over the military. Without a viable, educated, articulated civilian leadership in regards to military affairs it is unlikely if not impossible to effectively control the military.

Under the direction of USAID and ultimately accountable to the leadership of the Coordinator I would recommend increased funding in various established “civilian” programs in order to improve civilian-military relations. The first and some of the most closely related to the Department of Defense element programs include the police and internal security programs. It would be important to integrate these programs with the military but it would be critical that USAID and Department of Defense working together draw an obvious line between civilian and military missions. Through the Department of Justice but accountable to USAID increased funding for the International Criminal Investigative Training would help bolster the Thai police forces. Thailand has struggled with the role of the military particularly the developmental role. Close cooperation between USAID, the Thai military, and civilian leaders can professionalize the military and the police will meeting all of Thailand’s security needs. International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), Nonproliferation, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR), and Export Control and Related Border Security Assistance (EXBS) programs are all necessary programs to ensure Thai and US security but the all need supervision by USAID to ensure a coherent strategy of police functions, military missions, intelligence communications, and human rights are effectively implemented. Multilaterally, INCLE funds the International Law Enforcement Academy in Bangkok, a

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<sup>251</sup> “Civil-Military Relations: USAID’s Role” *Center for Democracy and Governance*. (Washington D.C.: Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support, and Research), July 1998, 31.

cooperative U.S.-Thai undertaking.<sup>252</sup> These programs are critical to establishing a professional, competent, and effective police force in order to reorient the military to military missions. That is not to say at times these missions will not overlap but with proper supervision of USAID Thai police, military, and security forces can effectively meet security needs and promote civilian control of a military mission oriented military.

The chosen policy option would in addition to bolstering the civilian police forces also bolster the civilian leadership under the direction of USAID. In order to enhance the expertise of civilian officials in military matters the Thai civilian leadership could work with both the United States Institute for Peace and the National Endowment for Democracy. The United States Institute for Peace, an independent government think tank provides research and assistance on civil-military relations and the National Endowment for Democracy is a quasi-governmental agency that contributes to civil-military relations in developing states. Through increased funding to these two institutions assistance to the Thai civilian leadership can help develop the necessary tools to implement effective civilian control of the military.

Using a multilateral approach USAID can direct and coordinate with the United Nations Development Program, encourage Japan to increase funding, and encourage dialogue with neighboring countries. The United Nations Development Program sponsors programs, seminars, and conferences on civil-military relations. By exposing Thailand to a diverse set of civil-military relations the Thai civilian leadership can pick and choose what they would consider effective policies and apply it to their state. The United States could also encourage Japan, who has been seeking a larger regional role, to increase funding, dialogue, and educational programs. USAID with experience in the region could encourage dialogue between Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand. In 2001, a USAID-assisted team of civilian military experts drafted defense related legislation which the Indonesian parliament chose to adapt. USAID is also supporting civilian

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<sup>252</sup> U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27790.htm> (Accessed Dec. 4, 2004)

participation in the drafting of a defense white paper which civilian reformers were the key actors.<sup>253</sup> This invaluable experience would assist the Thai civilian leadership a great deal.

Having analyzed the two elements to the increased funding, the civilian and the military, it is important to focus on both the short and long term goals of each element. The short term goals would highlight among other factors; establishing “integral” boundaries between military and civilian institutions, greater international rather than domestic orientation of the military, active encouragement of disengagement from politics, and emphasis on greater structural differentiation (focusing on police units).<sup>254</sup> Examples of short term goals could include structural changes such as legislative budget appropriations and formal control over promotions of military officers to the highest ranks. These short term goals will allow the Coordinator to help analyze on a yearly basis what policies and programs are more effective. The Coordinator could use his funding leverage to tie reforms to additional funding. Short term goals should have an overarching long term strategy.<sup>255</sup> The long term strategy in Thailand’s case should be to establish a competent civilian leadership in military affairs. The Thai civilian leadership is hesitant to confront the military concerning budgets, stationing of troops, and policies because of a certain lack of expertise in the military arena. With the development of civilian military experts a real debate can occur over civilian control of the military. With the Thai civilian leadership deferring military matters to military leaders true civilian supremacy will not be achieved.

The policy this chapter has chosen to propose takes into account programs already in place. The only real fundamental change is the coordination of these programs. Civil-military affairs are a complex and challenging relationship. In the past the primary focus has been on only one side of the equation, the military side. In addition to looking at the civilian side of the equation it is important to integrate and complement the existing

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<sup>253</sup> Reference to these USAID programs can be read in “Military Reform and Civilian Conflict,” by Marcus Mietzner, *Journal of Developmental Alternatives*, Vol. 8., Issue 1, (September 2002) 23-36. [http://www.dai.com/daideas/pdf/developing\\_alternatives/beyond\\_chaos\\_summer\\_2002.pdf](http://www.dai.com/daideas/pdf/developing_alternatives/beyond_chaos_summer_2002.pdf), (Accessed May 25, 2005).

<sup>254</sup> Claude E. Welch, *Civilian Control of the Military: Theory and Cases from Developing Countries* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 1976.

<sup>255</sup> “Civil-Military Relations: USAID’s Role” *Center for Democracy and Governance*. (Washington D.C.: Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support, and Research), July 1998, 9.



programs in order to develop a coherent focused strategy to help Thailand consolidate the progress it has made in democratic civilian control of the military. This chapter has proposed a Thai Civilian/Military Coordinator to oversee and implement the difficult task of integrating these diverse and complementing programs. On a yearly basis he will be able to evaluate short term goals and increase or decrease funding to effective and ineffective programs. While implementing these short term goals a longer term goal of competent effective civilian supremacy over an external mission oriented military will be achieved.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Thailand has a legacy of military rule. It wasn't until 1988 that effective civilian leadership was given a chance to begin to develop. Since 1992 it appears as if the Thai military has returned to the barracks but effective civilian control of the military still faces many obstacles. With these obstacles in mind I have proposed a variety of possible US policy options. The options ranged from "Trusting the Thais" to using economic pressure to force reform. This chapter settled on a policy of increased funding for programs already in place. But if funding is to be increased without several key changes it seems unlikely Thailand will transition to democratic civilian supremacy. The key changes I suggested were appointing a Coordinator to effectively develop a strategy to link all the diverse yet interrelated programs. Another key change was to have USAID direct the entire civilian element of the civil-military relations. In the past these programs have fallen under the Department of Justice and the Drug Enforcement Agency with little to no regard on their effect on civil-military relations. Increased funding can only give Thailand the tools necessary to put in place and build on some the democratic reforms necessary to have complete civilian supremacy. The integration of the Department of Defense programs and the civilian USAID programs will allow Thailand to have an effective short and long term strategy to ensure consolidation of the gains they have made in civilian control of the military.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Since 1992, the military has undergone a significant change in attitude and ability to exert its influence on Thai politics. The military starting in 1992 has promoted professionalism among the ranks and began focusing its energies on restructuring and modernizing its forces.<sup>256</sup> The military has since 1992 remained neutral in election campaigns, did not intervene in politics during the financial crisis, and no new military-backed political parties have formed.<sup>257</sup>

In addition after the 1997 constitution several structural changes were implemented to consolidate civilian control of the military. Among these were a reduced role for the military in cabinets and the Senate. Starting in 2000 Senate members are now elected vice appointed and active duty members are no longer eligible for cabinet positions or the Senate<sup>258</sup>. The 1997 constitution also called for an elected Prime Minister.<sup>259</sup> The appointed Senate positions and previous constitutions allowing an appointed Prime Minister were powerful tools in the past for the military to gain political control. It is possible that the Thai military has turned a corner with the younger generation of officers growing up in democratic apolitical military environment. There have been encouraging signs since the events of 1992 indicating the military has decided it no longer has an interest in direct control of political affairs.<sup>260</sup>

It has been argued that “whether military elites were united or not, their political centrality was eroded during the events following May 1992 by the bourgeoisie and the middle class.”<sup>261</sup> This is a valid argument. This thesis makes the case the rise of a

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<sup>256</sup> Daniel E. King, “Thailand: Toward Democratic Stability,” *Journal of Democracy* 7.1 (1996): 108-109.

<sup>257</sup> Daniel E King. “Thailand in 1995: Open Society, Dynamic Economy, Troubled Politics,” *Asian Survey* 36 (Feb 1996): 137.

<sup>258</sup> James Ockey, “Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations,” in Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2001, 207.

<sup>259</sup> James R. Klein, “The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 1997: A Blueprint for Participatory Democracy,” *The Asia Foundation Working Paper Series*, 21-22.

<sup>260</sup> James R. Klein, “The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 1997: A Blueprint for Participatory Democracy,” *The Asia Foundation Working Paper Series*, 35.

<sup>261</sup> William F. Case, “Can the ‘Halfway House’ Stand?” *Comparative Politics* 28 (Jul 1996): 455.

business class and political parties with support from the Monarchy played an integral part as critical parameter for the development towards greater civilian control of the Thai military.

Concerning this development, the analysis in chapter III has shown that three factors external to the armed forces enabled an environment for greater civilian control of the military in Thailand. The first critical factor to civilian control of the Thai armed forces was the economic development witnessed by Thailand from the 1970's to 1992.<sup>262</sup> This economic development produced a capital class that sought greater political influence. An outlet for the increasingly influential business leaders became political parties. Because of the Thai military's willingness to allow political space; political parties were able to develop into a viable institution able to counterbalance the political role of the military. Having developed as an alternative institution the political parties were able to fill the political vacuum created after the events of 1992. Yet without the role the Monarchy played, it is unlikely the military would have been forced to return to the barracks. The Monarchy provided legitimacy to the appointed civilian leadership. Civilian leadership, after 1992 was able to exert small but increasing control over a once politically dominant military.

The analysis in Chapter IV suggests that Thailand has witnessed greater civilian control in both the political realm and on institutional issues from Prime Minister's Thanom's rule through Prime Minister Thaksin's first administration. It was during PM Thanom's reign, that military autonomy in both the institutional and political arenas was relatively high. The military from 1963-1973, clearly dictated the political decision making authority and maintained independence from civilian influence in the professional decision areas. The period following the events of 1992 through 2001 illustrated greater civilian control over the once autonomous Thai armed forces.

The post-1992 era witnessed greater intervention by civilian in the personnel decision process and for a brief period a reduction in force levels. Attempts were made by civilian leadership to address the overstaffing of generals in the ranks, yet the military

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<sup>262</sup> World Bank, *World Table 1994*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 340-341.

was able to effectively resist the proposed programs.<sup>263</sup> This indicated a greater will on the part of civilian leadership, compared to the Thanom period, to intervene in what traditionally has been a professional function. However, the military ability to resist change demonstrated the armed forces still had control over most internal issues. Another decision site that demonstrated an evolving level of civilian control in the institutional sphere of influence was troop levels. The civilian leadership was able to reduce force levels starting in 1994 by 50,000 troops.<sup>264</sup> Troop levels remained at this reduced level until 1998, coincidentally the same time as Thailand was feeling the effects of the Asian Financial Crisis.<sup>265</sup> From 1998-2001 troop levels returned to their 1992 levels showing the military's ability to continue to exert influence on areas viewed as a core issue. In the political arena, civilians exerted greater control over the military than in the Thanom period. Military expenditures were reduced steadily from 1996-2001, indicating an increased ability of civilian leadership to dictate how and where limited government resources were to be allocated.<sup>266</sup> The military reforms implemented by the Army Chief General Surayud, under the leadership of PM Chuan, displayed the rising influence of civilian authority compared to 1963-1973.

The final period analyzed, the first term of the Thaksin administration (2001-2004), indicated a trend of increased civilian control of the military compared to both the post-1992 era and the Thanom rule. In the first decision site of institutional autonomy, personnel decisions, Prime Minister Thaksin exerted far more influence and independent decision making authority than Thailand has ever witnessed. His ability to effectively appoint his supporters to key posts within the armed forces has created a situation where the armed forces threaten to become an instrument to consolidate his power.<sup>267</sup> In the other area of institutional autonomy, force levels, PM Thaksin has not reduced the

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<sup>263</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 132.

<sup>264</sup> Bonn International Center for Conversion, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed May 28, 2005).

<sup>265</sup> Bonn International Center for Conversion, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed May 28, 2005).

<sup>266</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <http://first.sipri.org/index.php?page=step2>, (Accessed May 29, 2005).

<sup>267</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 121-165.

number of troops. The analyses suggests however, this may illustrate his willingness to co-opt the military vice confront a possible power base.<sup>268</sup> On the political side of the spectrum, PM Thaksin and his administration exert greater control of the military compared to the two previous periods. Although during PM's Thaksin's first term the military budget has increased if you analyze the budget as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product the budget has actually decreased.<sup>269</sup> What this clearly demonstrates is the politically savvy of PM Thaksin who is able to keep the armed forces well funded yet still divert additional governmental resources to other programs. The final area of political autonomy, military reform, shows a centralization of all decision making powers relating to the military going through one man, PM Thaksin.

As the Thai military retreats to the barracks Thailand and more civilian control is exerted on the military the issue of objective or subjective control becomes relevant. The consolidation of power by PM Thaksin and the Thai Rak Thai is threatening to many intellectuals in Thailand. The ability of one man to harness vast amounts of power, threatens the democratic process and the future of civilian control over the military. Thaksin has recently appointed his cousin Chaisith Shinawatra as commander-in-chief of the army.<sup>270</sup> In addition, he has elevated a host of his former military preparatory schoolmates to key commands of the army, navy, air force, and police.<sup>271</sup> The possible consequence of this consolidation of power can lead to the Thai armed forces becoming a "tool" in the consolidation of PM Thaksin's grip on power. As he continues to appoint supporters to key positions in the military the possibility of disgruntled officers within the military developing a competing faction increases. If no opposition develops to the appointments of Thaksin supporters then the Thai military will become increasingly loyal to an individual and not the democratic institutions. The threat of subjective control of

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<sup>268</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), 2005, 208.

<sup>269</sup> Ministry of Defense--Compiled by: U.S. Commercial Service, U.S. Embassy, Bangkok, Thailand, [http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?\\_m=31303e5ef7b29faeabc5f9a263762c01&\\_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&\\_md5=9f355f9290495fbeb093845cc563d19a#refpt\\_Defense\\_Budget](http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?_m=31303e5ef7b29faeabc5f9a263762c01&_docnum=1&wchp=dGLbVtz-zSkVA&_md5=9f355f9290495fbeb093845cc563d19a#refpt_Defense_Budget), (Accessed May 25, 2005).

<sup>270</sup> Spacewar, "Thai PM Defends Cousin's Appointment as Army Chief." <http://www.spacewar.com/2003/030827104915.b7b5fnqf.html> (Accessed December 1, 2004).

<sup>271</sup> Thitinan Pongsudhirak, *Southeast Asian Affairs* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), 284.

the Thai military seriously threatens the democratic development of Thailand. The progress made in Thailand's civil-military relations regarding civilian control of the military will be lost if that control reverts from democratic control to subjective control.

The United States has taken on a business as usual attitude toward these alarming developments. This thesis proposed the most logical course of action to assist Thailand in achieving democratic civilian control of the military- tying together diverse programs into a coherent strategy. The interests of the United States are benefited by seeing further objective civilian control of the Thai Military. The policy proposed by this thesis of increasing funding of programs already in place and placing the responsibility to implement these programs under a coherent strategy offers the best option to the United States in assisting Thailand achieve democratic civilian control of its military. Increasing funding without an integrated strategy will not be successful. Both sides of the civil-military relationship equation must participate. Currently, the focus is primarily on the military side. The Thai military has increasingly shown its willingness to remain in the barracks and become professional soldiers. By increasing funding to established programs the U.S. can continue to offer training to military forces yet it can also provide opportunities to civilian leaders to gain technical and professional expertise in the security and military arenas. Civilian leaders educated in the complex issues regarding military and security affairs are necessary for continued progress in democratic control of the Thai military. Without more civilian expertise the repoliticization of the Thai military, either overtly or under subjective civilian control of PM Thaksin, becomes more likely

Prime Minister Thaksin recently won a second term in office with an overwhelming majority in the parliament. Civil-military relations in Thailand are in danger of taking a step "backwards." Despite the fact there has been a generally positive trend towards greater civilian control of the military since the Thanom's rule PM Thaksin's attempts to employ the Thai military as a tool of his personal power base threaten this trend. Because U.S.-Thai bilateral security cooperation has a long history, the United States has an opportunity to use this unique relationship to assist a friendly nation in achieving democratic control of its Armed Forces. At this critical juncture in

Thailand's political development it is critical to have a clearly defined policy to match our strategic interest in seeing Thailand continue its democratic progress.

As more data becomes available during Thaksin's second term as Prime Minister more information on the trends in civilian control of the military will become available. Further studies can also examine different areas within the political and institutional areas of autonomy to include: military education, military doctrine, arms production, arms procurement, intelligence gathering, internal security, and human rights. Moreover, additional research can be done considering the impact of subjective or objective civilian control on the Thai military. Thailand appears to be transitioning through a unique period in its political development. An elected Prime Minister not only made it through an entire term but was re-elected to another four years in office. The question of with so many supporters in powerful positions in the Armed forces will Thaksin be able to retain his hold on power for a third, fourth, or fifth term in office if he so chooses. Based on past events, at the end of PM Thaksin's second term the transfer of power or retention of power may lead to instability. It is therefore critical both to study trends and developments in Thaksin's second administration to be better prepared for possible confrontations.

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