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THAILAND SINCE THE COUP

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The most dramatic recent twist in Thailand's long and uncertain search for stable democracy came on 19 September 2006, when the Royal Thai Army overthrew the government of elected prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The bloodless takeover—which in a single day would drop Thailand's Freedom House rating from Free all the way to Not Free—was the country's first nonconstitutional change of government since the coup of February 1991 (although it was the successful eighteenth coup or coup attempt since the beginning of modern Thai political history in 1932, the year that a bloodless putsch sparked a switch from absolute to constitutional monarchy). After fifteen years during which the reins of government had changed hands only via elections, it seemed that Thailand had taken a giant step backward.

The events of September 2006 capped a political crisis that had been on the boil at least since early 2005, when Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai ("Thais Love Thais" or TRT) party and its populist, redistributionist platform won reelection resoundingly in balloting for parliament. Since the 2006 coup, a new constitution has been written (under military auspices), elections held, and civilian government restored under 73-year-old Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej and the People's Power Party (PPP), the now-banned TRT's de facto successor.¹ Yet the underlying tensions that led to the coup remain, as a traditional establishment resting on the nonelected "holy trinity" of monarchy, military, and bureaucracy confronts powerful populist currents that Thaksin and his associates more than once rode to elected office in a still-modernizing country deeply riven by an urban-versus-rural divide.

The story of Thailand in the early years of this century is not without precedent either in Thai political annals or those of other developing

democracies. The populist billionaire Thaksin, now living in exile in Britain while a host of legal charges awaits him back in Thailand, represented the most powerful single challenge to an entrenched political, social, and economic establishment. This establishment has evidently succeeded in putting down his challenge, but the popular grievances, demands, and expectations that were unleashed during the Thaksin years will continue to put the establishment to the test.

The political crisis of 2005 and 2006 has become the paramount puzzle of politics and political economy in this country of 65 million people. In order to grasp the nature of that puzzle more adequately, it is helpful to look back at the preceding coup, which occurred in February 1991, and trace the unfolding of events from there. The 1991 takeover inaugurated a period of military-authoritarian rule that boasted the usual features of a technocratic caretaker cabinet, a military-appointed legislative assembly, a new charter, and a scheduled return to elections. But the process dissolved into violence when troops killed civilian protestors near old Bangkok's Democracy Monument in May 1992. In response, a broad-based movement for political reform gathered pace over the next five years. Its aims were to end corrupt "money politics" and find a permanent way out of the vicious cycle of frequent coups, constitutions, elections, and self-dealing that had long dominated Thai public life. The much-touted outcome, which arrived just as Thailand became caught up in the East Asian financial crisis of 1997, was a new constitution.

The 1997 Constitution was designed to promote the transparency and accountability of the political system and the stability and effectiveness of government. It strengthened executive authority, provided for a fully elected bicameral legislature, consolidated the electoral system in ways that favored a few larger parties, installed a clutch of independent agencies to fight graft, guaranteed media freedom, required officials to disclose their assets, and empowered the electorate to impeach unscrupulous cabinet ministers. When it was promulgated, the 1997 Constitution was opposed mainly by the old-style politicians who had peddled patronage and votes in return for power and graft. The vast majority of the Thai people, particularly Bangkok's middle class, civil society groups, and business community hailed it as the promised land of a full-fledged and lasting democratic system, a long-awaited document meant to eliminate graft from politics by promoting ability and integrity. While the Thai economy headed south, Thai politics was looking up—or so it seemed.

In some ways, however, the 1997 charter worked so well that it became unworkable. It enabled the rise of the TRT and Thaksin, a telecommunications tycoon who had dabbled in politics in the 1990s. Thaksin led the TRT to its first electoral triumph in January 2001, to the landslide win of February 2005, and to another (but soon to be nullified) victory in April 2006, a few months before the coup. He achieved a number of firsts that

seemed to augur well for democratic stability and effective (or at least coherent) governance: He became the first prime minister of Thailand to complete a full four-year term in office, the first to be reelected, and the first to preside over a government composed entirely of ministers from one party. But his administration was fraught with controversies, contradictions, and corruption allegations. It derived democratically from ballots cast by voters, but operated in an authoritarian fashion reminiscent of the long-entrenched, one-party-dominant regimes in countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. Thaksin ultimately monopolized the electoral system, manipulated the constitution, and exploited its inner workings to the point of usurpation. And yet his overthrow closed the most promising and unprecedented chapter of constitutionalism in the history of Thailand.²

In one sense, the Thaksin phenomenon and the TRT juggernaut merely culminated the constitutional intentions of the post-1992 reform movement, resulting in a strong executive branch and a shift away from shaky coalitions toward stable single-party rule, policy activism, and legislative effectiveness. Yet the fulfillment of the 1997 Constitution's design produced a weak parliamentary opposition in the Democrat Party (DP), and gave rise to a vociferous anti-Thaksin opposition, spearheaded by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). Both the DP, led by the 44-year-old, Oxford-educated Abhisit Vejjajiva, and civil society elements within PAD had been in favor of the "people's charter" movement less than a decade earlier. When what has been justified as a "good coup"³ upended the 1997 Constitution, the move had the DP's tacit support and the PAD's overt backing. And the postcoup Constitution of 2007, drafted under military sponsorship, bears antidemocratic traits, including the return to a partially appointed upper legislative chamber, a fragmentation of the party system, and a marginalization of political parties and elected politicians. Yet both the DP and the PAD endorse this charter, while the PPP is vehemently opposed.

Contours of Crisis

The meteoric rise of Thaksin and his TRT was fueled by a populist agenda centered on income redistribution, government activism, and policy innovation. This agenda captured the hearts and minds of Thailand's rural majority, and built the TRT into an unstoppable political machine. In February 2005, when his incumbent government was returned to office with almost 61 percent of the vote and (in coalition with a smaller allied party) more than three-quarters of the seats in the lower house of the National Assembly, Thaksin had reached the pinnacle of his political career. He had put Thailand on the world's emerging-markets map with impressive rates of economic growth, bold leadership, clear policy directions, and apparent democratic consolidation that seemed to prom-

ise a future in which Thailand would be politically stable, effectively governed, and highly attractive to investors.

The dark side to all this was the lengthening trail of corruption accusations and alleged abuses of power that Thaksin's government was leaving behind. Critics charged the premier and his party with instituting authoritarian rule behind the cover provided by the democratic legitimacy that flows from winning elections.⁴ The Bangkok-based urban elites (comprising the car- and home-owning middle classes in and around that city of ten million), the intelligentsia and civil society groups, the old nobility, sections of the private sector, the bureaucracy, the military, and implicitly the monarchy under King Bhumibol Adulyadej, soon took Thaksin to task for what they saw as misrule for the purpose of graft and aggrandizement.

Street demonstrations against the Thaksin government began in Bangkok in September 2005, and markedly expanded in late January 2006 after the tax-exempt US\$1.9 billion sale of a Thaksin-owned telecommunications conglomerate (built up by lucrative state concessions) to the sovereign wealth fund of the government of Singapore. Months of turbulence followed, as Thaksin responded by dissolving parliament in February, holding snap elections (which the opposition boycotted) in April, and then at last being toppled by the Army, which waited until he was out of the country to strike. The September 2006 putsch hurled Thailand back into the familiar whirl of coups, elections, and constitutions. What had seemed like a firm march toward democratic consolidation from May 1992 onward had suddenly fizzled and relapsed into military-authoritarian rule. But the generals, who called their junta the Council for National Security (CNS), kept their pledge. They oversaw the formulation and promulgation of a new constitution followed by lower-house elections on 23 December 2007, on the presumption that Thaksin would call it quits.⁵ Instead, the PPP, which had stepped forward as a self-proclaimed proxy for the TRT after the latter had been dissolved during the coup period, won resoundingly in those polls and promptly began to reintroduce Thaksin's interrupted populist agenda.

Less than a year after the late-2007 parliamentary balloting, the structure of the political crisis that led to Thaksin's ouster remains fundamentally the same. This time, Thaksin's allies and the PPP under Prime Minister Samak are in charge. The Army has returned to the barracks, but coup rumors persist. The PAD has returned in full force, and has become broader-based, with considerable provincial networks added to its mix of civil society and labor activists plus urban intellectuals with roots in the 1992 antimilitary protests. The PAD had been instrumental in leading the street protests in 2005 and 2006 and laying the conditions for the coup.⁶ Partly in response to Thaksin's February 2008 return to Thailand and attempted political comeback, the PAD revived its street demonstrations in late May 2008, initially opposing the Samak government's efforts to

amend the coup-induced constitution and later morphing into a rabidly pro-establishment and pro-monarchy conservative movement that voiced nationalist tendencies on macroeconomic issues and an elitist appeal for a predominantly appointed rather than elected National Assembly.⁷

In late August 2008, the PAD intensified its protests by laying siege to several state agencies and occupying Government House, where the prime minister and cabinet have their offices. These unlawful actions prompted arrest warrants for the ringleaders. In cahoots with the DP and certain appointed senators, the PAD demanded Samak's resignation and the implementation of its "new politics" of mostly appointed rather than elected representatives. Were the PAD to succeed in this campaign, it would deal a blow to democracy's prospects and represent the crowning success of the conservative coalition that started out as an anti-Thaksin movement.

In what may represent another major turn of events, the legal dissolution of the PPP—in effect, it would be the second destruction of the TRT—appeared to be in the pipeline as of early July 2008. That was when the Supreme Court's Division of Crimes by Political Office Holders handed a PPP executive a "red card" for vote-buying. As the Supreme Court and two other high courts prepare to issue key verdicts that could reshape Thailand's political landscape, what appear to be in the offing are even more dramatic and drawn-out phases in an ongoing, titanic tussle for Thailand's soul. Thaksin's opponents have largely succeeded in extinguishing the Thaksin phenomenon with its oddly twinned yet contrasting traits: grassroots-friendly policies such as cheap health care and rural microcredit programs on the one hand, and efforts to make life easier for vested interests and their relentless rent-seeking on the other. Thaksin and his allies will continue to put up a stiff resistance in the belief that their rule is justified by a sustained and regularly demonstrated democratic mandate.

Thailand's prolonged political crisis emanates from a deep-seated and irreconcilable conflict between the older, more traditional Thailand and a new Thailand. It is a clash that pits establishment forces against Thaksin and his allies and loyalists. In the midst of Thailand's transformation and transition, Thaksin stood as an agent of change, an ironic force for globalization able to wed new business groups with old-style provincial patronage networks and elements of the leftist agenda from the 1970s, concertedly taking advantage of Thailand's urban-rural divide. He sought to usher Thailand into a new era, upending its anachronistic, neofeudal hierarchy even as his opponents tagged him for corrupt cronyism, graft, and abuses of power. Chief among these opponents were the bureaucrats, the military, and the monarchy—a troika that has called the shots in Thailand for decades. As neither a grand reconciliation between the two opposing sides nor a third way that transcends both pro- and anti-Thaksin forces appears to be in the offing, Thailand's democratization process is headed for growing turbulence. There will be

ebbs and flows, but most likely no denouement until after the aging and revered monarch passes from the scene.

An Uncertain Restoration

Although the establishment coalition and its Bangkok-based supporters succeeded in ousting Thaksin and keeping him outside Thailand's borders for fifteen months, they were unable at first to do much more than that. They tried to go back to the old days of weak, faction-ridden political parties and clumsy, short-lived coalition governments. Their means for effecting such a return was a new constitution that featured a half-appointed senate, multimember constituencies instead of the previous single-member-district arrangement, a gerrymandered party-list system to dilute the voting power of the populous northeast, and a shift of authority away from the executive and legislative branches and toward the judiciary.⁸ Yet even as mid-2008 brought the lodging of legal complaints against Thaksin (who had returned from exile in February 2008), Samak, and their allies as well as a greater prospect that the PPP would be dissolved, the establishment has been hard pressed to maintain its grip on a changing Thailand. As Thai society evolves, the establishment's attempts to restore a past in which it was comfortable and privileged may not be readily compatible with the growing demands and expectations of two important groups. The first comprises those previously neglected segments of Thai society that formed the TRT's support base and now back the PPP. The second comprises stakeholders in the Thai economy who liked the policy innovations and government activism on behalf of greater economic competitiveness that marked Thaksin's tenure in power.

The establishment found its efforts undermined by the ineffective coup-appointed interim administration that ran the country from October 2006 to January 2008. General Surayud Chulanont, a former army chief and member of the King's Privy Council, served as the junta's handpicked premier.⁹ His government's two-pronged platform of developing a "sufficiency economy" and advancing the cause of national reconciliation made little headway. The former was inspired by the Buddhism-based approach to development that King Bhumibol favors as a response to the challenges of the world economy and globalization.¹⁰ The latter was necessitated by the social polarization surrounding the putsch. But this two-pronged platform was marked by murky policy directions and controversial results. The junta government even failed to convict Thaksin on the charges of corruption, constitutional usurpation, and disrespect toward royalty that engendered the coup. Moreover, the Malay-Muslim insurgent violence in Thailand's three southernmost provinces raged unabated during Surayud's time in power.

The coup-making generals and their allies found themselves squeezed

by international and domestic opinion, which alike expected democratic governance rather than naked military rule. The brass can seize power by force, but soon finds that it must yield to pressures for a constitution and elections—elections that Thaksin's brand of populism has time and again shown itself to be capable of winning. Little in the generals' training, outlook, or experience equipped them to manage Thailand in the era of globalization with rising expectations at home and growing pressures of various kinds from abroad. Over the last generation, Thailand has changed dramatically while the Thai military has not kept pace. But before it left after the December 2007 election, the junta shrewdly institutionalized its role in politics and entrenched its ruling apparatus. The Internal Security Operations Command, a Cold War relic, received more money and staff. The defense budget, weapons-procurement programs, and military salaries all increased. Above all, just prior to the election, the military was able to push through a new Internal Security Act, which provides the generals with wide-ranging powers at the expense of basic civil liberties.

In the longer term, the Army-dominated military is unlikely to remain in the barracks. It will be looked upon to maintain order if political volatility spirals out of control and leads to strife, especially as the daunting question of royal succession looms. The Thai military sees itself as the self-entitled defender and guardian of Thailand's political future. Yet it will find its freedom to intervene in politics constricted by Thais who demand representation and responsive policies, by portions of civil society opposed to coups on principle, and by the international community and its strengthening standards of democratic rule.

The military's sidelining (for the time being at least) is thus attributable not only to its ineptitude during the coup period but also to the democracy imperative. Aware of the pressures for democratic rule, the top brass packed a constitution-drafting assembly with allies and supporters. The result is the 2007 charter. The antithesis of its bottom-up, reform-oriented 1997 predecessor, the new constitution features a Senate in which 74 appointed senators sit alongside 76 elected senators (one from each of Thailand's 76 provinces). Under the 1997 Constitution, the 200-member upper house was fully elected. The new charter gives power to judges, bureaucrats, and independent bodies (such as the anticorruption commission) at the expense of elected politicians and political parties. At the same time, the new rules of the game promote a weakened party system, an executive branch with much-reduced authority, and rickety coalition rule that is unlikely to last a full four-year term.

The new 150-member Senate reveals the old elites' influence. While the Senate will not have lawmaking authority, it will still act as a crucial mechanism for scrutinizing bills that come out of the PPP-dominated lower house. For the lower-house elections on December 23, the PPP scored a thumping victory by capturing 233 of 480 lower-house seats, leaving its rival DP in the dust with 165 seats. The PPP's comfortable

win vindicated Thaksin and TRT's resilient populist platform. It was also a victory of performance over integrity. While Thaksin has been hounded by corruption allegations, his ousted administration was widely seen as strong and effective, a perception magnified by the relative incompetence of the military-appointed Surayud government. Despite its near-majority, the PPP's triumph was not comprehensive. It garnered the largest number of the 400-strong constituency seats thanks to its strongholds in the populous Northeast and North, but lost both Bangkok and the South to the DP by 27 seats to 9 and 52 seats to 2, respectively. Of the 80 seats filled according to the party-list system, the PPP won 34 to the DP's 33.

These results suggest regionalized and polarized electoral patterns that mirror the political crisis. Bangkok and the South were overwhelmingly pro-DP while the Northeast and North were largely pro-PPP. The telling Bangkok verdict explains how Thaksin was given the boot and also sowed the seeds for future anti-Thaksin and anti-PPP protests in the capital. Yet the DP's inability to broaden its base to northeastern and northern Thailand has contributed to the polarization by not giving voters a clear alternative. In the event, the PPP was compelled to enter a coalition government with five smaller parties, with the DP as the sole opposition.

In line with its campaign promises, Samak's PPP-led government announced a raft of growth-friendly policies aimed at shoring up investor confidence and pandering to key voter blocs. What was missing, compared to the Thaksin period, was a comprehensive logic of development and the resources to back it up. The Samak government appears to be intent on pump-priming, but without offering much clear direction or economic-policy leadership beyond that. It is relying, as had Thaksin, on incoherent leaps from politically expedient populist policies to the embrace of gung-ho globalization, but it cannot deploy the TRT's veteran policy makers and managers, many of whom remain legally banned from holding office, and its efficacy has suffered as a result.

The Return of Street Politics

By reverting to populism and globalization, the Samak government has come up against the same extraparlimentary opposition coalition that derailed Thaksinomics and ousted Thaksin. The various constitutional bodies whose mission is to stop graft and abuses of power—these institutions include the National Counter Corruption Commission, the Election Commission, and the Constitutional Court—are being steered mostly by figures who supported or were associated with the 2006 coup. They represent the coupmakers' latent power. The public face and linchpin of this coalition, however, is the PAD, which led the campaign of Bangkok street protests that preceded the coup. Since May

2008, it has stepped up its activity, opposing amendments to the military's 2007 Constitution, criticizing Prime Minister Samak for rising consumer prices, and demanding that his government resign. Clad in shirts and headbands of yellow and blue—the colors associated with the monarchy—the PAD finally revealed its pro-establishment hand several weeks into its 2008 street demonstrations by calling for a national assembly that is mostly appointed rather than elected. At every step of the way since it once again took to the streets earlier this year, the PAD has tried to provoke heavy-handed government responses in order to create a pretext for an extraconstitutional, extraparliamentary intervention. The PAD has grossly distorted and manipulated news and events for its own ends, launching attempted character assassinations against anyone who offers an opposing view, all in the name of “rescuing the nation.”

Prior to Thaksin's overthrow, some of his critics say, he had succeeded in manipulating and monopolizing Thai politics so thoroughly that opposition to him had no choice but to take on an extraparliamentary character and go into the streets. Yet the mainstay of that opposition, the PAD, has now ironically come to resemble the very thing that it condemned. It works to hijack Thai democracy for its own purposes, and its more extreme right-wing elements brook no dissent. But what are the PAD's prospects for ousting Samak's government? The Army, in view of its lackluster showing the last time, is unlikely to come out again unless there is violence that the civil authorities cannot handle. In that case, the generals could impose limited martial law after Samak's cabinet issued an emergency decree covering the affected areas. The more extreme option, of course, would be to seize power again. This is what the PAD has been urging the Army to do, but even if strife becomes severe it is unlikely to go beyond a few parts of Bangkok. A coup would be unnecessary.

Samak had only himself and his cabinet to blame for their policy incompetence, and for exacerbating the tit-for-tat battle that his government has been waging against the PAD and the media. The PAD can be expected to keep gnawing away at the prime minister's credibility and his administration's legitimacy. If his term is shortened, it will be a bad precedent and a blow to Thailand's struggling democracy. Samak's government certainly deserves scrutiny in parliament and through other constitutional channels, but the PAD's reckless movement—based on a rights-without-responsibilities street campaign—is likely to do more harm than good to Thailand's fragile process of democratization. In late August 2008, the PAD seemed to be raising the stakes further by sending a crowd to seize and occupy the Government House compound. This may prove to be a piece of political overreaching that alienates many of the movement's core middle-class supporters in Bangkok as well as a legal setback, thanks to the flagrant law-breaking involved.

A major factor in the deep background of Thai politics has been the twilight that is overtaking the 62-year reign of widely revered King

Bhumibol. Now 81 and in frail health, the world's longest-reigning living monarch held an audience with the junta leaders on the night of the putsch. Before that, he had made an unusual appeal to the judges of the Administrative Court to do something about the dubious April 2006 election—in which the incumbent TRT had been the only party running amid an opposition boycott—and to find a way out of the political stalemate. This set in train a series of profound and unprecedented episodes of judicial activism, ranging from the invalidation of the 2 April 2006 election and the TRT's

dissolution just over a year later to the current legal and constitutional imbroglio and the specter that it raises of yet another ruling party (this time the PPP) being disbanded.

The setting sun of the King's long reign is the background against which the battle of attrition for Thailand's soul is taking place. In this twilight struggle are locked opposing webs of partisans and vested interests both for and against what Thaksin has done to Thailand. The old establishment confronts the popular demands and expectations that the age of globalization has wrought, and strains to find ways to render the new voices irrelevant. The situation has been made more ominous by the death in early January 2008 of Princess Galyani Vadhana, one of the last surviving family members of the monarch's generation.

Both sides are well aware, as all Thais fear but dare not say in public, that Thailand's future is up for grabs. What happens after the current king leaves the scene could be the most wrenching crisis yet. So successful has been his kingship that most Thais have come to take too much for granted what he has meant to the fabric of national life. His reign has seen Thailand go from a rustic backwater filled with thatch-roofed villages to a modern nation with gleaming skyscrapers. His has been a remarkable life, controversially chronicled in Paul M. Handley's officially banned but widely discussed unauthorized biography, *The King Never Smiles*.¹¹ As it stands, the monarchy as embodied by King Bhumibol is at the apex of Thailand's sociopolitical order.

The King's popularity and legitimacy have emanated from his devotion to his people and to leadership by example. Despite his enormous wealth, he has lived a relatively modest life free of the opulence often associated with monarchs. He has worked in far-flung corners of the country in public-works projects, capturing hearts and minds in the pro-TRT and pro-PPP rural heartland. Above all, he has played the crucial role of final arbiter in a country whose politics are chronically fractious and volatile. King Bhumibol's unsurpassed moral authority has

A major factor in the deep background of Thai politics has been the twilight that is overtaking the 62-year reign of widely revered King Bhumibol.

long been Thailand's sheet anchor, the mainstay of national stability and continuity. Once he is gone, the country will be in uncharted waters.

It is common knowledge that none of King Bhumibol's eligible heirs can be reasonably expected to command as much popularity, reverence, and moral authority as he does. Not only will the King leave behind a large gap by virtue of his remarkable personal achievements, but it may also be argued that institutionally the monarchy occupies an asymmetrically important position in a now-modern country where public expectations for representation and demands for a greater share of the pie are rife. Matching up to such a predecessor and crafting a new role for the modern monarchy will be daunting challenges indeed.

In accord with palace law, 56-year-old Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn is first in line for the throne, and has several sons and daughters who may also be deemed eligible. Any succession outcome that bypasses the heir-apparent appears problematic, as its rationale must be justified and his willingness to accede must be assumed. The role of Queen Sirikit, who is closest to the Crown Prince among her four children, is expected to be crucial. Strictly enforced laws against *lèse majesté* deter open discussions of acceptable and workable modalities for royal succession. Unlike their equivalents in most other countries with monarchies, Thailand's *lèse majesté* lawsuits can be filed against anyone by anyone, and not merely by the Royal Household. As long as King Bhumibol is around, the Thai people's conspicuous and paramount regard for the monarch seems likely to discourage forward-looking discussions of the pros and cons of what might happen after the end of the current reign.

A Daunting Question Mark

The constitution prescribes that, when the time comes, the 19-member Privy Council, currently chaired by General Prem Tinsulanond, a retired army chief and former prime minister, will decide upon the succession and notify parliament. The Privy Council has been politicized over the past three years of crisis amid perceptions of General Prem's personal conflicts with Thaksin before the coup. Thailand has never been here before, and the Privy Council has not expressed any preference regarding the succession. Nor has King Bhumibol indicated his own preference thus far, aside from a 1974 legal revision that enabled a female heir to ascend to the throne. Without clearer indications from the King, the palace, or the Privy Council, the royal succession will remain Thailand's biggest and most daunting question mark, with far-reaching implications for political stability. It is clear now that Thailand's democratic institutions are too weak, divided, and politicized to manage the succession effectively. Unless clearer signs appear of what will happen after King Bhumibol, all bets are off as to where Thailand will be headed when the current royal twilight finally fades to full darkness.

The structure of the political polarization and social conflict that beset Thailand has not changed since the weeks and months preceding Thaksin's downfall. It has, rather, simply become more convoluted and protracted—something like trench warfare being fought out in the streets, military barracks, newspaper headlines, courtrooms, and halls of parliament. Thailand now confronts three avenues toward a democratic future. The one currently being traveled is based on the 2007 Constitution, which puts first the interests of the monarchy, the military, and the bureaucracy (the last currently being spearheaded by the judicial branch). This path points toward a bureaucracy-driven body politic adapted to the demands of economic globalization. Elections are held, and the prime minister must be an elected MP, but the appointed half of the Senate is filled with bureaucrats and military surrogates. This is a watered-down version of democracy, less democratic and more elitist than the model laid out in the 1997 Constitution. Its aims and intentions were contained in most of the charters prior to 1997 and before Thaksin's rise and rule. Some have labeled this a "royalist democracy."

A second avenue leads toward a version of Thai democracy essentially similar to the one that prevailed under Thaksin and the 1997 Constitution. This version privileges new business groups that take control and monopolize power through elections (a process, one should recall, that allowed Thaksin and his associates to line their own pockets, abuse power, and violate rights). The policy agenda leans in a populist direction, committed to helping the poor and exposing the underbelly of an era of development during which rural, grassroots voters did not receive a fair share. Unsurprisingly, Thaksin's supporters and what remains of his regime want to amend the 2007 Constitution to save themselves from legal prosecution and party dissolution.

Thailand's third potential route to the future is a more people-oriented, bottom-up, political, social, and economic order based on the spirit of the 1997 charter but without Thaksin and his corruption and abuses of power. This third avenue is inchoate, indirectly promoted by those who oppose *both* Thaksin *and* the coup, who dislike Samak and the PPP as proxies of Thaksin, yet disagree with the PAD's favored methods for toppling them. If it can build and solidify around a new consensus and fresh leadership—which the Democrat Party has, sadly, so far not been able to provide—this third way would be the most promising path out of the crisis.

Now that Thaksin is off the scene, the way forward appears clear. His economic and bureaucratic reforms, income-redistribution programs, and policy innovations to boost Thailand's competitiveness in global markets merit being retained just as much as the corruption, cronyism, and abuses of power that flourished under his government merit being rejected.

The establishment coalition that engineered Thaksin's political decapitation needs to accept that not all of what he stood for was wrong.

Until his opponents can come to terms with what is positive about his legacy, Thailand's crisis will remain intractable. Without accommodation from the establishment, there will be no reconciliation and no clear path forward. Thailand's optimal destination after its most remarkable royal reign would wed the far and the recent past. It would carve out a new consensus and an acceptable middle ground between the forces of globalization and the proponents of a sufficiency economy. It would combine the greater enfranchisement and egalitarianism that the Thaksin regime leaves behind with the fading establishment's sense of duty, integrity, and traditional ties to values that have long anchored the Thai people's collective identity and interest.

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NOTES

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1. In one of the many ironies of contemporary Thai politics, Samak is a veteran right-wing politician who played a significant role in inciting mob violence against student and other left-leaning activists in the mid-1970s. On 9 September 2008, the Constitutional Court of Thailand disqualified Samak from the premiership on the basis of a minor conflict-of-interest charge stemming from payments that he had collected as the host of two televised cooking shows. At the time of this writing, shortly after the disqualification ruling came down, it is possible that the PPP's near-majority in parliament may vote to return Samak to the premiership; may hand the office over to another candidate (probably, but not necessarily, from PPP ranks); may dissolve the current parliament in order to make way for new elections; or may accommodate a government of national unity led by a current MP or a respected outsider (in which case the suspension or revision of certain clauses of the 2007 Constitution would become necessary). Whatever happens, it seems unlikely that the PAD will abandon its campaign based on street demonstrations and the recent illegal takeover of the Government House complex. In short, the fundamental showdown that now grips Thai politics will continue, even if its shape shifts somewhat or the precise cast of characters changes.

2. See Allen Hicken, "Party Fabrication: Constitutional Reform and the Rise of Thai Rak Thai," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 6 (September 2006): 381–408; Erik Martinez Kuhonta, "The Paradox of Thailand's 1997 'People's Constitution': Be Careful What You Wish For," *Asian Survey* 48 (May–June 2008): 373–92; Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "The Tragedy of the 1997 Constitution," in John Funston, ed., *Thailand's Continuing Crises: The Coup and Violence in the South* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008); Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Thailand: Democratic Authoritarianism," in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2003* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003).

3. For a critique of the "good coup" argument, see Michael K. Connors and Kevin Hewison, "Introduction: Thailand and the 'Good Coup,'" *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38 (February 2008): 1–10.

4. For an elaboration, see Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Thaksin: Competitive Authoritarian and Flawed Dissident," in John Kane, Haig Patapan, and Benjamin Wong, eds., *Dissident Democrats: The Challenge of Democratic Leadership in Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Thaksin's Political Zenith and Nadir," in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2006* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006). For a book-length exposition on Thaksin, see Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm, 2004).

5. In the event, the CNS leadership wanted to delay the elections until 2008 but was constrained by Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont's insistence on sticking to the original timetable. Author's interviews with two CNS members, 6 June and 5 August 2008.

6. For more details on the PAD, see Oliver Pye and Wolfram Schaffar, "The 2006 Anti-Thaksin Movement in Thailand: An Analysis," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38 (February 2008): 38–61.

7. The PAD called for a lower-house ratio of 70 percent appointees and 30 percent elected members of parliament. It also openly invited the military to intervene and put an end to the Samak government. See *Matichon Sutsapda* (Bangkok), 27 June–3 July 2008, 9.

8. Under the 1997 Constitution, one MP represented each of the 400 constituencies, whereas the 100 places on the party-lists were based on proportional representation nationwide. The 2007 charter reverted to the older practice of apportioning two or three seats to each constituency, and the party-list MPs were reduced to 80 and divided into 8 voting zones of 10 seats each, allowing some of the northeast provinces to be grouped with those of the central region to lessen the impact of northeastern voters' heavy support for the PPP.

9. General Surayud stepped down from the 19-member Privy Council, which advises the King on state affairs, to assume the premiership, and was reinstated to the Council in a matter of days after the Samak cabinet was sworn in.

10. See UN Development Programme, *Sufficiency Economy and Human Development* (Bangkok: UNDP, 2007).

11. Paul M. Handley, *The King Never Smiles*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). For an assessment of this book's political implications, see Kevin Hewison, "A Book, the King and the 2006 Coup," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38 (February 2008): 190–11.