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Thailand

CHAI-ANAN SAMUDAVANIJA
SUCHIT BUNBONGKARN

THE *coup d'état* of June 1932 replaced rule by princes with rule by generals. Ever since, Thai politics has been characterized by the dynamics of military dominance, punctuated by the occasional short-lived elected legislature in the military-bureaucratic polity.

During the half a century since 1932, Thailand has had thirteen constitutions, fourteen elections, fourteen coups, and forty-two cabinets. There have been fifteen prime ministers, of whom six were military officers and nine civilians. During this fifty-year period Army prime ministers were in power for thirty-nine years altogether while their civilian counterparts were in office for a total of only eleven years.

Thailand ranks very high on military coup frequency compared with other states in the world. Data on military coup frequency, 1946-70 supplied by William R. Thompson show that out of fifty-nine states which experienced military interventions in the twenty-four-year period after the Second World War, twelve states had undergone between eight and eighteen coups and Thailand is included in this list.¹

Successful military interventions usually resulted in the abrogation of constitutions, abolition of parliaments, and suspension of participant political activity. Each time, however, the military re-established parliamentary institutions of some kind. While the military often claimed that they had taken power from the elected representatives 'in order to save democracy', paradoxically in their view parliament had to be abolished because the people were not yet ready for democracy. From time to time they established what they called 'Thai-style democracy' with an appointed legislature designed to legitimize their own power. Soon, however, crisis would set in, leading once again to a coup situation.

Out of all the successful coups, the one in 1932 was aimed at overthrowing the absolute monarchy; another four coups which occurred in 1947, 1957, 1971 and 1976 were intended to overthrow civilian governments and elected National Assemblies; another four intended to consolidate the power of the coup groups themselves. This high frequency of coups reflects the weakness and low level of legitimacy of participatory political institutions. Without an institutionalized elected National Assembly and political party system, civilian political groups have been unable to subdue the politicized military. Changes of the government and political leadership are more often done through coups than elections. Therefore, the Thai political process, which is characterized by conflicts among military leaders, on the one hand, and between the military and civilian political groups, on the other, cannot be thoroughly explained in terms of struggles for power among political parties and interest groups through the electoral process. It is more appropriate to analyse them in the context of military-civilian relations and intra-military conflicts.

PATTERNS OF MILITARY RULE

The patterns of military rule in the Thai political system can be divided into five periods: the first one is from the 1932 coup to the end of the Second World War; the second, from 1947 to Sarit's coup in 1957; the third from 1957 to 1968; the fourth, from 1968 to the fall of the Thanom-Praphat clique in October 1973, and the last period from October 1973 to the present.

Constitutionalism and the Emergence of Military Rule, 1932-1944

In 1932, middle-level officers and officials in the Army, the Navy and the Civil Service, who had formed the People's Party under the leadership of Colonel Phya Phahon, Major Luang Pibunsongkram and Pridi Panomyong, launched a bloodless coup which ended several centuries of absolute monarchy.² While a promise was made to modernize the Thai political system on the basis of constitutionalism, equality and representative government, this was only partially met. A permanent written constitution was promulgated on 10 December 1932 to become the supreme law of the land. However, it was by no means democratic in character since it allowed the People's Party to appoint half of the members of parliament to ensure its control over the elected members.

Despite the Party's domination in the National Assembly, its stability was not entirely ensured. The government was faced with challenges from the conservative and royalist opposition on the one hand and the split within the People's Party between Phya Songsuradej and Pibun on the other. The first encounter between the conservatives and the coup group occurred when Phya Mano, a conservative but highly respected judge who was invited by the People's Party to become Prime Minister, decided to dissolve the National Assembly after the Assembly was split over the issue of Pridi's economic plan to nationalize industries and agriculture.³ The young officer group, led by Pibun, interpreted Phya Mano's move as an attempt to destroy the Party's political domination. To counter the conservative group, Phya Phahon, with the support of the young officers, launched a coup to put an end to Phya Mano's government and revived the National Assembly. A new cabinet was set up under the premiership of Phya Phahon and this time no conservative element was included.

The second challenge to the monopoly of power by the People's Party was the 'Bowaradej Rebellion'. Prince Bowaradej, who was a former Defence Minister during the absolute monarchy period, with the support of the royalist and the dissident group in the armed forces, led a provincial army to seize the capital in an effort to overthrow the People's Party rule. His army, however, was crushed by the Bangkok garrison led by Pibun in April 1933. Although the rebellion proclaimed that its armed struggle against the government was intended to establish real democracy in the country, the People's Party was convinced that it was only aimed at restoring royalist power.⁴ The defeat of Bowaradej was a heavy blow to the conservatives and the royalists, who thenceforth were not able to pose any serious threat to the political dominance of the Party.

After the victory over the 'Bowaradej Rebellion', Pibun became a national figure and moved up rapidly in the military hierarchy and politics. His rise to power, however, was met with opposition both within and without the People's Party. Through several shrewd moves, his enemies were gradually weakened and eventually put out of his way. His arch rival in the Party, Phya Songsuradej, was first transferred to a less powerful position in the Army and then was forced to live in exile abroad. Several others were accused of being involved in a plot to overthrow the government and some of them were sentenced to death.⁵

To consolidate his political position, Pibun not only intimidated his rivals and would-be enemies, but also made an attempt to build

his political constituency in the armed forces. During his tenure as Minister of Defence, the Army and Navy launched vigorous programmes of modernization and development. He also organized public campaigns to support his accelerated military programmes. A military youth corps was established to instill nationalism and militarism in the young. With all these efforts, he was able to establish himself as an unchallenged national leader and in 1938 when Phya Phahon voluntarily resigned, no one was able to contest against him for premiership.

Military glory reached its zenith during the Pibun administration. With emphasis on nationalism, militarism and territorial expansionism, the armed forces were given top priority in development. The 'victory' over the French in the Indo-China incident in 1939 increased military prestige and the popularity of Pibun, who became a national hero.⁶ The international tension caused by the German and Japanese aggrandisement also helped justify Pibun's military rule and the expansion of the armed forces.

The serious threat, however, to Pibun's regime was the Japanese imperial ambition in South-East Asia. Despite cordial relationship with Japan, Thailand was not willing to join the Axis countries. The strategic location of Thailand, however, gave Pibun's government not much of a choice. As Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Japanese troops landed on Thailand's coastal provinces and forced the Thai government to allow passage of the Japanese Army through the country to fight in Burma and Malaya. In view of the fact that his armed forces could not resist the Japanese, Pibun decided to yield to the demand.⁷ His government later declared war against the Allied Powers, presumably under pressure from Japan.

His decision to collaborate with the Japanese caused a split within his government. Pridi and his followers strongly opposed Pibun's decision and as a result, he and Direk Jayanama, his close associate and the Foreign Minister, were ousted from the cabinet. Pridi was appointed regent, a prestigious but politically inactive post. As disaffection with the Japanese occupation and Pibun's dictatorial rule became more widespread, an underground 'Free Thai Movement', which was organized under the leadership of Pridi, became more effective in undermining the Pibun regime and was later to give Pridi a political base after the war.

As the war turned in the favour of the Allied Powers and subsequently ended with the Japanese defeat, the political fortune of Pibun began to decline. He resigned from the premiership in August 1944 when his bills to move the capital to Petchabun and to

establish a 'Buddhist District' in Saraburi province were defeated in the National Assembly. The fact that the Assembly did not reinstate Pibun is an indication of Pridi's strong influence in the Parliament.⁸ Khuang Aphaiwong, with the support of Pridi, succeeded Pibun and held the office of Prime Minister until the Japanese surrender.

Return of Military Oligarchy, 1947-1957

The defeat of Pibun in the National Assembly and the Japanese surrender forced the Army to withdraw from politics, at least temporarily. From August 1945 to November 1947, Thai politics was characterized by conflicts among three political groups. The first group was composed of liberal and socialist politicians led by Pridi; the second consisted of more conservative and royalist members of parliament led by Khuang; and the third was the military, forced to stay out of politics, but still retaining strong political potency.

Although the struggle for political dominance was in the favour of Pridi at the beginning, he faced strong opposition from Khuang's conservative faction in Parliament and within the military. His government had also to tackle difficult economic and social problems, which were exploited by the opposition. In April 1946 Khuang, who was appointed Prime Minister after the January 1946 general election, resigned to form his own political group; Pridi decided to give up the regency to assume the premiership. In an effort to consolidate his power in Parliament, a new constitution was drafted under his guidance and was promulgated in May 1946, changing Parliament from a single-house system to a bicameral one. The new Parliament comprised the House of Representatives, which was elected by the people, and the Senate, elected by the Lower House. Although Pridi won a majority in both Houses, the stability of his government was not assured. Economic difficulties, such as inflation which had risen to more than a hundred per cent during 1944-6, and corruption among government officials and pro-government politicians, aggravated the people's disaffection.

On 9 June King Ananda was found shot in bed and Pridi was accused of being involved in the regicide. As a result, the government's legitimacy was further weakened. He voluntarily resigned to ease the tension and picked Admiral Luang Thamrong, his close follower, as his successor.⁹

Thamrong's government continued to face unresolved economic problems and the political crisis stemming from the death of King

Ananda. In addition, the Army, whose corporate interests and prestige were severely affected by several government policies, became disgruntled with Pridi and his group. Large numbers of troops were demobilized within a short period and were badly treated. Military officers were also prohibited from holding political posts. These were government attempts to prevent the Army from regaining political dominance. As a result, the rift between the government and the Army widened and a military coup was becoming imminent. As the economic and political situation further deteriorated in 1947, army units in Bangkok, led by Phin Choonhavan, a retired general, seized power on 9 November 1947 and abolished the 1946 constitution, terminating Pridi's four-year political domination and ushering in another era of military rule.¹⁰

The coup in November 1947 marked the emergence of a younger group of army officers who were much more traditionalist than the 1932 coup promoters. They had not had the same degree of exposure to Western education and culture, and thus were less interested in the parliamentary process. Although the leader of the coup was a retired general, the coup was successfully executed because of the support of troops controlled by the young military commander of the First Regiment of the Army's powerful First Division—Colonel Sarit Thanarat. Together with Sarit a group of young army officers, who were commanders of battalions in the capital city, participated in the coup. They included Lt.-Col. Praphat Charusathien, commander of the first battalion of the First Regiment, Lt.-Col. Thanom Kittikachorn of the Royal Military Academy, Lt.-Col. Prasert Ruchirawongs, commander of the second anti-aircraft artillery battalion, Major Pramarn Adireksan of the Army Transportation Department, Captain Prachuab Suntharangkura of the armoured cavalry battalion, and Captain Chatchai Choonhavan, troop commander of the first cavalry battalion. Subsequent to this event the young army officers who formed the nucleus of the coup conspiracy rose to prominent positions both in the military and political spheres.

Military government was not set up immediately after the coup. Khuang Aphaiwong, the leader of the Democrat Party, was invited to head the new government until the general election scheduled for January 1948. Although his party won a majority in the new Parliament, his government lasted only three months. He was forced to resign in April 1948 to pave the way for Marshal Pibun, who became Prime Minister until 1957.

The post-war regime of Pibun was not as stable as the pre-war

one. From 1948 to 1951, his regime, considered illegitimate by major political groups, was challenged by three attempted coups: the first was the general staff coup on 1 October 1948; the second was Pridi's abortive coup in February 1949 and the third, which was the bloodiest, was the Navy-attempted coup on 29 June 1951.

The military ruling group was divided into three principal factions. The first was composed of the remnants of the People's Party with Pibun as their leader; the second consisted of military and police officers under Marshal Phin and his son-in-law, Police General Phao Sriyanond. These two groups later merged into one under the collective leadership of Pibun, Phin and Phao. The third was a group of young military officers led by General Sarit, who rose rapidly in military and political circles after the 1947 coup. The Navy had been able to maintain its political neutrality until the 1951 abortive coup, in which its political importance was largely destroyed. After the coup, the Navy's strength was drastically reduced, its aviation and marine units dissolved, and several leading naval officers including Admiral Sindhu, the Commander-in-Chief and close friend of Pibun, dismissed and prosecuted.

An important political opposition to the military ruling group was the Democrat Party of Khuang, which consistently advocated an anti-military rule policy and always gave Pibun trouble in the National Assembly. The conflict between the opposition and the government intensified when the Democrats strongly attacked the government on its excessive suppression of the Navy in 1951. Consequently in November 1951 Pibun, with the cooperation of the 1947 Coup Group, staged another coup to consolidate his power through the suspension of the 1949 constitution. It was replaced by the revived 1932 constitution which enabled the government to appoint half of the seats in the National Assembly. Ninety-one, or 74 per cent, of the total of 123 men appointed in that Assembly were military members, of whom 62 were army officers. It is also noteworthy that 34 of these were middle-ranking officers (Major to Colonel).

Following this event the leading members of the 1947 Coup Group were rapidly promoted to the ranks of lieutenant-general and major-general.¹¹ They were given cabinet posts commensurate with their strategically important military positions. Sarit, for example, rose from colonel in 1947 to lieutenant-general in 1950 and was given the command of the powerful First Army Region. He was also appointed Deputy Minister of Defence in 1951.

Following their consolidation of power in the 1951 coup, the

1947 Coup Group became deeply involved in politics and commercial activities. They built up their economic base by setting up their own business firms, secured control over state enterprises and semi-government companies, and acquired free shares from private firms mainly owned by Chinese merchants. This active involvement in business ventures also resulted in the division of the 1947 Coup Group into two competing cliques, popularly known as the Rajakru and the Sisao Deves cliques.¹² The former clique was led by General Phao, the Police Chief, while the latter centred around Sarit.

The Rajakru clique controlled, between 1948 and 1957, 10 companies in the banking and financial sector, 15 in the industrial sector, and 7 in the commercial sector. The Sisao Deves clique had 12 companies in the banking and financial sector, 15 in the industrial sector, and 10 in the commercial sector.¹³

Thai politics from 1951 to 1957 was characterized by conflicts between General Phao, the Police Chief, and Marshal Sarit, the Army chief, with Pibun acting as a balancer, who played one against the other in order to retain his leadership. The Navy and civilian politicians ceased to be a real threat to Army rule. However, when Pibun decided to form a political party and to run in an election which would take place in 1957, he moved closer to General Phao who was appointed the secretary-general of the party and was responsible for the election campaign. The government's Seri-manangasila Party was composed of civilian politicians, civil servants, and military officers but the military faction under Marshal Sarit seemed less committed to the party. It is apparent that Pibun's motivation behind the establishment of the party was to build a new power base since his influence in the Army had declined rapidly. Democratization of his regime was the only way for him to stay on top.

The February 1957 election was Pibun's first attempt to acquire power through democratic means. His party won a majority in the National Assembly, but discontent with frauds in the Bangkok election led to mass demonstrations. Sarit, who was appointed 'City Peace Keeper', emerged as a popular leader when he did not resort to force in coping with the demonstrations. Thus Sarit seemed to reap most of the benefits out of these demonstrations, since the targets of attack were Pibun and Sarit's archrival, Phao. The protests widened the rift between Sarit and Phao and on 26 September 1957 Sarit led the Army to topple Pibun's regime. The main motivation behind the coup was to crush General Phao and his

clique, though the coup group announced that corruption among government officials and politicians, and a communist threat to national security were the main reasons.¹⁴

Military Absolute Rule, 1957-1968

Sarit's 1957 coup opened a new chapter in the history of military rule in Thailand. His rule from 1958 to 1963 and the subsequent period under the leadership of Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn from 1963 to 1968, differed from the previous military regimes in many respects.¹⁵ First, Sarit introduced absolute rule which Thailand had hitherto never experienced in its modern history. As the revolutionary leader, he ruled the country with absolute power during 1958-9. Despite the fact that from 1959 he ruled under an interim constitution, he was granted vast discretionary powers to solve social, economic and national security problems. Secondly, the parliamentary form of government, which had been adopted since 1932, was scrapped and replaced by a semi-parliamentary system in which the executive was independent of the legislature. Thirdly, popular participation, which was allowed to some extent during 1945-57, was totally prohibited.

In fact, Sarit did not establish absolute rule immediately after the 1957 coup. A caretaker government with a civilian leader was set up and a general election was held in December 1957.¹⁶ Since no party won a majority in Parliament, General Thanom was appointed Prime Minister, while Sarit was having medical treatment in the United States. On 21 October 1958, shortly after he returned to Thailand, Sarit led another coup and this time the constitution was abrogated and the country—for the first time—began to experience absolutism.

Sarit's government contributed considerably to Thailand's development in several fields. He reorganized the government administrative structure, pushed forward economic and industrial development, and cracked down on opium dens, drug trafficking, hooliganism and prostitution. Despite this trend toward modernization, democratic development was very slow, popular participation in politics prohibited and participatory political institutions undeveloped.

Sarit's death in 1963 did not lead to any fundamental change in the Thai political system. This was due to the firm military base continuously built up during the nearly two decades of the 1947 Coup Group's supremacy. Military positions held by Sarit,

Thanom and Praphat from 1947 up to 1957 had provided for their subsequent strong political power base.

Sarit's successor, Marshal Thanom, was faced with some difficulties resulting from conflict between two leading members of the revolutionary group, i.e., General Praphat and Police General Prasert. The government was also pressed by its political opposition to accelerate the drafting of a constitution which had deliberately been delayed for a considerable period of time. Without absolute control over the revolutionary group, Marshal Thanom decided to yield to the demand for a new constitution and a general election.

After almost ten years of drafting, a new constitution was proclaimed in 1968 and a semi-parliamentary system was established with a two-house legislature. In the election of the Lower House in February 1969, the first in ten years, the government United Thai People's Party (UTPP) won 35 per cent of the total seats and another 33 per cent was won by independents, most of whom were UTPP sympathizers who later joined the party.¹⁷ Marshal Thanom continued to be the Prime Minister with the support of the majority in the legislature and the military.

Military Authoritarianism and Struggles for Democracy, 1969-1973

Despite the fact that the military continued to be the dominant political force after the elections, it had been split into several factions and no one was able to assume supreme control. In fact, the political leadership was shared among several military leaders: Thanom, Praphat, Prasert, Krit Sivara and Dawee Chulasap. Political parties were also more effective than in the past in playing the role of interest articulation as well as control over the government, though they still lacked cohesiveness and mass support. Politicization among the students was very much on the increase and their organization became a powerful countervailing force to the military.

During the first three years of this period, elected members of Parliament in both the government and opposition parties seemed dissatisfied with the status quo. They demanded more control over the government, more recognition and, for members of the government party, more financial support. Their interference in government administration, deliberate delays in passing budget bills, and attacks on government policies and ministers, led to

increasing tension between the government and the elected House. As a result, Thanom, with the support of the Army, staged a coup in 1971 abrogating the constitution, dissolving Parliament and political parties, and banning political gatherings.¹⁸ The coup also aimed at reducing, if not eliminating, the influence of General Prasert, the Police Chief, who was in conflict with Praphat.

None the less, the coup did not pave the way for political stability. Actually, Thanom-Praphat's decision to launch the coup was a wrong move which proved disastrous later. The coup aroused resentment among civilian politicians, students, and the politicized public, who considered the coup unjustified and intended only for the personal gain of the military leaders.

The general public as well as students and military officers also became disenchanted with the rapid rise of Colonel Narong Kittikachorn, Thanom's son and Praphat's son-in-law. He was appointed Assistant Secretary-General of the National Executive Council, the supreme body of the government administration after the coup, and played a dominant political role overshadowing in power, if not in dignity, senior military officers including General Krit, the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Several pressure groups, particularly university students, became increasingly politicized and began to express publicly their disaffection with the monopolistic grip on government by Thanom, Praphat and Narong. In early 1973 the National Students' Center of Thailand (NSCT) organized a series of demonstrations against the dismissal of student activists of Ramkhamhaeng University. The arrest of students and political activists in October 1973, while they were distributing leaflets demanding a permanent constitution, sparked off another protest. This time, more than a hundred thousand university and high school students, organized by the NSCT, marched through the streets to demonstrate against the arrest and to demand a new constitution. Although the government agreed to release the arrested activists and promised a new constitution within one year, fighting between the students and the police erupted in the early morning of 14 October and rioting spread rapidly to several areas of Bangkok. Small units of troops were sent out to suppress the riots, but to no avail. Amidst the turmoil, the King stepped in to control the situation by asking Thanom, Praphat and Narong to leave the country. With the refusal of General Krit, who was recently promoted to be the Army Chief, to join their side, there was no alternative left for the trio except to comply.¹⁹

The Period of Open Politics and the Military Reform Movements, post-1973

The student-led 14 October 1973 uprising against the Thanom-Praphat regime brought back once again a period of open politics and experiment with democracy. During this period the military, as an institution and a profession, was at its nadir, chiefly because of graft, corruption and the failure of former military rulers to effectively minimize the problems of the nation. In the 1973 Legislative Assembly, whose members were elected from the 2,436 members of the National Convention appointed by the King immediately after the 14 October 1973 incident, there were only 53 military officers elected out of 299 members, and of these 53 persons, 28 were retired officers. This was a great change considering that military representation in the legislature had usually been well over 50 per cent of the total membership. Another significant political development which directly affected the power and influence of the military was the 1974 constitution which limited the number of Senate members to only 100 with much less power than the elected House of Representatives. This constitution, unlike the 1968 constitution, required the Prime Minister to be a member of the House of Representatives. It also prohibited civil servants from holding positions in private firms.

From October 1973 onwards the political climate in Thailand became highly volatile. Pressure group politics, mobilization and confrontation replaced the usual political acquiescence and achievement of consensus through bargaining between established patron-client factions. During the three years after 1973 there were 1,333 strikes and 322 demonstrations. The same period saw 30 assassinations of politicians and farmer leaders, and experienced the bloodiest election (1975) in the country's history. By 1975 activist students had clearly rejected the Western-type democratic process of government as a workable route to achieve the social reform they felt to be imperative for Thai society. Instead, they were concentrating their efforts primarily on bringing about a true cultural revolution. Classical literature was attacked as 'a feudalistic tool to corrupt the minds of the exploited masses'. Amidst this blossoming of leftist ideology and literature came the fall of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to the communists.

All these events occurred within a very short span of time and overwhelmed the ordinary Thais who had yet to suffer political trauma of this sort. As for the military, it was naturally apprehensive of these domestic and external developments especially at a

time when they had just been deprived of their earlier supremacy in Thai politics. Younger military officers who had fought in Vietnam and were also fighting communist insurgents at home were the most frustrated of all. They were not party to the corruption which brought the downfall of the Thanom-Praphat regime. With growing student radicalism and activism inside the country and the perceived threat emanating from communist victory in the Indo-China states, they were fearful that the situation was getting out of control. They were also apprehensive of the 'leftist' influence in the political process (in the January 1975 election, left-leaning parties—the Socialists, the New Force and the Socialist Front—won 37 out of 269 seats in Parliament and captured an unprecedented 13.8 per cent of the popular vote).

THE EMERGENCE OF THE 'YOUNG TURKS'²⁰

The Thanom-Praphat clique alienated a large number of army officers who felt that the Army had ceased to be a national army and was being turned into a family affair. It was during this period in the early 1970s that a group of young army officers, most of whom had been assigned to fight communist insurgencies in remote rural areas, began to develop a sense of deprivation. In the face of political activism and demands made by students and politicians, the military leadership was considered weak and too compromising by young army officers. These officers who saw themselves as 'professional soldiers' had not had the privilege of gaining access to the core of the patron-client network which Thanom and Praphat had established in the decade prior to October 1973. They became increasingly frustrated with their Army Commander's attitudes and behaviour under civilian governments. They were dissatisfied that the image of the whole officer corps was inextricably linked with the so-called 'tyrants' (Thanom-Praphat). They were unhappy with the infighting among the generals before and after the 14 October 1973 incident and were of the opinion that the basic fighting units of the army (the battalions) had been neglected.

Against this background of political polarization, threats to corporate interests, weak and uncommitted army leadership, a rapidly changing international political environment especially at the regional level, and a strong sense of relative deprivation, a group of young army officers, all of whom were graduates of the Royal Military Academy's Class 7 (graduated in 1960), decided to form a

secret movement. They called themselves 'Khana Taharn Num' (Young Military Officers' Group) and became popularly known as the 'Young Turks'.

The 'Young Turks' comprised mainly young commanders of units in the combat forces. They were closely linked through their common combat experience. The group was formed soon after October 1973 and originally comprised only six army officers. They were Major Manoon Rupekachorn of the 4th Cavalry Regiment, Major Chamlong Srimuang of the Plan and Projects Division in the Supreme Command Headquarters, Major Choopong Mattavaphand of the 1st Cavalry Regiment, Major Chanboon Phentragul of the 1st Infantry Regiment, Major Saengsak Mangklasiri of the Army Corps of Engineers, and Major Pridi Ramasoot of the Army's Directorate of Personnel.

The group remained a very small and informal one until October 1976 when the military reintervened in a coup against the elected civilian government and put in its place a military-backed, civilian-led regime. After that other friends from Class 7 were invited to join in. By 1977 the group had 18 battalion commanders as their members.

The Young Military Officers' Group was formed, therefore, as a reactive and defensive mechanism against the growing tension and conflicts in Thai society. As Colonel Manoon explained to the newcomers who joined the group in June 1980:

The Young Military Group was born and became actively involved in politics amidst the October 14, 1973 crisis. Since then, especially in the past three years of confusion and disorder in Thai society during the era of blossoming Democracy, we were forced to be involved in politics. For we could not let national security be in the hands of those dirty politicians or even senior officers in the army who are irresponsible to the nation and allowed themselves to be under the rotten political system just to live happily with benefits handed to them by those politicians.²¹

The young colonels who formed the Young Military Officers' Group had a low opinion of their superiors because they regarded them as mediocrities. There was also intergenerational conflict between senior officers who were in their fifties and the Young Military Officers' Group whose members were aged between the early thirties and mid-forties. Regional and division commanders had been cadets of the Military Academy in the 1940s when the Academy was still using the traditional-type curriculum and training. The young army officers were graduates of the 1960s²² and

underwent the new five-year course patterned after the American West Point model. Young army officers take pride in their modern education and training and stress that they graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in contrast to those who received certificates under the old curriculum.²³

* The Young Military Officers' Group was also convinced that the older generals were not genuinely interested in the development of the Army. This was tested during the 1973-6 period when the autonomy of the Army was seriously jeopardized and there was no effort on the part of the senior officers to resist the movement by radical students and parliamentary politicians to interfere in military affairs. The young military officers, therefore, did not look up to the senior officers for leadership but began to develop their own collective leadership instead.

To appreciate the significant role of these middle-ranking officers in Thai politics an examination of their place in the Army organization before the April 1981 coup attempt is necessary. The Royal Thai Army (RTA) is divided into five major sections: Headquarters, Combat Forces, Logistics, Regional Command, and Training.

The Combat Forces section is composed of four Army Area Commands located in the Central, North-Eastern, Northern and Southern regions respectively. These Army Area Commands are basically infantry units. Major combat forces directly under the Central Command of the Army Headquarters are the Cavalry Division, the Anti-aircraft Artillery Division and the recently established 9th Division at Kanchanaburi Province in the West near the Burmese border. Also under the direct command of the Headquarters are the Army Aviation Centre, the Special Warfare Centre, the 1st corps of the Engineer Regiment, the King's Guard, the Signal Battalion Headquarters, the 101st Artillery Battalion and the 201st Artillery Battalion (with 155 mm. howitzers).

The 1st Army Area (Central) encompasses the largest combat forces and heavy military weapons and equipment. It is composed of the First and Second Army Divisions. The First Army Division's major strength comes from its two strategically important infantry regiments—the 1st and 11th regiments and the 1st Artillery Regiment—garrisoned in Bangkok while its best fighting force—the 31st Infantry Regiment is located in Lopburi. The 2nd Army Division of the First Army has two infantry regiments—the 2nd Infantry Regiment located in Prانبuri which is about 300 km. south of Bangkok and the 21st Regiment (the Queen's soldiers—as it

is called) located in Chonburi—90 km. east of Bangkok.

Centred in and around the capital city are the Cavalry Division, the Anti-aircraft Artillery Division, the First Military Circle which commands the Military Police Battalion, and the 9th Division. The Cavalry Division is divided into two main divisions. The First Cavalry Division (composed of two regiments) is located in Bangkok. The Second Cavalry Division or the Armoured Cavalry has two regiments—the 2nd Regiment in Bangkok and the 4th Regiment which has two battalions in Bangkok and one battalion in Saraburi, 108 km. from Bangkok. Another quasi-combat force is the Army Cadets' Regiment of the Military Academy.

The most prestigious and powerful regiment of the Thai Army has been the 1st Infantry Regiment of the First Division of the First Army Area. It is this regiment which supplies the main troops for the military coups in Thailand. Several of its commanders have become, in consecutive order, the Commander of the 1st Division, Commander of the 1st Army Area, Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Prime Minister. The command of this regiment, in the past four decades, was the beginning of the classic route to the top political position. Sarit, Thanom and Praphat had all commanded this regiment.

* It is quite clear that commanding posts of battalions and regiments are vital sources of power for every Army Prime Minister. General Prem Tinsulanond, the current Prime Minister, realized this and quickly built up his power-base by giving special attention to the placement of middle-ranking officers at the regimental and battalion levels. In the November 1980 military reshuffle, therefore, key members of the Young Military Officers' Group were given major command positions of a number of regiments in and around Bangkok. Colonel Pridi Ramasoot assumed the command of the 1st Infantry Regiment, Colonel Pallop Pinmanee became Commander of the Saraburi Military Circle (he was later appointed Commander of the 19th Infantry Regiment based in Kanchanaburi) and Colonel Saengsak Mangklasiri was promoted to the position of the 11th Corps of Engineers Command.

In March 1981, a month before the April coup attempt, the core group members of the 'Young Turks'—all of them graduates of Class 7 of the Military Academy—held the following positions:

1. Colonel Pridi Ramasoot
Commander, 1st Infantry Regiment (Bangkok)
2. Colonel Chanboon Phentragul
Commander, 31st Infantry Regiment (Lopburi)

3. Colonel Prajark Sawangjit
Commander, 2nd Infantry Regiment (Prachinburi)
4. Colonel Choopong Mattavaphand
Commander, 1st Cavalry Regiment (Bangkok)
5. Colonel Manoon Rupekachorn
Commander, 4th Cavalry Regiment (Bangkok)
6. Colonel Bunsak Pothcharoen
Commander, 2nd Anti-aircraft Artillery Regiment (Bangkok)
7. Colonel Pallop Pinmanee
Commander, 19th Infantry Regiment (Kanchanaburi)
8. Colonel Bovorn Ngramkasem
Commander, 21st Artillery Regiment (Lopburi)
9. Colonel Sakorn Kitviriyā
Commander, 1st Military Police Battalion (Bangkok)
10. Colonel Saengsak Mangklasiri
Commander, 11th Corps of Engineer (Rajburi)
11. Colonel Virayuth Invasa
Commander, Military Cadets Regiment (Bangkok)

It is also important to note that all these colonels were senators in the National Assembly. Colonel Choopong was personal aide as well as adviser to the Prime Minister while Colonel Chamlong, although not a commanding officer, served as Secretary-General to the Prime Minister. Hence the Group's network was not limited within the hierarchy of the Army organization but was spread out to the political realm as well. It is not an exaggeration to say that in early 1981, the Young Military Officers' Group was more or less in control of the major political resources in the Thai political process.

A Faction to Defeat Factionalism

The composition and location of an informal group is largely determined by the formal structure of the organization. Informal groups in the Army usually develop where the formal organizational structure facilitates frequent contact at certain locations in the squads of the Army.²⁴

Informal groups in the Thai Army developed from a number of factors—graduates of the same class at the Military Academy, close links between men involved in a particular event (the 1932 coup promoters, the 1947 coup initiators, officers in the Army units which fought in Korea, Laos and Vietnam), intermarriage between leading families, and membership of the same corporate boards. The Young Military Officers' Group was different from other informal groups in the Army, at least in one respect: it was a small

deviant group. Its professed values and behaviour were in conflict with the norms of the Army. It was in fact a faction aimed at fighting factionalism in the Army. It was an informal group striving for a qualitative development of its own, an incremental drive towards transforming a faction-ridden army into a professional national army. The Group performed significant functions for its members in providing them with a sanctuary.

The stature of the Young Military Officers' Group as an informal group and a faction is illustrated in their attitudes and stand on one particular issue confronting the Thai Army in late 1980: whether General Prem should retire or have his term of office as Commander-in-Chief of the Army extended.

General Prem became Commander-in-Chief of the Army in October 1978 at the age of 58 and was scheduled to retire in September 1980. He became Prime Minister in March 1980 through the backing of members of the National Assembly and the Army although he had no real base of support in the elected Parliament because he did not belong to any political party. It was quite obvious that his political power-base emanated from his position as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army; hence his retirement was seen as jeopardizing his position as premier. There were feelings among certain quarters, especially the Palace, that General Prem should remain in his army position for at least another year in order to stabilize both the Army and the government. This succession crisis in army leadership reflected divisive factionalism within the Army and, naturally, aspirants for the position sought support from the middle-ranking officers. A secret document circulated among the Young Military Officers' Group expressed their concern and frustration on this issue. In the section on 'military situations' the following statements were made:

The situation which every circle is interested in is the question concerning the position of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. We ought not to get involved since it is the business of superiors.

But all of us must have realized that there have begun struggles for this position through newspapers and leaflets in the most disgusting manner to the extent that it is almost unbelievable that this is a professional military position—it looks as if it were a political position.

Not only that, this struggle has spread to us, each faction has been trying to seek support from us and our forces at the lower level. . . .

What we should do most is to maintain our Group's solidarity and persist in hearing the decision from our superior in this matter. We persist in this manner, not dancing to the tune of other (groups), or allowing ourselves to be the power base in this struggle. . . .

... the only thing we cannot allow to happen is to let some high-ranking persons in the army who have no virtue, who cheat the army, and are power-hungry to step in and be our top commander. If we had accepted this, we would not have been united as we are now. Each will allow himself to be slave of bribery and money, or positions for which the senior officers are struggling... like what our army had to face all the time prior to the birth of our group—that is before we shook off the yokes put on us.

The document concluded by emphasizing the stance the Group must adopt: neutrality.

While the middle-ranking officers took a neutral stand on the issue, their senior counterparts under the leadership of Maj.-Gen. Arthit Kamlangek, the First Army Division commander, sought to resolve the conflict by collecting about one thousand signatures from army officers calling for General Prem's extension of tenure. What is significant and unprecedented was that the petition was submitted to the King in August 1980. This move was seen by the Young Military Officers' Group as endangering Prem's credibility as Prime Minister. Colonel Chamlong Srimuang, Secretary-General to the Prime Minister, expressed his disagreement with this proposal saying that such a move would be bad for the country and would merely make General Prem a target for criticism.²⁵ Despite the Young Military Officers' Group's advice against it, Prem's tenure was extended for one more year.

Prem's extension of tenure brought about intense conflict within the Army, especially between Maj.-Gen. Arthit and the 'Young Turks'. The latter disapproved of Arthit's move in 'bringing down' the monarchy by being involved in politics. They also expected another move to extend Prem's service again in 1982 and 1983 to facilitate Arthit's rise to become the Army's Commander-in-Chief. The 'Young Turks' also anticipated that Arthit was aiming for the position of Commander of the First Army Region as the first step to consolidate power for his group.²⁶ In the September 1980 military reshuffle, therefore, the 'Young Turks' put pressure upon General Prem to transfer Arthit to the position of Deputy Commander of the 2nd Army Region in the North-east. Arthit's new position was considered a demotion rather than a promotion since his former position as 1st Army Division Commander was more important strategically because it commanded major combat forces in the capital city.

By early 1981 the 'Young Turks', as a group, had to contend with two major interlocking issues—the military leadership crisis and the future of the Thai Army, on the one hand, and the political

leadership crisis and the future of Thai society, on the other. Since 1976 they had acted as an arbitrator in the crises on both issues, deposing Thanin Kraivixien, the civilian Prime Minister put in office after the October 1976 coup, and after another coup in October 1977, they installed the Army commander, General Kriangsak Chomanan in his place. Later they withdrew support from Kriangsak in March 1980 and provided a political and military power-base for his successor, General Prem. In military affairs they were able to bargain for positions for their group members and blocked appointments and promotions of members of other factions in the Army. General Prem had to depend on them for support as he had no other power-base. The Arthit faction which rallied behind Prem was in conflict with the 'Young Turks', especially after the former manoeuvred for Prem's extension of tenure. However, Prem and Arthit were close to the Palace and their relationship with the monarchy provided for them the most important 'reserved symbolic political resource' which no one else had.

It is an established fact that every successful coup in Thailand, especially since 1957, had to be legitimized by the tacit consent of the King. Hence any group that seeks to stage a coup must be led by a person acceptable to the Palace. This posed a serious problem for aspirant coup-makers. Before the second Prem government there was already a cabinet reshuffle; the King had shown his concern over the image of the government which, in his opinion, should not be changed too frequently. Prem, unlike Sarit, had to depend on support from the National Assembly which was composed of the elected House of Representatives and the appointed Senate. In the former, he could count on the Democrat Party, the Social Action Party and the Chart Thai Party, all of which formed a coalition government under his leadership. In the Senate his main support came from the 'Young Turks' while other senators' allegiance to him was questionable since they were appointed by General Kriangsak in 1979 before Prem became Prime Minister.

Prem's first coalition government (12 March 1980-10 March 1981) was plagued by inter-party rivalries. The administration of the government greatly suffered from consideration of each party's political interests. Major parties in the coalition government were given portfolios which each party tried to utilize for building up their strength. Prem, on the advice of his close aides, devised a check and balance system by appointing members of different parties to the same ministry. For example, while the Chart Thai

Party was given the ministerial portfolio of the Ministry of Industry, the Social Action Party was entrusted with the deputy ministership. The same pattern was used in the ministries of Interior, Commerce, Communications, Agriculture and the Prime Minister's office. Deputy prime ministerships were allocated to leaders of the Social Action Party, the Chart Thai Party and the Democrat Party who were assigned to supervise the country's economic, administrative and foreign affairs respectively. The post of Deputy Prime Minister, in charge of national security matters, was given to General Serm Na Nakorn, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Prem retained for himself the Defence portfolio.

After a short honeymoon period, intense conflicts began to develop between the Social Action Party and the Chart Thai Party. The former had its major economic interests in the banking, finance, and some industrial sectors (cement in particular) while the latter (a remnant of the 1947 Coup Group) has vast interests in the textile and sugar industries. These two major parties in the coalition government attempted to devise policies augmenting their own vested economic interests. Boonchu Rojanasathien, the Social Action Party Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Economic Affairs, proposed a vigorous, all-encompassing plan for national development through industrialization and export promotion, a plan he called 'Thailand Inc.'²⁷ The Chart Thai Party, whose major financiers controlled the sugar industry, was blamed for the sugar crisis in mid-1980 which Boonchu solved by importing sugar in order to bring down the prices and prevent hoarding. Boonchu launched what he termed a war against sugar hoarders by banning exports of raw sugar and ordering 200,000 tons of white sugar from a British company, Tate and Lyle.²⁸ The government made compulsory purchases of the embargoed raw sugar at fixed prices, a move which directly affected the sugar millers, most of whom had close business association with the Chart Thai Party. The Social Action Party was accused of getting Baht 300 million (US\$15 million) from the purchase of white sugar from Tate and Lyle, a charge which the Party failed to answer convincingly. This affair led to the resignation of the Minister of Commerce, a Social Action Party leader, in January 1981.

In February 1981 another inter-party conflict developed in the coalition government over the government oil deal with Saudi Arabia in which Chart Thai Party Industry Minister, Chatchai Choonhavan, accused his Social Action Party deputy, Visit Tansatja, and Boonchu of trying, for personal gain, to sabotage an

oil deal he had concluded in Saudi Arabia by sending telexes saying that Chatchai was not authorized to strike a deal on behalf of the Thai government.²⁹ Visit Tansatja, a former employee of Exxon before becoming Deputy Minister of Industry, was charged with trying to deal with Saudi Arabia's Petromin on a personal basis instead of the government-to-government purchase Chatchai was making. General Prem was inclined to believe that Visit was guilty and his statement concerning the dispute did not in any way clear Visit of the charge. He accepted Visit's resignation on 2 March and consequently, the Social Action Party withdrew from the coalition government in early March 1981.

The second Prem cabinet was formed on 11 March 1981 as a result of the above-mentioned 'telexes crisis'. Without the support of the Social Action Party, which had the largest number of seats in the House of Representatives (79 out of 301),³⁰ General Prem brought the Mass Line Party (led by Maj.-Gen. Sudsai Hasdin) into his new government. General Prachuab and Sudsai, Prem's close friends, were given the portfolios of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister attached to the office of the Prime Minister respectively.

The Young Military Officers' Group tried to oppose the appointments of Prachuab and Sudsai whom they considered political opportunists. The colonels were particularly annoyed and frustrated with Prem's choice of Sudsai as a cabinet minister. Sudsai is a retired army officer who formed the 'Red Gaur' extremist organization in 1974 to counter the leftist movement.³¹ He and his 'Red Gaur' vocational students were responsible for the bloody incident of 6 October 1976 in which more than forty university students were killed, some being burnt alive. His remarks that the killings were justified in the name of national interest and that he was above the law had aroused strong resentment and criticisms from the public. The Young Military Officers' Group had expected General Prem to recruit competent and respectable persons into the new cabinet and Sudsai, in their opinion, was a far cry from meeting this criterion.

The leadership crisis in the Army was still unresolved in early 1981. In September 1980 General Prem's tenure was extended for one year after he reached the retirement age of sixty. In March 1981 the same group which agitated for Prem's extension of tenure as the Army's Commander-in-Chief initiated another move for a further extension.

The 'Young Turks' this time had become less tolerant of Prem's

stand, both in political and in military affairs. They had failed to block the appointment of Sudsai and were frustrated with Prem's indecisiveness concerning the proposal by Arthit's faction to extend his tenure for another year. Public criticisms over the appointment of Sudsai mounted when the 'Red Gaur' leader said in an interview that he planned to bring in his 'Red Gaur' extremists to guard the Prime Minister's office.³² From the middle of March 1981, the 'Young Turks' began to put pressure on Prem to reshuffle his one-week-old cabinet, a proposal Prem found impossible to undertake.

While Prem was seeking a solution to the problem, one of the 'Young Turks', Prajark, had already made up his mind to stage a coup to resolve the growing tensions. On the night of 31 March he moved in his troops from Prachinburi. Manoon and other core group members of the 'Young Turks', upon Prajark's request, decided to persuade Prem to lead the coup. While the negotiations with Prem, who was reluctant to stage a coup against his own government, were still on, General Arthit went to see the Queen in order to block the coup attempt. Arthit himself admitted that the Queen directed the coup group to allow Prem to come to the Palace. The group had to comply with Her Majesty's order³³ and decided to make General Sant Chitpatima, the Deputy Commander of the Army, as leader of the Revolutionary Party.

With Prem being summoned to the Palace and remaining there until the morning of 1 April before moving to Korat with the Royal Family, it was clear that the coup group's fate was sealed.³⁴ Without the tacit support of the King, who openly supported Prem, the 'Young Turks' automatically became a rebel group. Their power and influence based on control of coercive force in society thus ended abruptly.

THE 'DEMOCRATIC SOLDIERS'

Like the 'Young Turks', the 'Democratic Soldiers' emerged on the political scene soon after 14 October 1973 as a result of the concern among certain staff officers over the issues of national security and the government's stability as well as the role of the Army itself. Most of the founding members of the 'Democratic Soldiers' were those assigned in their official capacities to fight the political war against the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). The core founding members were:

1. Maj.-Gen. Ravi Wanpen
2. Maj.-Gen. Chavalit Yongchaiyuth

3. Colonel Chavat Pisuthipan
4. Colonel Prayote Tavornsiri
5. Colonel Suban Saengpan
6. Colonel Songsak Suyanont
7. Colonel Prasit Navawat
8. Colonel Sompong Bunyasirikul
9. Colonel Mana Kasetsiri
10. Lt.-Col. Somsak Pan-iam
11. Lt.-Col. Pisitsak Nipavanij
12. Captain Somchai Viroonpol

The most important key figure behind the 'Democratic Soldiers' perhaps was Colonel Chavat Pisuthipan, born in the southern province of Pattani, who was known as a 'bright young man' through his military course (five-year military technical college, the Tenth Batch starting in 1943). After graduation, he was attached to the artillery unit at Kokkrathiem, Lopburi, and later became a teacher at the Pre-cadet College, lecturing at first on artillery use. Later he taught politics and comparative political theories while pursuing a master's degree in political science at Thammasat University and a doctorate in diplomacy. The fact that he taught for twenty-six years at the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy gave him the advantage of having taught political science to a large number of military students, starting with the Fifth Batch (under the revised curriculum which was put into force in 1953). When political awareness was the main discussion topic following the 14 October 1973 Uprising, Colonel Chavat's opinions and analysis were obviously widely accepted by his former students.

Meanwhile, Maj.-Gen. Ravi Wanpen was the 'open figure' in the movement. His background was also academic in nature and he was later involved in planning and staff work. He also assisted in the anti-communist activities of the Internal Security Operations Command.

The 'Democratic Soldiers' can be regarded as a promotional pressure group as its name suggests. Their main thrust was to promote democratic ideals and democratic government since they were convinced that democracy was the only tool to counter communism. Their thinking was influenced by Prasert Sapsunthorn—a former member of the CPT who defected from the Party in 1958 and had been working for the government since then. Prasert started to wield his influence in the late 1960s when he assisted the Thanom government mainly through advice in confidential papers

and writing radio commentaries attacking the CPT. He developed a close relationship with Maj.-Gen. Ravi.

✓ 'Democratic Soldiers' were, in a way, pursuing their goals in a more systematic way compared to the 'Young Turks'. They were defining strategies and goals openly, although they were sometimes rather ambiguous and impractical. But basically, their objective was to fight the CPT and their thrust was democratization. At one point, the 'Democratic Soldiers' were calling for a 'democratic revolution'.

✓ The grouping began to develop a cohesive identity only after the 20 October 1977 coup which brought General Kriangsak to power in place of the civilian, Thanin. Before this, their main activity was no more than private discussions on political issues, mostly gathering around 'Acharn Chavat'. Interestingly enough, Colonel Chamlong Srimuang of the 'Young Turks' was often seen at the discussions at that time.

The grouping began to make its presence felt when the *Tawan Mai* magazine was launched on 3 February 1978. The source of funds for the news magazine was never established. But Prasert's series on 'Democracy', written under the pseudonym of 'Suriya', was appearing on a regular basis as of the seventh issue. He later wrote another series entitled 'The Young Turk Movement' under another pen-name, 'Surayan'. The 'Democratic Soldiers' had their own column known as 'Conversation on National Problems'. However, the editorial team, led by veteran journalist, Pricha Samakkitham, left in a huff in early May that year amidst allegations that the 'Democratic Soldiers' members were tampering with the editorial contents. Maj.-Gen. Ravi stepped in to play a more active role in the magazine and began to write his own column. Later, the grouping used the magazine to make declarations on their political thinking, mostly stressing the need to 'democratize' the military establishment and to set up a 'democratic mechanism' as a prerequisite for the drafting of a democratic constitution.

✓ The first conflict in ideas between the 'Young Turks' and the 'Democratic Soldiers' emerged around August 1978, when the magazine ran an editorial asking, quite abrasively: 'Are the Young Turks Helping Kriangsak to Amend the Constitution?' The 'Young Turks' were indeed following their own pragmatic path while the 'Democratic Soldiers' were against the proposed amendments of the constitution simply to prop up Kriangsak.

The 'Democratic Soldiers' could make their influence felt only through expanding sideways—not vertically as the 'Young Turks'

were doing then. They therefore fanned out to other progressive groupings such as the New Force Party, Social Democrat Party and certain members of the Democrat Party as well as some elements of the Social Action Party. At the same time, they also linked up with such labour leaders as Ahmad Khamthesthong and Sawat Lookdod. Former student leaders such as Sombat Thamrongthanyawong and Sompong Srakavi also became close associates. They were later to set up a group known then as the 'Chokechai Building Group' after the name of the venue where they chose to meet weekly.

At this juncture, moves were made to step up its call for the framing of a new constitution. The suggestions gained momentum and rhetorical writings began to appear in the magazine. It was in late October that the group came out with its first official statement (dated 23 October 1978) to make known its stance on the political scene. The declaration was published in *Tawan Mai* on 3 November 1978, sparking off wide-ranging comments from political and military circles.

The official emergence of the 'Democratic Soldiers' created a new chapter in the history of the Thai military establishment: a group of soldiers who want to have a political say in the whole structure. This group gained the limelight: so much so that General Kriangsak declared one day that if the 'Democratic Soldiers' really existed, they should come forward instead of hiding behind the magazine articles. The Army television station ran a commentary criticizing the declaration of the 'Democratic Soldiers' as a negative move 'attempting to create divisiveness among soldiers and monopolizing democracy'. The same commentary, which was later broadcast on radio throughout the country, even suggested that perhaps the communists might have been behind it. Or could it have been written by non-military people trying to masquerade as soldiers? On 22 November 1978, the 'Democratic Soldiers' issued another statement, reiterating that they were genuine soldiers. The statement also clarified several controversial points and retaliated against the accusation that they were trying to create disunity within the Army. The 'Democratic Soldiers' later decided to move in a different direction by setting up the 'Democratic Movement' to widen their base. In October 1981, they set up a new political party known as 'Puang Chon Chao Thai' Party led by Captain Somwang Sarasat with Dr Kamon Chalaeka serving as deputy party leader.

The 'Democratic Soldiers' did not come out openly to affiliate

✓ themselves with the Party. But it was well-known that Maj.-Gen. Ravi was attending all Party meetings. The Party was aimed at garnering mass support by making the farmers' cooperatives throughout the country its political base. The 'Democratic Soldiers' main thrust in pursuing their policies was basically to oppose military dictatorship which the group members saw as a trap which would eventually benefit the CPT. The group also publicly advocated a 'neutral policy' in Thailand's foreign relations, particularly with the Indo-Chinese states. Although the proposal did not receive wide publicity, the group at one point suggested that an international conference be called to recognize Thailand's neutrality in the context of regional politics.

The group also made use of the 'Sathiaraparp' (Stability) programme on the Army radio as their tool through which their stances were pronounced and broadcast. The radio programmes reached a wider audience than the magazine which was mainly limited to a small group of intellectuals. The 'Democratic Soldiers' also at one point wielded control over the *Sena Suksa* magazine of the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy. Colonel Chavat was made editor and the usually conservative magazine was suddenly 'politicized' with the inclusion of critical and controversial articles.

It is of interest to note that the 'Democratic Soldiers' did have some very decisive influence over the issuance of Order No. 66/2523 of Prime Minister Prem which was issued in April 1980 as the 'bible' of the country's anti-insurgent guide-lines. The draft had apparently been initiated by the 'Democratic Soldiers' and endorsed by Lt.-Gen. Harn Leenanond and Maj.-Gen. Chavalit Yongchaiyuth, both close aides to Prem. The 'liberal' tone of the order was unprecedented. Part of the order called for a 'political offensive' against the communists on a consistent basis through destruction of the CPT's front organizations so that the state of war could be eliminated and peaceful struggle could replace the armed struggle.

✓ It was a peak point for the 'Democratic Soldiers' who managed to grasp a certain degree of influence. But the upper echelons in the Army began to cast suspicion on the group, creating a series of serious troubles for its members. In November 1981, the 'Democratic Soldiers', whose fortunes fell with the 'Young Turks' following the 1-3 April abortive coup, announced 'disbandment' of the group. The announcement was taken to mean that there would be no more joint announcements signed by the group until further notice.

The 'Young Turks' and the 'Democratic Soldiers' Compared

A very interesting question was raised during and after the 1 April 1981 abortive coup: Did the 'Young Turks' and the 'Democratic Soldiers' work as one group or not? And if they belonged to separate groups, what were the basic differences? Our findings show that the two groups did not have any direct relations in terms of organization and activities. There might have been some temporary connection in the beginning but that could not be described as 'genuine'; nor did it have any sign of continuity.

If the 'Young Turks' appeared on 1 April 1981 to develop yet another temporary link with the 'Democratic Soldiers', it was due mainly to the fact that the 'Young Turks' at the time lacked the 'brains' to draft the Revolutionary Party's announcements. Besides, the 'Democratic Soldiers' as a group did not take part in the abortive coup. Some members of the 'Democratic Soldiers' might have joined the coup in their personal capacities—as former classmates of the core of the 'Young Turks'.

The lack of links between the two groups was probably due to the fact that the 'Young Turks' did not consider the 'Democratic Soldiers' a force to be reckoned with in the first place. It may also have been due to the inability of the 'Young Turks' to accept the leadership of the 'Democratic Soldiers'. Again, this stemmed from the general conviction among the 'Young Turks' that they would accept and show respect to military officers with combat experience only. It has also been noted that the 'Young Turks' may have looked upon the 'Democratic Soldiers' with suspicion as a result of the reasonably successful 'outside connections' the 'Democratic Soldiers' had managed to develop in non-Army circles. Certain 'Young Turks' felt somewhat uneasy over the fact that the 'Democratic Soldiers' had cultivated a wide network of connections with various groups of people.

There were, of course, both similarities and differences between the two military movements. For one thing, both groups had their beginnings in the 14 October 1973 incident—which subsequently was to raise concern among certain military officers over the issue of national security, the government's stability and the status as well as the role of the army itself. Another similarity was the high educational level of the members of both groups: having gone through the Army Chief of Staff College and holding middle-level ranks. Clearly, both movements comprised members who

were politically aware and staunchly anti-communist. At the same time, both the 'Young Turks' and 'Democratic Soldiers' were 'informal groups' whose existence relied heavily on face-to-face relationships and personal consultations. No doubt, both groups were keen to play a role in the country's political process, pushing for changes in certain vital policies. It was also plain that the two groups were developing some effective organizational ability. In their own ways they were trying to enlarge their membership. It is also interesting to note that both groups had developed contacts with senior leaders in the Army. While both groups had contacts with various organizations, the number of persons or groups on both sides varied. Finally, both represented 'deviant groups' trying to take a different path from the majority of military officers in the Army.

But the 'Young Turks' and 'Democratic Soldiers' did have their differences. First, their approaches in resolving national problems were divergent. The 'Democratic Soldiers' stressed the importance of changing the system in order to make it more democratic in accordance with certain democratic principles. In many respects, they tended to analyse problems in a more systematic way.

The 'Young Turks', on the other hand, were rather pragmatic, giving emphasis to solving immediate political problems. They had yet to demonstrate any conviction that a democratic system could resolve the country's problems. Besides, in an attempt to gain prominence in the political arena, they tended to cast suspicion on proposals paving the way for democratic movements. This probably explains why the 'Young Turks' placed emphasis on the use of their bargaining power in view of the fact that they were in control of the combat units. They used this bargaining chip to press for changes in political leaders or to oppose certain policies and actions of the political leadership and politicians. One example was the important role they played in backing General Kriangsak for the post of Prime Minister—support they later were to withdraw in favour of General Prem. Also, their abortive coup on 1 April 1981 was clearly an attempt to change the country's political leadership by proposing that General Prem call it quits.

These differences between the 'Young Turks' and the 'Democratic Soldiers' can be attributed to the fact that their respective positions in the Army were different in the first place. The 'Young Turks' were in control of the combat units and were fully aware of their potential. That is why they remained together to push for political changes.

The 'Democratic Soldiers', on the other hand, were not posted to such powerful positions. However, they were in charge of the Army's intelligence service, their task having been concentrated on analysing political and military problems. They were also involved in more intellectually challenging jobs, having to propose ideas and situation reports. In brief, the 'Democratic Soldiers' had members who were trying to develop new, but practical, approaches to problem solving. In a way, those 'Democratic Soldiers' who were assigned to anti-insurgency tasks in their official capacities were in a position to spread their ideology and gain members for the group rather rapidly. The group also made use of radio communications and official publications in their fight against communism for their own end: to spread their new lines of thinking.

The 'Young Turks', on the other hand, had a different strategy; they had to be more cautious in their movements and lobbying. That explains why their membership did not grow as rapidly as they had wanted. Also, they simply did not have the time to expand their relationship with persons or groups of persons outside the Army—the way the 'Democratic Soldiers' had managed to. Another vital difference between the two groups was that while the 'Young Turks' had stressed the importance of enlarging their membership to include lower-ranking soldiers (particularly military officers in control of battalion-level units), the 'Democratic Soldiers' made a concerted effort to develop their links outside with such pressure groups as labour, farmers, MPs, former student activists and student leaders in various universities.

The 'Young Turks' were also reaching out to a different group of political thinkers than those contacted by the 'Democratic Soldiers'. The 'Young Turks' had military 'ideologists' as their intellectual leaders and developed, to a certain degree, their relationships with some university lecturers. But the main 'thinker' of the 'Democratic Soldiers' was Prasert Sapsunthorn, former politician and ex-member of the CPT.

The 'Democratic Soldiers' had a more open and wide-ranging strategy. The group consistently came up with declarations, articles, and panel discussions and meetings of small groups in conjunction with student and labour leaders. On the other hand, the 'Young Turks' did not publicize their thinking as openly as the other group, except for occasional Press conferences, and opinions were usually expressed in 'personal capacities' rather than on behalf of the group. There was also a difference in approach in pressing for political changes: the 'Democratic Soldiers' attempted it

through mobilizing public opinion or support from non-Army pressure groups while the 'Young Turks' chose to go personally to persons who were in a position to order changes in personnel and policies. The 'Young Turks' were of the opinion that their strategy was much more direct, effective and less time-consuming.

In reaching up to high-level military leaders, the 'Democratic Soldiers' worked through high-ranking Army men close to Premier Prem such as Lt.-Gen. Harn and Maj.-Gen. Chavalit. They also developed contacts with General Serm na Nakhon and Maj.-Gen. Arthit Kamlangek through Maj.-Gen. Ravi. The 'Young Turks', however, were cutting down the number of senior generals with whom they were trying to establish close relations. In fact, just before the 1 April 1981 coup attempt, their main contact was reduced to General Prem alone.

If the two groups were both trying to 'deviate' from the establishment in the Army, the nature of such deviations was not identical. The 'Democratic Soldiers' wanted soldiers to have a bigger role in politics in order to change from the dictatorial to a democratic system. But the 'Young Turks' move had stemmed from their disillusionment with the senior military generals. That is why a senior general had called them 'soldiers stepping out of line'.

It should also be noted that the 'Young Turks' had greater cohesiveness since their relationship was based on fraternity, personal relations and old schoolmates' respect and closeness. Members of the 'Democratic Soldiers', however, based their strength on drawing people from different backgrounds.

All in all, although both groups contributed to stimulating a degree of awareness among certain groups of soldiers in the Army, the abortive coup on 1 April 1981 created wariness among middle-ranking and lower-ranking soldiers in expressing themselves in the political fields as the 'Young Turks' and 'Democratic Soldiers' had done before. In the Army itself, commanders of combat units would reconsider carefully before setting up a group similar to that of the 'Young Turks' or 'Democratic Soldiers'. At the same time, higher-level military officers would be stricter and would be expected to lay down measures to prevent similar groupings being formed within the Army again. This trend in the Army foreshadows a return to the old pattern of relationship—loyalty by the subordinates to the more senior officers.

The 'Democratic Soldiers' may, henceforth, have a diminished role. Their superiors may not provide the same kind of support by

offering them the channels of the Army's communications facilities to propagate their beliefs. Their function is likely to be restricted to anti-CPT work only. Their contacts with other pressure groups, which could well be the main new thrust of the strategy, could face more obstacles than before.

MILITARY INTERVENTION IN THAILAND

Some students of military-civilian relations suggest disequilibrium in society as a main cause for military intervention in politics. According to this school, political disorder, economic crisis, social unrest and other destabilizing factors are conducive to usurpation of the governmental role by the military.³⁵ As for Thailand, it is more often than not that a military coup is a means by which political leaders alternate in power. Therefore, it is not necessary that political, social and economic crises are preconditions for a military intervention, although they could facilitate the intervention, particularly, when the civilian government's supporters are very strong and active. In 1947, the Army intervened in politics when the civilian government was faced with disastrous post-war economic and social problems and seemed unable to solve them. The period from 1945 to 1947 witnessed a rapid rise in the rate of inflation and an adverse balance of payments. Purchasing power of the baht decreased from an index of 100 in 1938 to 8.20 in 1947. The consumer price index increased from 100 in 1938 to 1,247.11 in 1947.³⁶ A rice shortage and unemployment hastened the crisis. In addition to economic problems, corruption amongst government officials and politicians and a rising crime rate were important social problems which the government seemed unable to solve.

In 1957 and 1971, economic problems were not among the main reasons for the military usurpation of power but political unrest in the capital city in 1957 lended legitimacy to Marshal Sarit's coup. In 1971, economic conditions were not satisfactory. Inflation, a balance of payments deficit, and decrease in investment were the major economic issues which were employed by the military to discredit the 1968 constitution. The 1976 coup was also preceded by riots, mass demonstrations, labour strikes, and political violence. During 1975-6, there were 598 labour strikes,³⁷ a number of mass demonstrations protesting against American foreign policy, economic and social injustices, corruption of government officials, and military suppression of communist terrorists. Violence often

erupted during student demonstrations as they were harassed by militant rightist groups.³⁸

Loss of a civilian government's legitimacy is another important political condition which facilitates a military coup. The propensity for military intervention varies inversely with a civilian government's legitimacy. In the Thai political system, the legitimacy of civilian and representative government has not yet been recognized. Many democratic institutions and ideas such as constitutionalism, political parties, an elected National Assembly and an electoral process, though introduced to Thailand more than forty years ago, are still novel to the Thais. Frequently interrupted by military coups, the democratic political process has been unable to institutionalize itself and a low level of political institutionalization leads to a low level of legitimacy.

Several coups, such as those in 1947, 1957 and 1976, took place when the civilian government's legitimacy was threatened. In 1947, in addition to the economic crisis and increasing crime rate, the legitimacy of Pridi's regime was shaken when King Ananda was found shot in bed, thus giving rise to a widespread rumour that Pridi was involved in the regicide.³⁹ The 1957 coup by Marshal Sarit took place after a series of protests against the Pibun government which was accused of election fraud. Sarit asserted, 'When the election was not clean, the members of Parliament would be affected because they may not be the real choice of the people and thus the government, despite its majority vote in the Parliament, cannot be a true government of the people if they do not accept it.'⁴⁰

In the 1976 coup, the situation leading to the intervention was more complex than in 1957 since those who supported parliamentary democracy were larger in number, more active and more organized, and as a result its legitimacy was better established. However, the ineffectiveness of the Kukrit and Seni governments to cope with political unrest and conflicts among the government parties reduced substantially their legitimacy during the democratic period. Coupled with anti-leftist mobilization by the military, the silent majority began to lose faith in the civilian government and resorted again to a military regime for restoration of peace, order and security.

The propensity of the military to intervene in politics also depends on the strength of the armed forces. As the only organization which monopolizes the legitimate use of force, it is small wonder that the military possesses considerable potency. Moreover, the military has at its disposal several political resources

which make it a powerful political force in Thailand, i.e., cohesiveness, organizational complexity and adaptability, high status, wealth and control of mass communications. Therefore, in any struggle for power, the military always has an 'edge' over civilian groups.

In 1971, the strength of the three armed forces in terms of number of personnel was estimated to be around 200,000. The Army alone consisted of 10,903 officers, 52,403 non-commissioned officers and 66,740 enlisted men.⁴¹ Its forces are distributed all over the country and are divided into four army areas for administrative, logistic and strategic purposes. The forces of the first army area, stationed in and around Bangkok, are of political importance since they can be deployed quickly for political purposes, either suppressing a riot or staging a coup. Consequently, the loyalty and support of the commanders of army garrisons in the capital city are indispensable for stability and the survival of any government. Sarit, Thanom, Praphat and Krit always controlled important positions of these army units, especially the first army area and its principal combat unit, the first division, filling them with their own men. The fact that all the four leaders were former commanders of the first division and of the first army area before being appointed Commanders-in-Chief of the Army indicates the political importance of these two positions.

The Army and the Navy were first modernized during the reign of King Chulalongkorn at the end of the nineteenth century. Under his guidance and with assistance from several Western-educated princes, modern organization was developed and universal conscription adopted. Standardization of training, ranks, positions, and pay was also introduced during this period. Professionalization of the military, developed during this reign, led to the distinction between military and civil bureaucracies. Military affairs became matters for experts with specialized training and military men began to share with one another common training, responsibility and interest. Corporatism and cohesiveness of the military were also developed during this period. By 1932, the military institution was firmly established, highly professionalized and considerably cohesive.

The role of the military as the guardian of national institutions, traditions and virtue has elevated the military profession into a position of high prestige in Thai society. This role, which had its root in traditional Thailand, has been strengthened since the beginning of modernization in the armed forces. Chulalongkorn's

great concern for modernization of the military was indicated by the fact that five of his sons were sent abroad to receive modern military and naval training.⁴² The military prestige was heightened when the King himself became Supreme Commander of the armed forces and important military positions were filled by members of the royal family.

After the 1932 coup, while the prestige and power of the royal family diminished, the political domination of the Army increased the prestige of the armed forces. Although military involvement in politics has often been denounced by some politicians, political parties and activist groups, the military has continued to be held in high regard by the general public.

Military strength can also be attributed to its organization. The military has continually been reorganized to meet increasing demands for defence, national security and political purposes. The Army, Navy and Air Force are organized within the Ministry of Defence, but each service retains a considerable amount of autonomy in its internal affairs. The Commander-in-Chief of each service is responsible directly to the Supreme Commander who has, in theory, control over the three armed forces. In practice, it is the Army chief who is the most powerful since he directly controls the Army. It is interesting to note that the office of Supreme Commander, which was abolished after the Second World War, was re-established in 1960 by Marshal Sarit. He reinstated the office to ensure his control over the armed forces. It was common practice, until recently, that the Army chief would concurrently hold the office of Supreme Commander to ensure his control over the other two services.⁴³

The responsibility of the supreme command headquarters lies not only in directing and coordinating the operations of the three services but also in developing communities in remote and sensitive areas and overseeing national security problems, including urban riots, communist infiltration, mass demonstrations and government instability. In the past, the Army played the leading role in planning a coup but as politics becomes more complex, such as during the period from 1974 to 1976, systematic planning, accurate information and mass mobilization were thus required for a successful military seizure of power. For example, in the 1976 coup, the supreme command headquarters played an active role and several leading officers attached to the headquarters were directly involved.⁴⁴

A major development in the military organization has been the

creation of the Internal Security Command or ISOC (formerly known as Communist Suppression Operation Command or CSOC). Legally, the command is an autonomous body outside the military bureaucracy, but as its director is the Army chief and its operation units are essentially those of the armed forces and the police, it has virtually become part of the military organization. It was first designed to coordinate and control communist suppression operations of the military, the police and the civil service. However, its responsibility was later extended beyond communist suppression in sensitive areas to dealing with internal security problems, such as mass demonstrations, urban riots, activities of political parties and labour strikes. The ISOC operation now covers a large area of civic action, including agricultural, communication and public health developments at the village level. It is also involved in training villagers for self-defence and counter-insurgency tactics. In addition, the ISOC is now responsible for organizing political education programmes for the masses both in urban and rural areas to counter the leftists and the communists. Several rightist movements are also known to have been mobilized by ISOC.

The strength of the armed forces is also reflected in a consistently large budget in comparison with other government departments. In 1960, the annual budget for the Defence Ministry was 1,360 million baht or 17 per cent of the total budget; in 1965, the amount increased to 2,500 million baht but its share in the total budget decreased to 13 per cent. In 1973, the defence budget amounted to 4,988 million baht or 17 per cent and in 1975, its share in the total budget was 15 per cent of 7,640 million baht.⁴⁵ From 1976 to 1982, the defence budget averaged about 20 per cent of the total annual expenditure.⁴⁶ Each year the ministry has been granted a considerable secret fund, which could be used for intelligence operations, but has also been widely used for internal security and political purposes. Several civic action programmes, political education projects, and rightist mass movements have allegedly been financed from this fund.

The military has also been strengthened by what could be called a military-business complex. Several military leaders have been able to increase their wealth through involvement in private business. Since the Thai political system has been characterized by limited participation and business associations have not been well organized and strong, the only effective way for business leaders to influence government decision-making has been to build business

connections with the military leaders. Therefore, many prominent military officers, such as Sarit, Thanom, Praphat, Phin, Krit and Narong, were involved in various businesses, as shareholders and board members of private companies. Moreover, top positions in quite a number of state enterprises are reserved for leading officers of the three armed forces. Through business connections, the military-politicians possess one of the most important political resources—wealth—and can thus become politically powerful.

The mass media, particularly radio and television stations, are under the control of the military, which has undoubtedly reinforced its political potency. Although the Public Relations Department is responsible for operating government-run radio and television stations, there are quite a few stations which are operated with considerable autonomy by the armed forces. These stations are often used by the military to rally public support for a *coup d'état*. For instance, the Armoured School Radio played a very active role during 1975-6 in mobilizing rightist movements, village scouts, and some right-wing politicians against the NSCT, which eventually led to the coup on 6 October 1976. The military has also been broadcasting several counter-communist propaganda programmes through all its radio stations without intervention from the government, thus exhibiting military capability in political mobilization.

It could thus be concluded that the political supremacy of the military has been an outstanding feature in the modern Thai political system since 1932. An absence of strong participatory political institutions and a lack of legitimacy on the part of civilian regimes enable the politicized military to seize power and establish an authoritarian regime without much difficulty. Its organizational complexity and adaptability, prestige, wealth, and control of the mass media are important political resources for control over all other political institutions, including the cabinet, the National Assembly and, to a lesser extent, political parties.

1. William R. Thompson, 'Explanations of the Military Coup', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1972.

2. For details of the 1932 revolution, see Thawatt Mokarapong, *History of the Thai Revolution*, Bangkok, Siva Phorn, 1973.

3. There are several works by Thai scholars and writers which give interesting interpretations and analyses of Pridi's economic Plan. See Duen Bunnag, *Than Pridi rathaburut ahwaso (Pridi—The Elder Statesman)*, Bangkok, Serm Wit Bannakarn Press, 1957, pp. 60-388, Witeskorani, *Yuk Toraraj (The Age of Tyranny)*, Bangkok,

Odeon Press, 1958, pp. 223-302 and also Mokarapong, *History of the Thai Revolution*, pp. 139-62.

4. See Mokarapong, *History of the Thai Revolution*, pp. 196-214.

5. For full details of the conflicts between Marshal Pibun and Phya Song as well as Pibun's ruthless attempt to eliminate his opponents, see Payab Rojanavipart, *Yuk Tamin (The Age of Terror)*, Bangkok, Sor Sethabutr, 1972; see also Witeskorani, *The Age of Tyranny*, op. cit., Chapters 1, 3, and 11.

6. Pibun was promoted unprecedentedly from the rank of major-general to the rank of field marshal after the incident and became the first field marshal after the 1932 revolution.

7. According to the minutes of the cabinet meeting, A. Pibun was given full authority by the cabinet member to decide whether to yield to the Japanese demand or not, see A. Pibunsongkram, *Jompon Por. Pibunsongkram (Field Marshal Pibunsongkram)*, Vol. 2, Bangkok-Sookan Pim, 1975, pp. 248-57.

8. See also Adul Korwattana, 'Karn lar ork kong rathabarn Jompon Por. Pibunsongkram meur 24 karakkadokom 2487' ('The Resignation of Field Marshal Pibunsongkram's Government on July 24, 1944'), M.A. thesis, Department of Government, Chulalongkorn University, 1975, pp. 106-70.

9. See Suchin Tantikuln, *Rathprahan 2490 (The 1947 Coup)*, Bangkok Social Science Association Press, 1972, pp. 77-88.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 89-110.

11. They were Sarit Thanarat, Thanom Kittikachorn, Pramarn Adireksan, Siri Siroythoin and Chartchai Choonhavan.

12. Rajakru is the name of a lane in the residential area where Marshal Phin, Maj.-Gen. Pramarn, Maj.-Gen. Siri, and Police General Phao lived, while Sisao Deves was the area where Marshal Sarit resided. Leading members of the latter clique were Marshal Sarit, General Thanom Kittikachorn, General Praphat Charusathien, General Krit Sivara and General Prasert Ruchirawongs.

13. For details see Sungsidh Piriyarangsarn, 'Thai Bureaucratic Capitalism 1932-1960', unpublished M.A. thesis, Thammasat University, Faculty of Economics, October 1980, pp. 286-307.

14. See The Royal Thai Army, *Jompon Sarit Thanarat (Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat)*, Bangkok, 1964, pp. 120-4 for the content of the Revolutionary group's Announcement on the 1957 and 1958 coups.

15. For an excellent study on the Sarit regime see Thak Chaleomtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, Bangkok, Social Science Association of Thailand, 1979.

16. Pote Sarasin, a well-known diplomat and the Secretary-General of SEATO, was invited to lead this civilian government.

17. See Chai-Anan Samudavanija, 'Rai ngarn karn wijai kwarm sampan rawang phai nitibunyat kab phai borihan kong Thai' ('Research Report on the Relationship between the Thai Legislative and the Executive; a Case Study of the 1969 House of Representative'), presented to the National Research Council, September 1977, memo, p. 67.

18. See David Morell, 'Thailand: The Military Checkmate', *Asian Survey*, XII, February 1972, for his analysis on the 1971 Coup.

19. For details see David Morell and Chai-Anan Samudavanija, *Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction, Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass., Oelegeschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1981.

20. This subject is treated in full detail in Chai-Anan Samudavanija, *The Thai*

Young Turks, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982.

21. Address to the meeting of Young Military Officers' Group's Expanding Alliance by Colonel Manoon Rupekachorn, 27 June 1980. This is a secret document distributed among members of the Young Military Officers' Group dated 27 June 1980. Quotations regarding the Group's role perception, ideology and aspirations which appear in the latter part of this chapter will be taken from this document.

22. The Military Academy changed its curriculum in 1948. The first graduating class under the new 5-year curriculum was in 1953.

23. The new curriculum superseded an earlier system under which 10th grade students were required to take a two-year pre-university course offered at the Military Preparatory School followed by only three years at Chulachomklao Military Academy.

24. In the case of the Young Military Officers' Group, their positions as commanders of regiments and battalions in and around Bangkok facilitated their informal group meetings which took place at the headquarters of the 4th cavalry battalion at least once a month on pay day when their colleagues from outside Bangkok came to collect their salaries. Also, since core group members were senators they had the chance to meet more often when the Assembly was in session. They were well-informed of political situations because their leading member, Colonel Chamlong Srimuang, was Secretary-General to the Prime Minister. Another of their classmates, Colonel Sombat Rodpothong, was chief of staff to General Sant Chitpatima—the Deputy Commander-in Chief of the Army who also acted as Chairman of the Prime Minister's Advisory Council.

25. *The Bangkok Post*, 24 August 1980, p. 19.

26. Maj.-Gen. Arthit Kamlangek (Commander of 1st Army Division), Maj.-Gen. Harn Leenanond (Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations), and Maj.-Gen. Yuthasak Klongtruatlok (Commander of the Military Academy) were graduates of the same class (the so-called Class 5 under the old curriculum).

27. On 'Thailand Inc.', see *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 May 1980, pp. 40-3 and *Asiaweek*, 20 March 1981, pp. 30-1.

28. For details see 'Sugar: A Year of Bitter Memories' in *The Economic Review* (A supplement of *The Bangkok Post*), 31 December 1980, pp. 107-9.

29. *The Nation*, 18 February 1981, p. 1 and also *The Nation*, 27 February 1981, p. 1, which presented full texts of the controversial telexes sent by Visit from Jakarta on 9 February 1981. (Boonchu and Visit were at a meeting in Jakarta when Chatchai was in Saudi Arabia.)

30. SAP had 79 seats, Chart Thai 37, Prachakorn Thai 32, Democrat 30, Mass Line Party 30, Siam Democracy 26, Seritham 14; the other seats were held by small parties. The United Party was formed after the 1979 election by gathering independent MPs and some MPs from small parties. The leader of the United Party (General Prachuab) claimed to have between 50-60 MPs but no one really knew exactly. This is because some MPs often change parties. On this point see 'The numbers game they play in the House', *The Nation*, 6 March 1981, pp. 1 and 8.

31. For details concerning Sudsai's personality and ambition, and his close association with Prem see David Jenkins, 'The Three Faces of Sudsai' and 'The Not-so-odd Thai couple', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 January 1981, pp. 31-2 and p. 33 respectively.

32. John McBeth, 'Prem plays the joker', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 20-26 March 1981, p. 10; see also *The Nation*, 12 March 1981, p. 1; and *The Bangkok Post*, 12 March 1981, p. 3 for reactions to the second Prem government.

33. 'Secret Memoir of Lt. General Arthit Kamlangek' in *Siam Mai*, 24 May 1981, p. 14.

34. For coup events see *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10-16 April 1981, pp. 10-16 and *Asiaweek*, 17 April 1981, pp. 15-20.

35. See Samuel Decalo, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa—Studies in Military Styles*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976, pp. 12-13.

36. Quoted in Suchin, *The 1947 Coup*, pp. 33-41.

37. Quoted in Suchit Bunbongkarn, 'The Military Intervention in Politics', *Journal of Social Science*, April 1978, p. 48.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.

39. See Wilson, *Politics in Thailand*, p. 24; see also Suchin Tantikul, *The 1947 Coup*, pp. 45-55.

40. *Pim Thai*, Thursday 7 March 1957.

41. See Suchit Bunbongkarn, 'The Military Intervention in Politics', p. 54.

42. Princes Nakorn Chaisri, Nakorn Sawan and Pitsanulok were sent to Denmark, Germany and Russia respectively to receive military training; Princes Chumporn and Songkla were sent to England and Germany respectively for naval training.

43. After General Krit Sivara who retired in 1975, no Army Chief had been appointed as Supreme Commander until 1978 when General Serm na Nakorn, the Army Chief, was appointed Supreme Commander but he had to relinquish the Army top post to General Prem.

44. For instance, General Kriangsak, the Supreme Commander, and the two Deputy Supreme Commanders were key members of the coup groups.

45. See Budget Bureau, *Annual Government Spending Budget, 1960, 1967, 1973, 1975*.

46. Data obtained from the Budget Bureau.