



**“Thailand: The Land of Smiles“
The Impact of the 2014 Military Coup on the country's
democracy**

Andri Henrysson

Lokaverkefni til BA-gráðu í stjórnmálafræði

Félagsvísindasvið

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Stjórnmálafræðideild

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Ritgerð þessi er lokaverkefni til BA-gráðu í stjórn málafræði og er óheimilt að afrita ritgerðina á nokkurn hátt nema með leyfi rétthafa.

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Útdráttur

Taíland, áður nefnt Síam, var formlega stofnað árið 1238, þegar Sri Indraditya stofnaði konungsríkið Sukhothai, en núverandi saga Taílands hófst ekki fyrr en í árið 1782 með valdatöku Chakri konungsættarinnar. Í þessari ritgerð verður fjallað um valdaránið í Taílandi árið 2014, þegar her landsins ákvað að steypa þáverandi ríkisstjórn af stóli. Var það gert til þess að binda enda á stjórnarkreppu í landinu sem staðið hafði í nokkra mánuði. Ritgerð þessi skiptist í þrjú meginkafla, þar sem í fyrsta kaflanum er hugtakið valdarán útskýrt og fjallað verður um stöðu hersins innan taílenskra stjórn mála. Í öðrum kaflanum verður í grófum dráttum farið yfir fyrri valdarán landsins; þ.e. allt frá árinu 1932 þegar bylting átti sér stað sem leiddi til þess að Taíland tók upp þingbundna konungsstjórn, auk valdaránsins árið 2014. Í þriðja kaflanum verður fjallað um lýðræðisþróun landsins undir stjórn hersins og helstu aðgerðir hersins til þess að bæta hið pólitíska ástand landsins. Að lokum verður rannsóknar-spurningunni svarað í niðurstöðukaflanum.

Abstract

Thailand, formally known as Siam, was established when Sri Indraditya formed the Kingdom of Sukhothai in 1238, but Thailand's current history didn't start until 1782 when the Chakri dynasty became the ruling monarchy in Thailand. The aim of this thesis is to examine the 2014 coup d'état, when the military decided to overthrow the government. This was done to put an end to the political crisis that had been going on for several months. The thesis is divided into three parts. While the first part explains the notion of a military coup d'état and the military's role in Thai politics, the second part is devoted to the previous military coups; starting with the 1932 Siamese revolution of 1932 when Thailand became a constitutional monarchy, and ending with the military coup in 2014. In the third part, the focus is on Thailand's democratic system under military rule and the military's main tasks after the 2014 coup. Finally, the research question will be answered in the results section.

Formál

Ritgerð þessi er lokaverkefni mitt til BA-gráðu við Stjórnmálafræðideild Háskóla Íslands. Ritgerðin var unnin á skólaárinu 2016-17 og er metin til 12 eininga (ECTS) af 180 eininga námi í stjórnmálafræði með sagnfræði sem aukagrein. Leiðbeinandi minn var Magnús Björnsson og ég vil þakka honum fyrir frábæra leiðsögn, hvatningu og aðstoð. Kærar þakkir fá þeir dr. Jakob Tómas Bullerjahn og Unnar Örn Harðarson fyrir yfirlsturinn og góðar ábendingar. Einnig vil ég þakka móður minni fyrir ómetanlega hjálp sem hún sýndi mér við gerð þessarar ritgerðar. Ég hefði ekki getað skrifað þessa ritgerð án hennar stuðnings. Síðast en ekki síst þakka ég þeim Gunnari Bjarna Ragnarssyni og Halldóri Gylfasyni fyrir þeirri jákvæðni, stuðning og hvatningarorð sem veittu mér drifkraft við skrif verkefnisins. Að lokum vil ég tileinka þessa lokaritgerð föður mínum heitins Henry Kr. Matthíassyni.

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Introduction

Ever since the Siamese revolution of 1932, Thai politics have been unstable. Throughout the years, Thailand has primarily been ruled by military dictatorships with the military and bureaucratic elites shaping the country's political landscape. Thailand's government is composed of an executive branch, a legislative branch, and a judicial branch of three court systems.¹ The executive branch is divided between the king (head of state), and the Prime Minister (head of government). Since the constitution was amended in 1992, the Prime Minister needs to be a Member of the Thai Parliament. The government is composed of fourteen ministries, as well as the prime minister's office, which is an independent ministry. Before the 2014 military coup the legislative branch used to be the National Assembly, country's Parliament,² but was later replaced by the National Legislative Assembly. The National Legislative Assembly consisting of 220 members appointed by the National Council for Peace and Order (the NCPO) or the king. In addition to a legislative function, the National Legislative Assembly has a limited role in reinforcing accountability of the cabinet.³ In this thesis, I shall discuss the military's role in Thai politics, with a special focus on its 2014 coup d'état, and the political tasks that currently lie before them. The goal is to determine if the 2014 coup has brought any long-lasting political change that might further underpin Thailand's democracy. Finally, I will answer the following question: *Did the 2014 Thai military coups d'état have any political impact on the country's democracy?* The main reason for this thesis is to look how the 2014 military coup differs from other military coups in the past. The main reason for the military coup due to the protest against the government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, which began in November 2013. Unlike the previous military coups d'état in Thailand, the 2014 military coup occurred in a different political climate. The military junta had partially repealed the 2007 constitution, declared martial law nationwide and arrested and detained politicians and anti-coup activists. The military then issued an interim constitution, which granted the military junta more legislative power. The reason that I wrote this thesis is that I'm interested in Thai politics. It is also interesting to examine how the country's democracy changed after the 2014 military coup.

¹ Emma Chanlett-Avery, Ben Dolven og Wil Mackey, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (Washington, DC: The Congressional Research Service, 2015), 3-4

² The United Nations, *The Kingdom of Thailand: Public Administration Country Profile* (The United Nations: New York, 2004), 5-7

³ Khemthong Tonsakulrungruang, „Thailand's National Legislative Assembly,“ <http://www.cetri.be/Thailand-s-National-Legislative?lang=fr> (sött 22. mars 2017)

2.0 Conceptual definition of a military coup d'état

Since the mid-20th century, the causes of military coups d'état have remained a prominent research subject, but in recent years its popularity has steadily declined. One explanation for the lack of military coup research is that numbers of coups have decreased over the past decade. Between 2007 and 2010 there were less than ten military coups compared to the decades prior to the 21st century. What exactly is a military coup d'état? A military coup d'état is an illegal and overt attempt by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to overthrow the head of state and/or the government. Recent coups suggest that they can and quickly derail the process of democratic consolidation. Although scholars have studied military coups since the mid-20th century, we still lack the basic understanding of a coup's impact on a broad range of topics. The reason for this might be could be that there is almost no discussion on what a military coup actually is.⁴

The most basic goal of a military coup is to bring about a change in the regime leadership, but often coup leaders also seek more substantial political transformation. Most coup leaders announce that they plan to hold general elections in the near future and may even propose a date when to hold said elections. However, some of them never fulfill that promise and remain in power.⁵ Scholars have identified two ideal conditions that make coups more likely to happen. Firstly, the coup leaders must be under the impression that the post-coup environment would be preferable to the *status quo*. Secondly, the coup leaders must view the illegal overthrow of the government as a last resort to improve the country's well-being. This condition is usually not taken lightly, because military leaders are usually quick to purge military leadership after a successful coup. However, if the coup is unsuccessful the coup leaders must face exile or imprisonment, or even death.⁶

Since the mid-20th century, mainly after World War II, around 500 coups in 94 countries have been staged all over the world. Military coups have been common in Africa and in America, but are rarely seen in Asia and Europe. The high point of military coups d'état was in the 1960s, when around sixty military coups were carried out. During the 20th century the numbers of military coups have declined. Even though military coups have waned over time, recent coups have shown us that military coups still remain a key element

⁴ Jonathan M. Powell og Clayton L. Thyne, „Global instances of coups from 1950 to 2010: A new dataset,“ *Journal of Peace Research* 48, nr. 2 (2011): 249–252

⁵ George Derpanopoulos o.fl., „Are coups good for democracy?,“ *Research & Politics* 3, nr. 1 (2016): 2

⁶ Clayton L. Thyne og Jonathan M. Powell, „Coup d'etat or Coup d'Autocracy? How Coups Impact Democratization, 1950–2008,“ *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12 nr. 2 (2012): 5

of governmental instability.⁷ Recent research shows us that the number of military coups has declined since the end of the Cold War, and during the years from 1950 to 1989 only 14% of successful coups against dictatorships led to democracy within the next two years. At the same time, nearly half of all dictatorships were overthrown by the military, while around 35% of democracies were. Since 1990 coups have been less frequent but are as likely to occur in democratic countries as in countries which are controlled by dictators.⁸ There are many ways to define a military coup. Dr. Ozan O. Varol, an associate professor of Law at *the Lewis & Clark Law School*, categorizes coups d'état into two simplified groups. The first type of military coup is the so-called *non-democratic coup*. In a non-democratic coup, the political leaders of the pre-existing regime are often put aside by the coup and replaced with military officers, but the form of the government and the political system remains unaltered. Muammar al-Gaddafi's overthrow of the Libyan regime and Omar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir's coup in Sudan are good examples of non-democratic coups d'état. The second type of military coups is called a *democratic coup*, which is more common than a non-democratic coup and refers to situations, where the military overthrows a totalitarian or authoritarian regime. This type of coup differs from the non-democratic coup, where the military overthrows the government and governs the country for a short period of time, or until democratic elections are held, usually within one to two years after the coup. The aftermath of the coup is marked by the transfer of power by the military officers to democratically elected leaders. This is mainly done because the military wants to get out of the unfamiliar business of ruling a country and get back to defending the country from external threats. A democratic coup usually features seven attributes according to Dr. Varol. The first attribute the military coup is staged against an authoritarian or totalitarian regime. A totalitarian system is when the ruling party has eliminated all the political pluralism which had existed in the previous regime. An authoritarian regime is when the political party consequently acts affirmatively to suppress political opposition. The leader of an authoritarian regime often lacks some kind of ideology to rule the country. The second attribute is when a military leader responds to a persistent popular opposition against a totalitarian or an authoritarian leader, which takes the form of a popular uprising or a rebellion. The citizens organize meetings/demonstrations, where they vocalize their demands, for example, that the totalitarian or authoritarian leader resigns. If that particular leader refuses to resign the

⁷ Jonathan M. Powell og Clayton L. Thyne, „Global instances of coups from 1950 to 2010: A new dataset,“ 255-256

⁸ Derpanopoulos, „Are coups good for democracy?,“ 2-3

military is called to intervene. The third attribute is when the authoritarian or totalitarian regime refuses to relinquish its power, which is a response to the popular uprising. The fourth attribute is when a military coup is staged when the military is highly respected by the nation, mainly because of mandatory conscription. This is because the military forces are primarily composed of people that are not considered to be paid, i.e. volunteers. The fifth attribute is when the military usually answers the people's call for a regime change by staging a coup overthrowing the unwanted regime. The sixth attribute is that the military has to hold general elections. One of the military's first priorities in a democratic coup is to find a suitable date to hold a democratic election in the country and to serve as a neutral monitor for the elections that are being held. Accordingly, the military is not allowed to interfere when the elections are being held. But after the elections the army must ensure that all votes are counted correctly and that everything is under control. The seventh and final attribute is important: Following the elections, the military must transfer its power to the newly democratically elected leaders immediately.⁹ One of the most recent successful coup d'état was in late-2008 when the Guinean army, under the leadership of Captain Dadis Camara, overthrew the Guinean government. What was special about this military coup was that it was staged just a day after the death of longtime dictator Lansana Conté. A statement was read on a national radio station announcing that the military had overthrown the government and that they would form a government, under the leadership of the newly formed National Committee for Democracy and Development (CNDD), which was established by Captain Dadis Camara. The 2008 military coup led to the establishment of a new dictatorship, where it was reported that the Guinean army decided to arrest civilians without a warrant and restrict their political rights. A massive anti-government protest broke out in 2009, where military forces killed more than 150 citizens. This led to an international condemnation of the Camara regime, where many heads of states demanded that the Guinean government resign. The events that followed the coup show us that military coups can have damaging consequences for citizens beyond regime change.¹⁰

2.1 The military's role in Thai politics

Prior to the coup d'état in 1932, the Thai army had rarely intervened with the country's politics, but this rapidly changed in the following decades. Before the army decided to

⁹ Ozan O. Varol, „The Democratic Coup d'État,“ *Harvard International Law Journal* 53, nr. 2 (2012): 298-305

¹⁰ Derpanopoulos, „Are coups good for democracy?,“ 4

intervene in Thai politics in 1932, the country's representative institutions, such as the parliament and political parties were weak. When the military assessed that the civilian governments were unstable, inefficient and corrupt, they decided to intervene by staging the country's first military coup d'état. After decades of poor governance, the Thai people preferred a strong and decisive political leadership, which the army could provide. In the past two decades, the army's political power has grown, as can be seen in the coups of 1991 and 2006. After the failed coup in 2006, the army is convinced that Thailand had to be ruled by a democratic government and the armed forces under civilian control. The political role of the Thai armed forces in the twentieth century can be divided roughly into five periods: from the revolution in 1932 to the end of World War II, 1947 to Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat's coup in 1957, and the three time periods 1957-1963, 1963-1973 and 1973-1992.¹¹ At the end of the 1940s and in the beginning of the 1950s, the army had weakened the king's power by putting together a government that was administrated by military forces. However, in 1957 the armed forces and the monarchy decided to join forces, mainly to protect the country against their enemies and to prevent political instability in Thailand.¹² Since the coup in 1932, the army has developed over those past decades and according to senior officers within the army there is currently potential to establish democratic governance. General Prayuth Chan-ocha has often stated that to maintain democracy in Thailand, the army needs to protect the Thai monarchy. This is the army's greatest mission, which is designed to protect the system of the constitutional monarchy. On the other hand, it is difficult to separate the king as the institution and the king as a person. That means that the army is required to protect the king as a person and as an institution. After the coup in 2006 the government and the army joined forces to protect Thailand. It was decided between 2009 and 2010 that the government of then Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and the army would work together to suppress the Red Shirt protests, which was aimed at disrupting the summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Thailand. The protesters broke into a building where ASEAN summit took place, forcing all ASEAN leaders to evacuate to a safer place. The protest lasted for days, which ended when army troops were deployed to surround the protest site. For years, senior officers in the army have questioned politician's competence in matters of national security and defense. Senior officers in the army have believed that politicians

¹¹ Suchit Bunbongkarn, „The Armed Forces and Democratic Development in Thailand,“ í *Military Engagement: Influencing Armed Forces Worldwide to Support Democratic Transitions*, 1. útg., ritstj. Dennis C. Blair (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 165-166

¹² Paul Chambers, *Under the Boot: Military-Civil Relations in Thailand since the 2014 Coup* (Chiang Mai: Southeast Asia Research Centre, 2016), 2

haven't been competent in areas of national defense and security. The army has also argued that civilian politicians might try to take control of the army and that no one outside the armed forces has the expertise to appoint high-ranking officers. Since the 2006 coup, the army has tried to improve relations between the armed forces, the civilian government and society, without success.¹³

¹³ Suchit Bunbongkarn, „The Armed Forces and Democratic Development in Thailand,” 175-181

3.0 History of military coup d'état in Thailand

The year 1932 was important for Thailand (better known as Siam at the time), when a coup d'état, best known as the Siamese revolution of 1932, was staged by the People's Party, a small group of military officers. The coup was a major turning point in Thai politics when Thailand went from being an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. This was important for the Thai government, as it changed the whole political system in Thailand. In the second half of 1931 officers and civil servants decided to team up with some senior army officials to overthrow the government. The two most important figures in the 1932 coup were the military leaders Phot Phahonyothin and Thep Phanthumasen. Just months before the coup, a rumor had been circulating that some government officials were plotting to overthrow the government. This was based on an old prophecy that Phra Phutthayotfa Chulalok (King Rama I) had made in the 18th century about his dynasty where he predicted that his family would only rule for 150 years. It was not until the night of June 23rd in 1932 when the army officers decided to overthrow the Thai government by surprise. Already in the morning of the following day, most of the high-ranking officials had been taken hostage. King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) received a message from the coup leaders about the fallen government and was asked to return to Bangkok. Days after the coup, the coup leaders met up with King Rama VII, who was generally happy about the overthrowing of the government and accepted the coup leader's idea of a new constitution. The new constitution would give the newly made National Assembly executive authority. The position of Prime Minister of Thailand was established and Phraya Manopakorn Nititada, the leader of the People's Party, became Prime Minister.¹⁴ In the following decades the country went through an increasing democratization, which led to a dramatic economy growth and advances in technology. Between the 1950s and the 1980s, the military had to intervene to maintain the peace in the country. In the late 1950s a successful coup, led by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, was made to overthrow the government.¹⁵ And in the aftermath Field Marshal Sarit rose to power and took the title of prime minister. Sarit soon realized the Army lacked cohesiveness because of political instability. In 1958, a year after Sarit's inauguration; he staged a new coup against his own government and the country's National Assembly. By staging a new coup, the Thai

¹⁴ B. J. Terwiel, *Thailand's Political History: From the 13th Century to Recent Times*, endurskoðuð útgáfa (Bangkok: River Books Press Dist A C, 2011), 258-259

¹⁵ Nguyen o.fl., *Thailand in Crisis: Scenarios and Policy Responses* (Washington: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2014), 1-3

Royal Army would grow stronger. Soon after the coup, Sarit realized that the Army needed an ideology to strengthen the military even further. This made Thailand a conservative country, with leads to consolidated bureaucratic rule, abolished constitutionalism, and limited political activities.¹⁶

Between 1960 and 1980, the military staged a numerous of coups but not all of them were successful. During that period, most of the coups were peaceful, but the 1976 coup was the most terrifying in Thai history. While the military was planning the coup, a fight between leftist and rightist students broke out at Thammasat University in Bangkok. The cause of the fight was that Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn had returned to Thailand after a three-year exile. Following this surprise return from exile, some activist students demanded that Field Marshal Thanom should be arrested and sentenced to prison for his crimes. On the morning of October 6th, nearly four thousand students came to the Thammasat University campus to protest the return of Field Marshal Thanom. While protesting, a bloody fight broke out between the students and the military forces. By the evening of the massacre, a small military group announced that they had been planning to overthrow the government for some time and had already taken the control of the government. Seni Pramoj, who was Prime Minister at the time, was placed under house arrest for his part in the protest and the 1974 constitution was abolished. The King formed a new government which was led by Thanin Kraivichien, a judge at the Supreme Court of Thailand. The following years would be difficult for the new Prime Minister, because of the country's highly polarized political situation and its poor economic development. When Thanin became Prime Minister, he turned his attention to these problems.¹⁷ In 1981, the Royal Army decided to stage an unsuccessful coup against the government. The Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda was asked to lead the coup against his own government but refused. Right before the coup took place, Prem was summoned by Queen Sirikit Kitiyakara, where they talked about the planned coup. It was decided that Prem would negotiate with the coup leaders. The following day Prem went with the Royal family to Khorat to negotiate with the leaders of the Royal Army. The presence of the Royal family was critical of the Prime Minister because it would give him political support from the army. While Prem was negotiating with the coup leaders, he decided to send the 21st infantry regiment to Bangkok to arrest the coup leading forces. The original plan for the coup was to consolidate

¹⁶ Suchit Bunbongkarn, „The military and democracy in Thailand“ í *The Military and Democracy in Asia and the Pacific*, 1. útg., ritstj. R.J. May og Viberto Selochan (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2004), 48-49

¹⁷ R. Sean Randolph, *United States and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics, 1950-1985* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies), 203-204

the government if they had Prem as their leader. From the 21st infantry regiment point of view, the government would have been politically stronger if Prem would have listened to the advice given by the Royal Army, but he chose not to listen their advice.¹⁸ From the late 1980s to the late 1990s, Thai politics were generally stable and few coups were attempted. During the 1990s, only one coup was attempted. The coup in 1991 brought the National Peace Keeping Council to the fore and their main task was to fight against the country's corruption. The coup leaders accused the Thai government of massive corruption and condemned them to exile. The National Peace Keeping Council elected Anand Panyarachun to become Prime Minister for a year.¹⁹ A year later general elections were held, where Samakhhi Tham, a military supported party, won the election. General Suchinida Kraparayun was voted as Prime Minister, even though he had promised that he would not become the next Prime Minister of Thailand. After the elections, a massive protest broke out in Bangkok, where the protesters didn't like the idea of yet another military dictatorship. After days of protests it finally came to an end when King Bhumibol Adulyadej had to intervene to prevent further difficulties in the country. The king summoned Prime Minister Suchinida Kraparayun and the leader of the protest, Chamlong Srimuang, to the royal palace, where he demanded that they put an end to the protests. After the meeting, General Suchinida Kraparayun resigned as Prime Minister and new elections were held in September of 1992.²⁰ One of the most recent military coups in Thailand was in mid-2006, when the military staged an unsuccessful coup against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, despite his popularity with the Thai people. This was the first non-constitutional change of government in 15 years. Thaksin's party *Thai Rak Thai* (Thais Love Thais) had won both elections in 2001 and 2005, and he became the first and only Prime Minister in Thai history to serve a full four-year term. A year after his second victory, a coup was attempted because the political elite in Thailand were concerned that his political strength would intensify. The elite accused Thaksin of disrespecting the King and corruption against the Thai nation. This coup was quite different from other coups because this one was meant to protect the political interests of the Thai Royal Army.²¹ The Thai Royal Army decided to orchestrate a coup against the government while Thaksin was attending a

¹⁸ Yoshifumi Tamada, „Coups in Thailand, 1980-1991: Classmates, Internal Conflicts and Relations with the Government of the Military,” *Southeast Asian Studies*, 33, nr. 3 (1995): 321-322

¹⁹ Terwiel, *Thailand's Political History: From the 13th Century to Recent Times*, 282-283

²⁰ Supasawad Chardchawarn, *Local Governance in Thailand: The Politics of Decentralization and the Roles of Bureaucrats, Politicians, and the People* (Chiba: The Institute of Developing Economies, 2010), 11

²¹ Pavin Chachavalpongpun, "Good Coup" Gone Bad: Thailand's Political Developments since Thaksin's Downfall" í *"Good Coup" Gone Bad: Thailand's Political Developments since Thaksin's Downfall*, 1. útg., ritstj. Pavin Chachavalpongpun (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2014), 3-5

meeting at the United Nations' General Assembly, in New York. During the coup, under the leadership of General Sonti Boonyaratgalin, the Royal Army declared Martial law and arrested Thaksin's allies. Thaksin went to a self-proclaimed exile to avoid a two-year jail sentence. The Army then appointed General Sonti as acting Prime Minister, who promised to hold an election in the following year.²² The main cause of the 2006 coup was that there had been a political conflict between Thaksin's opponents and his supporters, which had deeply divided the country. The military knew that Thaksin's supporters, which were known as Red Shirts, were a serious threat to the monarchy, and they believed that the Red Shirts had been planning to adversely affect the monarchy. Moreover, the Thai military believed that Thaksin was planning on a one-party rule in Thailand to control all government agencies, including the army.²³

3.1 Yet another coup is staged

In November 2013, a massive protest broke out in Bangkok when an Amnesty bill was submitted to the National Legislative Assembly, which protects Thaksin Shinawatra against any charges that leveled against him. The protests escalated when current Prime Minister and sister of Thaksin, Yingluck Shinawatra, was being charged for her role in a rice subsidy program three years prior. After months of absolute chaos, the protests intensified when they moved into central Bangkok, where protesters organized a campaign to "occupy Bangkok".²⁴ Just two months after the protests broke out, Yingluck decided to call for new elections. Most the protesters refused to hold new elections, accusing her of being a puppet of her self-exiled brother. Yingluck Shinawatra had called for an election on February 2nd and some protesters were aware that she could win the elections, because of her support in the north and north-east of Thailand, and wanted her to step down and to be replaced by an appointed "people's council" to push through electoral reforms.²⁵

In early May 2014, the Constitutional Court found Yingluck guilty of abusing her powers as Prime Minister and compelled her to leave office while the Deputy Prime Minister

²² Chunjuan Nancy Wei, „Democratic Paradox: What Has Gone Wrong in Thailand?“, *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* 31 (2009): 298

²³ Suchit Bunbongkarn, „The Armed Forces and Democratic Development in Thailand,“ í *Military Engagement*, ritstj. Dennis C. Blair (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 176

²⁴ Rick Derrah, „Bangkok from 2005 to 2014: The Politics of Protest,“ *Journal of Policy Studies* 46 (2014): 4

²⁵ Amy Sawitta Lefevre, „Thai anti-government protesters march to support Bangkok "shutdown",“ fréttatilkynning, 7. janúar 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-protest-idUSBREA0605V20140107> (sótt 7. janúar 2017)

of Thailand, Niwatthamrong Boonsongpaisan, replaced her as Prime Minister.²⁶ On May the 22nd, after months of protest, General Prayuth Chan-o-cha carried out the country's 12th successful coup d'état. Just a few hours after the military took control, General Prayuth addressed the Thai nation on national television. He announced that the Thai army had assumed control of national administration, because the military had launched a coup against the government. General Prayuth would govern the country as Prime Minister until a new candidate would be found.²⁷ According to some military leaders, the coup was intended to safeguard the monarchy and to stop the country's violence and to seek a way out of the country's crisis. Since the military coup, the NCPO has worked with the Royal family and the Privy Council of Thailand, to ensure the country's parallel state of monarchy, undergirded by the Royal army, remains unhindered. To achieve popularity with the Thai nation, the newly formed military junta (the NCPO) sought out to dilute populist policies. The idea was to bring General Prayuth closer to the Thai nation, as he criticized the previous regime while praising, at the same time, the expected accomplishments of the new dictatorship itself. This was made in a weekly address, which was broadcasted both via television and radio. In those weekly addresses, the military junta expressed their loyalty to the king and reconciliation under the monarchy. A few weeks after the coup Scott Marciel, a United States government official, stated that the United States would impress upon Thailand's military leaders the urgent need to restore the country's democracy, while at the same time strengthening the United States-Thai alliance. As expected, the United States government condemned the coup and urged the Thai junta to immediately restore civilian rule by holding elections as soon as possible, as well as to release political detainees and respect fundamental civil and human rights. Senior United States officials have said that United States-Thai relations cannot return to normal until full democracy has been restored and fear that the alliance between Thailand and the United States would shatter over the next couple of years. The United States-Thai military cooperation has also been sensational, because it has been the main victim of the military coup. Since the coup, the United States government has withheld \$4.7 million in military and security aid to Thailand, which includes foreign military financing, International Military Education and Training and Peacekeeping Operations funding. This has put further pressure in their relationship, since the Thai military relies in (large parts) on this

²⁶ Chambers, *Under the Boot: Military-Civil Relations in Thailand since the 2014 Coup*, 9

²⁷ Sathid Boonmuang og fleiri,, „The Current Political Scenario in Thailand in Military Perspective,” í *Globalization and Nation-States: Dynamics and Implications of the Inter-Actions between Government, Business & Civil Society*, ritstj. Abubakar Eby Hara og Shamsuddin L. Taya (School of International Studies: Sintok-Kedah, 2014), 364-365

funding. The United States also decided to cancel the United States-Thai bilateral naval exercises under the annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training program and disinvite the Royal Thai Navy from the 2014 Rim of the Pacific exercise, which was highly criticized by General Prayuth and the Thai Royal Army.²⁸ Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, issued a statement where he was concerned over the military coup and called for a prompt return to constitutional, civilian, democratic rule.²⁹

The military coup's fundamental objective was to maintain the power position of the traditional elite at this critical period leading up to the royal succession. When the coup took place, the military had relied on three strategies. The first one was to eliminate the supposed threat of Thaksin and Yingluck Shinawatra from politics. The second one was to crackdown on supporters of Thaksin, who identified themselves as Red Shirts and third one was discrediting electoral politics as a source of corruption and dirty politics. The coup, under the leadership of General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, was considered legitimate, as King Bhumibol Adulyadej gave his blessing to the army to overthrow the previous regime. It had been reported by the Thai media the military junta had embarked on dismantling the Red Shirt networks in northern Thailand, but that part of the country had served as major power centers for Thaksin when he served as Prime Minister. Many core Red Shirt members had their houses searched and properties seized. Some village leaders in the north, which the military believed to be Red Shirt members, were abducted and locked up without any trial. The army did this, because they didn't want to repeat the mistake they made in the 2006 coup.³⁰ Just before the military coup, Yingluck had promised that a general election would be held in 2014. After the NCPO came to power, the idea of having general elections was pushed aside, while General Prayuth proclaimed a three-phase roadmap to reach an elected government and to “establish” fully-functioning democratic country. To pursue the three-phase roadmap, the NCPO established three legislative bodies, the NLA, the NRC and the CDC. Together, with the cabinet, would be known as “Five Rivers of Reform”. The NCPO

²⁸ Ian Storey, *Thailand's post-coup relations with China and America: more Beijing, less Washington* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing), 3-7

²⁹ The United Nations, „Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Thailand,“ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2014-05-22/statement-attributable-spokesman-secretary-general-thailand> (sótt 23. mars 2017)

³⁰ Chachavalpongpun, „The Politics of International Sanctions: The 2014 Coup in Thailand,“ 177-178

announced, after weeks of controversy, that the general elections would be postponed by an indefinite time, or until the government finds time to hold a general election.³¹

³¹ The International Crisis Group, *Thailand's Lengthening Roadmap to Elections* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2015), 5-6

4.0 Thailand's democratic system under military rule

Thailand's modern political system is based on the framework of a constitutional monarchy since 1932, where the Prime Minister is the head of government and the king is head of state. Since then Thai politics have been tainted by the military. The protests in 2013 and the coup in 2014 had a major impact on Thailand, because they caused both political and economic distress in the country.³² Just days before the military coup was made, the coups leader General Prayuth Chan-o-cha declared the installment of the Martial Law Act of 1914, when the Thai Senate refused to appoint an unelected Prime Minister. General Prayuth claimed that it was necessary to use those laws to stop the protesters vandalizing governmental properties and to bring peace back to Thailand. General Chan-o-cha first two acts as a martial law enforcer, was when he established the Peace-Keeping Command Centre and he dissolved the government's Centre for the Administration of Peace and Order, which Yingluck Shinawatra founded under the Internal Security Act.³³ During the first year after the coup, the NCPO relied mostly on the martial law to prohibit public demonstrations, restrict media freedom, shut down academic and other public meetings, make arbitrary arrests, and detain anyone they deemed an enemy for up to a week.³⁴ Just after the coup in 2014, General Prayuth and the NCPO invoked two articles which are part of Thailand's Criminal code, i.e. Articles 112 and 116. Both of these articles have been used prior to the coup, but not to the same extent as the current government have used them. Article 112 clearly states that whoever insults or threatens the royal family must be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years. Following the coup, the use of Article 112 has increased and there are at least 51 new cases pending in the criminal and military courts, including crimes such as threats against the Royal family on social media and to sending anti-monarchy text messages. In 2015, two university students were sentenced to two and a half years in prison for performing *The Wolf Bride*, a satirical play, in 2013. The military considered the play to be insulting to the monarchy, and that the play was a violation to Article 112. On the other hand, Article 116 states that whoever makes *apparent to the public by words, writing or any other means anything which is not an act within the purpose of the Constitution* will be sentenced

³² Naruemon Thabchumpon o.fl., „The Polarization of Thai Democracy: The Asian Democracy Index in Thailand,“ *Asian Democracy Review* 3 (2014): 66-67

³³ Chambers, *Under the Boot: Military-Civil Relations in Thailand since the 2014 Coup*, 9

³⁴ Tyrell Haberkorn, „Repression, Resistance, and the Law in Post-Coup Thailand,“ *Current History* 114, nr. 773 (september 2015): 241-242

to be imprisoned for seven years.³⁵ According to the media, Article 116 was only used four times, but after the coup there have been at least ten cases which involved 25 people. In some of those cases defendants were accused of distributing leaflets criticizing the coup in 2014. Those who are against the military junta have criticized General Prayuth and the NCPO of invoking the two articles of Thailand's Criminal code. Many of those who are accused of violating Article 116 are granted bail, even though there have been no decisions taken in any of the cases. A year after the coup, members of the Resistant Citizen group, an anti-junta activist group, filed a 20-page criminal complaint against General Prayuth and the members of the NCPO for overthrowing the previous government. The group specified in numerous ways how the coup in 2014 was in violation of existing Thai law. A week later the Criminal Court dismissed the complaint against the NCPO, ruling that Prayuth and the members of the NCPO cannot be held liable for their actions, even though the coup was not seen as democratic.³⁶ A few days later the military had dissolved the Parliament (which is also known as the House of Representatives), imposed a curfew and restricted media outlets. After the military had seized power General Prayuth announced that he had established the National Council for Peace and Order, which would rule Thailand, as well as the National Legislative Assembly, which acted as an apparent legislature for the NCPO. Later that year, the National Legislative Assembly elected General Prayuth as the new permanent Prime Minister.³⁷ Along with the National Legislative Assembly, the NCPO also established two other institutions, which were designed to create laws and a new constitution for Thailand. There were the National Reform Council (NRC), which was designed to put general recommendations for the new constitution and a 36-member Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC), which was actually charged with drafting the new constitution.³⁸ Shortly after the military came to power in May 2014, the NCPO revoked the 2007 constitution and made a temporary one, which meant that the military had absolute governmental power. The year after, the NCPO announced that the Constitutional Drafting Committee had begun to draft a new constitution, which was later rejected by the government. A second draft was ready the following year and was approved by the Thai government. The new constitution would be more voluminous than previous constitutions and this would be in fact the country's

³⁵ Haberkorn, „Repression, Resistance, and the Law in Post-Coup Thailand,” 242

³⁶ Sama heimils 242-243

³⁷ Emma Chanlett-Avery, Ben Dolven, Wil Mackey, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations*, 2-3

³⁸ Chambers, *Under the Boot: Military-Civil Relations in Thailand since the 2014 Coup*, 13

21st constitution since Thailand became a constitutional monarchy in 1932.³⁹ The new constitution states that the NCPO will get to select 194 out of the 250 senators in Thailand's Senate, and six seats that would be reserved for the military. The Senate will be granted veto power over the House of Representatives of revoking the current constitution. In addition, the Thai Senate could select the Prime Minister only if the members of the lower house and the Thai senate approves the nomination.⁴⁰ Many Thai civilians have criticized the constitution, where they think that it gives the military junta too much power. The military junta has deemed those critics as traitor and opinions about the constitution as false information and a threat to national security. The only source of information about the draft constitution now comes from government agencies. Furthermore, the military junta has ignored calls from the United Nations and foreign governments to respect people's rights to express their views on the newly drafted constitution. The NCPO stated that those who try to violate the constitution will face imprisonment of up to 10 years and/or will be fined up to 200,000 baht.⁴¹ A national referendum was then on August 7th 2016, where the military-written constitution was approved with 62% of the votes. According to military supporters, the constitution would restore stability, but those who criticize the constitution say it will entrench military control.⁴² In the beginning of 2016, General Prayuth announced that the next general election would be in 2017. Since the constitutional referendum, the European Union and the United States have called for the government to hold elections as soon as possible. Last elections in Thailand were held in 2011.⁴³

4.1 The tragic death of King Bhumibol Adulyadej

On October 13, 2016, King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) died after a period of failing health at the age of 88. This could have become a crucial turning point for the military junta, as the King is head of state and the military. After his death, the royal family announced that the

³⁹ David Hutt, „Draft Thai constitution threatens to cement military might,” fréttatilkynning, 6. júlí 2016. <http://sea-globe.com/thai-constitution-referendum/> (sótt 12. ágúst 2016)

⁴⁰ Mong Palatino, „Say Hello to Thailand's New Constitution. And Say Hello Again to Thailand's Military Rule,” fréttatilkynning, 22. ágúst 2016. <https://globalvoices.org/2016/08/22/say-hello-to-thailands-new-constitution-and-say-hello-again-to-thailands-military-rule/> (sótt 22. ágúst 2016)

⁴¹ The Human Right Watch, „Thailand: Army Detains Referendum Critics,” *hrw.org*, 29. júlí 2016 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/29/thailand-army-detains-referendum-critics> (sótt 16. október 2016)

⁴² BBC, „Thai referendum: Military-written constitution approved,” *bbc.com*, 7. ágúst <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36972396> (sótt 23. janúar 2017)

⁴³ Al Jazeera, „Thailand to hold elections in 2017: junta chief,” *aljazeera.com*, 9. ágúst 2016 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/thailand-hold-elections-2017-junta-chief-160809084208337.html> (sótt 17. nóvember 2016)

Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn would become the next King of Thailand. A few days later, the Crown Prince told the Thai nation that he would delay his coronation to mourn his father. Prem Tinsulanonda, who served as Prime Minister from 1980 to 1988, would serve as regent of Thailand until Maha Vajiralongkorn ascended the throne. After the king's death, the prime minister encouraged all government officials to mourn his death for a whole year. He also urged the Thai people to refrain from holding any celebrations or parties during that period.⁴⁴ In late November, it was announced that that the Thai junta had formally invited Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn to ascend the throne and thereby succeed his late father. The Crown Prince would ascend the throne on December 1st and by ascending the throne he would become the tenth king of the Chakri dynasty and would be known as King Rama X. Maha Vajiralongkorn would be the oldest Thai King to ascend the throne at age of 64.⁴⁵

4.2 The NCPO's main tasks after the 2014 military coup

On the day of the coup, the junta and the NCPO announced that they would restrict media activities and prevent news that was reported by independent media. The junta made more than ten announcements and orders that targeted the media and online information in the following months. This was done to prevent false and distorted circulation of news and information to the general public. Some of the announcements concerned freedom of information and the media was warned not to publish news that might threaten the national security. The NCPO decided the following day to invite the news editors of 18 media outlets, including some Thai-language and English-language dailies, to ensure that the junta's announcements were having the required deterrent effect. Several journalists and editors were arrested as the junta believed that those journalists would harm their image. Those included Thanapol Eawsakul, the editor of *Fah Diew Gan* (e. Same Sky magazine) and Pravit Rojanaphruk, a well-known journalist in Thailand. Other announcements that targeted the media instructed all of the country's TV and radio stations to suspend all programming at once. Two days before the military coup, soldiers stormed the studios of 10 TV channels and stopped them from broadcasting. Groups of soldiers were then temporarily stationed outside

⁴⁴ Danielle Belopotosky, „What the Death of Thailand's King Means, and What's Next,” fréttatilkynning, 13. október 2016 http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/14/world/asia/thailand-king-death.html?_r=1 (sótt 17. október 2016)

⁴⁵ Boonradom Chitradon, „King of Thailand: Eccentric Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn receives parliamentary invite to become country's next monarch,” fréttatilkynning, 29. nóvember 2016 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/king-of-thailand-prince-maha-vajiralongkorn-parliamentary-invite-next-monarch-a7445131.html> (sótt 16. febrúar 2017)

some media outlets. Besides targeting already published news, the junta decided to ban certain articles prior to publication. Unlicensed radio stations were ordered to suspend their broadcasting and by the end of May, nearly 3,000 illegal radio stations were completely shut down by the army. The junta ordered broadcasters, including some TV stations, to shut down, but instead of blank TV screens, the junta ordered all TV stations to broadcast NCPO announcements, to pressure the public that no other coup d'état was under way.⁴⁶

Just days after the Thai military seized power, they blocked hundreds of websites which were considered to be a threat to national security. One of those webpages was Facebook, which was temporarily blocked for around two hours in order to silence the anti-coup protest.

Although the NCPO denied all allegations concerning internet censorship, Surachai Srisaracam, a permanent secretary at the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, stated that they had blocked websites like Facebook, and they would meet with other social media executives, like Twitter and ask for cooperation. This was highly criticized by some protesters, who demanded that the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology unblocked those websites. Many of these websites were blocked because they violated the so-called lèse-majesté law. The lèse-majesté law in Thailand states that it is illegal to insult or threaten the king or other members of the royal family. The law dates to 1908 when Thailand was still under absolute rule of the monarchy.⁴⁷ When the military imposed the martial law on the country, they decided to open an NCPO Facebook account that would aid the military junta to secure their future monopoly of communication. It was then later reported by the NCPO that General Prayuth would have a weekly TV show, entitled *Returning Happiness to Thailand*, which he dedicated to subject how the junta had done since the coup. He also discussed the work his administration had done since they took over. In the first couple of shows, General Prayuth talked about why the military had to overthrow Yingluck Shinawatra's government.⁴⁸

In December 2016, a new cyber-crime law was passed by the Thai parliament. The newly reformed law is an updated version of the 2007 Computer Crimes Act and it was passed with 167 votes and five abstentions. Some non-governmental organizations, right-wing groups and anti-governmental groups have harshly criticized the law, as the law mainly prohibits the freedom of expression on the web. These groups have urged Thailand's new

⁴⁶ Benjamin Ismaïl, *Media hounded by junta since 2014 coup*, (Paris: Reporters without Borders, 2016), 7-9

⁴⁷ Pinkaew Laungaramsri, „Mass surveillance and the militarization of cyberspace in post-coup Thailand,” *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies* 9, nr. 2 (2016): 201-202

⁴⁸ Ismaïl, *Media hounded by junta since 2014 coup*, 10

king Maha Vajiralongkorn not to sign the law, as it violates the human rights of freedom of speech. The key factor of the new cyber-crime law was that the junta would be allowed to monitor the web and suppress any kind of criticism. According to the government, the Computer Crimes Act had to be modernized, but some right-wing pointed out that the cyber-crime law is nothing more than a vaguely-worded version of the Computer Crimes Act, thus allowing the government to broaden the scope of surveillance and censorship powers. Furthermore, the law also states that if a person allocates false information on the web that could potentially harm national security, public safety or public infrastructure that same person can be sentenced to up to five years in prison. The law also gives the authorities the authority to request users and traffic data from internet service providers without any court warrant. But probably one of the most controversial additions to the revised law is the formation of a five-person committee, whose task it is to seek court approvals to remove online content that is considered a breach of *public morals*.⁴⁹

Just days after the coup, the NCPO and the military carried out a series of mass summons and arrests, which included arrests of people at their homes or public summons through broadcast orders. Under the martial law, which was declared during the coup and was active until April 2014, the military was allowed to detain any individual for seven days without trial. Since the 2014 coup, 577 were summoned by the military junta and 288 people have been arrested. Out of these 859 people, 402 have been linked with the Red shirts or the *Pheu Thai* party of the ousted government. The NCPO refuses to release the number of individuals that have been summoned or arrested and not everyone who is summoned chooses to report to the NCPO. Those that choose not to report the NCPO are often reported to the military court and they can get two years in prison and/or a forty thousand baht fine if found guilty. Prior to this, the NCPO announced that those who do not share the council's opinions and dissents in any way are their enemies. These include the Red shirt movement, former political prisoners, and dissident thinkers. Kritstheuda Khunasen, who has worked with political prisoners since 2010, had been arrested just days after the coup. She accused the soldiers of repeatedly hitting and punching her, while she was being interrogated. The military junta denied those accusations and said that Kritstheuda's disclosures were swift and intended to both discredit and intimidate her.⁵⁰ While the military was arresting those who

⁴⁹ Channel Newsasia, „Thailand passes controversial cyber-crime law,” *channelnewsasia.com*, 16. desember 2017 <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/thailand-passes-controversial-cyber-crime-law/3372796.html> (sótt 13. febrúar 2017)

⁵⁰ Tyrell Haberkorn, „Martial Law and the Criminalization of Thought in Thailand,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 12, nr. 40 (október 2014): 2-4

where against the newly reformed government, the NCPO established a Peace Maintaining Force (PMF), and their main goal is to arrest any person who defied the junta's orders, including anti-coup protest leaders perceived by the junta as insurgents. The PMF was also intended to search out potential caches of war weapons and to attempt to connect with rural people to convey to them the NPCO's strategy and ideas. The PMF is mainly composed of soldiers from all over Thailand, as well as the Special Warfare Command and the Army Air Defense Command.⁵¹ A year after General Prayuth declared martial law on Thailand; the government decided to provoke the martial law but instead invoked Article 44 of the 2014 interim constitution, which gives the Prime Minister the power to take any action he deems necessary for the preservation of the country. This meant that the Prime Minister could arrest those who he thought were a threat to Thailand. During the regimes between the 1950s and the 1970s similar measures were used to authorize executions as well as extensive detention. Since Article 44 was invoked it has never been used for summary executions, but instead it has been used to ban public demonstrations, authorize arbitrary detentions and to facilitate the transfer and appointment of civil servants without due process.⁵²

One of the first major projects that the NCPO launched in Thailand after the military junta seized power, was to address issues of order affecting urban life. Just over a month after the coup, several plans were made in the largest cities in Thailand. These plans included reorganizing and regulating taxes, forcing thousands of vans and street vendors from the streets and leading to the arrests of foreign workers. Meanwhile, in several provinces in all four regions of Thailand, a plan was made to resolve disputes over national forest areas. The first step was to reclaim several large forests. The Prime Minister issued an NCPO order, namely order NO.64/201, regarding the suppression and cessation of encroachment on and the destruction of forest resources. The order will allow state agencies to arrest people who encroach on, seize, possess or cause damage to forests. State agencies would also be allowed to remove any trespassers on national reserve land. A master plan was introduced shortly after, by the Internal Security Operations Command and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. The plan resolves the problems of forest destruction. The principle objective of this effort is to increase forest coverage from 32% of the country's area to 40% within ten years. In 2015, the Thai National Police announced that

⁵¹ Chambers, *Under the Boot: Military-Civil Relations in Thailand since the 2014 Coup*, 11

⁵² Haberkorn, „Repression, Resistance, and the Law in Post-Coup Thailand,” 242

during the first six months of the implementation of Order No. 64/2014 that 2569 people were accused of violating the order.⁵³

The NCPO has also made plans to strengthen the country's economy by developing economic policies similar to the populist projects first implemented during the reign of the Thaksin Shinawatra administration. Unlike other developing countries, Thailand is particularly sensitive to sanctions because it is highly subjected to international trade with other countries and exports most of its crucial commodities such as rice, automobiles, and electronics. Ever since the military junta's influence in Thailand has grown, the council has provided various economic benefits to the population. This was done to procure loyalty and satisfaction among the Thai people and was a key element in maintaining stability and power. The NCPO has also ordered payments to poor farmers under a rice program, which was established under the deposed Yingluck government. Throughout the years, the efficacy of Thailand's economic plans has depended on how Western governments respond to the lack of democratic freedoms in the country. Therefore, Western sanctions have had a major impact on the Thai economy. This could even trigger the Thai people and may challenge yet another military rule in the future. It has been considered by some Western countries that if human rights get worse, the economic sanctions in Thailand could get intensified, which could shift the political dynamic in the country.⁵⁴ Just after the coup, the economic growth rate was measured less than 1%, where the investment and government spending, and the business and consumer confidence were negatively affected. With the return of political stability in 2015, the economic growth rate went up to 2.5%, mainly because of the increased domestic demand and higher government consumption. The increased public spending since 2015 has been expected to increase public deficits slightly in 2015 and 2016, as an expansion of the tax base would generate additional revenues. In addition, the military junta rice purchase programs of the former government, which proved to be a serious liability for the current government.⁵⁵ Just two weeks after the coup, the NCPO turned to China, who has been Thailand's ally for decades. This was done to stem the effects of the sanctions that the West had put on Thailand. General Prayuth met with Chinese business leaders to discuss trading opportunities between Thailand and China. This meeting between the two countries was perceived as a symbolic gesture that the NCPO had enjoyed from China for its needed

⁵³ Puangthong Pawakapan, „Thai Junta Militarizes the Management of Natural Resources,“ *ISEAS Perspective* 47 (2015): 3-4

⁵⁴ Chachavalpongpun, „The Politics of International Sanctions: The 2014 Coup in Thailand,“ 170

⁵⁵ Atradius, *Atradius Country Report: Asia Pacific – January 2016*, (Amsterdam: Atradius N.V., 2016), 33

legitimacy. China's role as a legitimacy provider to the NCPO meant a lot to the Thai government, because of the strong relations that the countries have. The relationship between China and Thailand has grown over the last century; partly because the Thai government has been willing to keep their Chinese counterparts happy. In contrast, China has been a market for Thai products, which has served as a source for the kingdom's direct foreign investment. China has also readily embraced the Thai junta, whereas the promotion of democracy has never been on the agenda with the Chinese authorities.⁵⁶

In January 2017, some governmental officials reported that the general elections in late-2017 would prevent future military coup d'état. On the other hand, some political activists were skeptical if the elections would take place at all. These political activists claimed that they have been grown accustomed to the military meddling in Thailand's attempts to become a democratic country. Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan announced that the 2017 elections might have to be postponed by a year because the government was afraid that the Constitution would not be ready for the 2017 elections.⁵⁷ Two days later, the Thai junta reported that the general elections would be postponed until early 2018 due to the death of Bhumibol Adulyadej. A senior government official confirmed that the elections would take place in 2018 and the juntas' roadmap to democracy. However, the NCPO would need to adjust their future plans because of the cremation of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the coronation of Maha Vajiralongkorn, who will be known as King Rama X, which would take place in late-2017.⁵⁸ Just before the senior government official announced that the elections would take place in 2018, the Prime Minister was summoned by Donica Pottie, the Canadian Ambassador to Thailand, to meet with her at the Canadian Embassy. At the meeting, the Prime Minister spoke about the political situation in Thailand. General Prayuth and Donica also talked about the elections and national reforms. This was the first time that the Prime Minister hinted at the fact that the general elections would not be held until 2018. The former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said that he was not worried about the delay, as long as the political roadmap would be intact. Abhisit also commented that the next elections would be held in 2018 if the timeframe for the drafting of Thailand's organic laws was fully utilized. The Constitution Drafting Commission is currently drafting the four organic laws required under

⁵⁶ Chachavalpongpun, „The Politics of International Sanctions: The 2014 Coup in Thailand,” 179-180

⁵⁷ John Walsh, „No Thailand Coup After 2017 Election, Officials Vow,” fréttatilkynning, 3. janúar 2017 <https://www.yahoo.com/news/no-thailand-coup-2017-election-180616378.html> (sótt 5. janúar 2017)

⁵⁸ The Borneo Post, „Thai junta says elections will be held in early 2018,” *theborneopost.com*, 6. janúar 2017 <http://www.theborneopost.com/2017/01/06/thai-junta-says-elections-will-be-held-in-early-2018/> (sótt 7. janúar 2017)

the new constitution for holding general elections. The four laws focus on political parties, the Election Commission, the election of Members of the Thai Parliament, and the appointment of senators. The National Legislative Assembly would only have two months to complete deliberations on these draft laws. Some members of the NCPO have criticized the postponement of the upcoming elections. General Noppadon Inthapanya, a leading member of the NCPO, said that he was surprised that General Prayuth would delay the elections by a year. He believed that General Prayuth should have exercised his power as Prime Minister to make sure that the next election could be held on time, as promised.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The Jakarta Post, „Thailand to hold election early next year: PM,“ *thejakartapost.com*, 6. janúar 2017 <http://www.thejakartapost.com/seasia/2017/01/06/thailand-to-hold-election-early-next-year-pm.html> (sótt 7. janúar 2017)

Conclusion

It is the authors' conclusion that the 2014 military coup had a drastic political impact on the country's democracy. Many nations and institutions condemned the military coup as they considered it to be undemocratic to the country. These include the United States, where Secretary of State John Kerry told that he was disappointed by the military's decision to overthrow the government, and the coup would have a negative consequence on the relations between the United States and Thailand. The author also believes that the 2014 military coup is a *non-democratic coup*, where the military junta refuses to step down as head of government and to hold general election on time. Even though general elections were to be held in Thailand, the military will still be in charge, where the newly military-drafted constitution gives them more power than before the military coup.

After the military takeover in Thailand, the NCPO has caused a lot of damage within Thai politics. The main example is when General Prayuth Chan-o-cha promised to hold the elections as soon as possible, but since he became Prime Minister of Thailand he has postponed holding general elections numerous times. The last elections were held in 2011, where Yingluck Shinawatra won the majority with 265 seats of 500. A couple of months after the protest broke out in late-2013 Yingluck had promised that a general election would be held in 2014, but the idea of holding a general election in the middle of the political chaos was pushed aside by the military. Other examples for the military's influence on politics in Thailand after the coup include their decision to suspend the 2007 constitution and draft a new interim constitution. By revoking the 2007 constitution, it showed that the military had absolute governmental power. The new constitution guaranteed the military more power to govern the country. In addition, it was decided that the National Assembly would be abolished and a new bicameral legislature would be taken over, entitled the National Legislative Assembly (NLA). The newly established bicameral legislature consists of 220 members, that are handpicked by the NCPO and appointed by the king. There was a debate within the political community whether Members of Parliament should be elected by the public or not, but it transpired that they would be handpicked by the military junta. The executive branch was also changed: where the cabinet now consists of 36 ministers, which is appointed by the king after being selected by the NLA. A new constitution was drafted by the Constitutional Drafting Committee, which states that the military junta will remain in power, even if they lose the elections. The constitution also states that the NCPO will get to select 194 out of the 250 senators in Thailand's Senate, where six seats would be reserved for the military. The parliament could also select a suitable candidate as Prime Minister. The candidate doesn't have to be a Member of Parliament or even a politician. Politicians, scholars and those who have opposed the military junta have criticized the new constitution; as they believe that the

constitution gives the military too much power, but those who supported the military junta believe that the constitution will bring political stability to the country. It was decided that a constitutional referendum would be held in the summer of 2016. Those who were against the newly drafted constitution urged people to vote against it, because they believed that it was undemocratic and would have a political impact on the country's democracy. In early August 2016, above mentioned referendum was held, where the constitution was approved with 62% of the votes. This meant that the military would be in power for years to come. Since the early 20th century, the military and the monarchy have worked together to the problems that the country has had to face and, all in all, these two institutes are considered to be good allies. However, the relations between the new king, Rama X, and the NCPO have not been good, especially after the king rejected the new constitution. Many Thai people have since then watched for signs of friction between the military junta and the monarchy, where the king has been linked to populist politicians whom the military has overthrown since 1932.

Although the military coup had a drastic political impact on Thailand, the military has done few good things for the country. The NCPO's main task after the military coup was to help the country recover from the instability of recent years. One of the first projects launched in Thailand after the military coup was to strengthen the country's economy by developing improved economic policies. Just a year after the coup, the economic growth rate went up to 2.5%, mainly because of increased domestic demand and greater government consumption. Another major project that the NCPO did was too was to strengthen the country's urban life. Plans and laws were made to improve the wild life and forests, mainly in rural areas. A major plan was set in motion to increase the country's forest cover from 32% of the country's area to 40% within ten years. However some of the NCPO's projects had implications for the nation. These include the mass summons, where hundreds of people where either summoned by the NCPO or arrested at their homes. This was done because the NCPO wanted to sift out individuals who had opposed the military during the 2014 coup. Although the military had a tremendous impact on Thai politics, their self-proclaimed goal has always been to protect the country against external threats.

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