

Why the British Prefer Fascism in Thailand

by Mike Billington

May 21—The world has watched in amazement as news videos have documented the unfolding of fascism in Thailand over the past week. On May 13, the security chief for the “Red Shirt” protesters, renegade Maj. Gen. Kattiya Sawasdipol, was shot in the head by a sniper while talking to a *New York Times* reporter, only hours after Prime Minister Abhisit Vajjajiva had publicly ordered military snipers to surround the protesters’ barricaded compound in central Bangkok. The Red Shirts, composed primarily of rural and urban poor, who support the policies of deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his allies, were in the ninth week of demonstrations demanding the resignation of the usurper government and the holding of new elections.

Over the six days following the shooting of General Kattiya, snipers picked off another few dozen Red Shirts, killing several journalists, and an Air Force officer in the process, and wounding hundreds. Finally, on May 19, despite public appeals from the U.S., Japan, the UN, and several fellow members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to refrain from using force and to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Red Shirts, the Army was sent into the protesters’ compound with armored vehicles and machine guns, clearing the compound and arresting the Red Shirt leaders.

Many of the enraged protesters immediately went on an arsonous binge, setting fires across Bangkok, while Red Shirt supporters in the north and northeast occupied city halls, burning several to the ground.

The chaos is only beginning. Unfortunately, that is precisely what the British interests behind the Thai monarchical institutions intended. With the world financial system in free fall, the British imperial forces are provoking chaos, for the sake of chaos, in every location they can. In blowing up Thailand, all of Southeast Asia is threatened, and even Asia as a whole.

The State Department Steps In

The U.S. State Department tried to prevent this lunacy. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, in an unusual and forceful gesture, went to Bangkok on May 8, visiting with former cabinet ministers of former Prime Minister Thaksin (now in exile), and with representatives of the Red Shirts. The Thai government went ballistic, denouncing the visit for lending legitimacy to Thaksin, whom they describe as a criminal, and to the Red Shirts, whom they describe as terrorists. Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya (who, ironically, was a leading participant in the anarchist occupation of Thailand’s international airport during the middle class protests which helped to bring down Thaksin in 2006) called in U.S. Ambassador Eric John, demanding an apology for Campbell’s intervention. Both Campbell and John stood their ground, insisting that the U.S. would not take sides, but that a peaceful means to resolve the crisis should be found.

A similar open conflict between U.S. patriotic interests and British imperial interests occurred in neighboring Myanmar (Burma) in 2008. After cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar in May 2008, the British demanded that the military junta in Myanmar allow British military forces—i.e., the former masters of colonial Burma—to enter the country to deliver aid to the victims, and refused to deliver aid under any other conditions. The British even announced their intention to invade militarily—for “humanitarian” reasons.

Patriots in the U.S. military recognized the danger—not from Myanmar, but from the British. Adm. Timothy Keating, head of the U.S. Pacific Command, flew into Yangon on a C-130, shook hands with the military chief, and pledged continuing supplies for the government to distribute to the victims. The British were furious.

Agrarian, or Agro-Industrial

The Thai population knows very well that the King’s privy council (top advisors and protectors of the King), headed by retired Generals Prem Tinsulanonda and Surayud Chulanont, was responsible for the 2006 military coup against Thaksin, followed by the imposition of a dictatorial constitution by a military government headed by Surayud himself. Then, after new elections were held which were won by Thaksin’s allies, the monarchical forces used the cor-



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The bloody ending May 19 of the ten-week protest of Thailand's Red Shirts, who were calling for new elections, was precisely what the British imperial interests behind the Thai monarchy intended.

rupt constitution to depose two popular pro-Thaksin prime ministers—one for the monstrous crime of continuing his popular cooking show on television (it was considered illegal for the prime minister to have a second job), and the other, by disbanding the entire pro-Thaksin party after just one of its officials was convicted of breaking an election law.

Finally, the British-born, Eton- and Oxford-educated Abhisit was maneuvered into power. The mass support among the poor for Thaksin soon coalesced into the Red Shirt protest movement, and demanded new elections.

The British know that the overt turn to fascist repression of these past weeks could well result in such a backlash against the King's privy council, that the monarchy itself could be brought down. While the British love their monarchical allies, they appear to prefer chaos, even at the cost of letting the monarchy go, in the face of the breakdown of the imperial financial institutions. If the Thais truly wish to establish democracy, they will have to find a way to replace the feudal relations which dominate the monarchical structure of government.

Thaksin, a former police official who made a fortune in the telecommunications business, was elected

prime minister in 2001, and reelected in 2005, by the largest majorities in Thai history. He is not anti-monarchy—in fact, it is widely reported that he is close to the Crown Prince, heir to the throne. It is perhaps for that reason that the London *Economist* issued a death threat to the Crown Prince on March 18, claiming that many would like the King to remove him from the succession, but that there are “other, bloodier, predictions of how he might be removed.”

The conflict arose from the fact that Thaksin implemented policies for developing the agro-industrial capacities of Thailand, as opposed to the traditional “self-sufficiency” policies sponsored by the King, based on a static agrarian society, little changed from generation to generation, typical of European colonial practice.

As prime minister, Thaksin initiated a drive to develop the poor agricultural regions of the country through a combination of major infrastructure projects, credits to each village to foster small and medium-sized agro-industries, scholarships for rural youth, a national health plan that guaranteed each citizen access to medical care for less than one dollar per visit, and a war on drugs that broke the stranglehold of the drug mafias (and the banks that controlled them) over



DoD/Helene C. Stikkel

Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, overthrown by a military coup in 2006, was popularly elected twice. Thaksin was hated by the monarchists and their British backers for his commitment to agro-industrial development of the nation.



Russian Presidential Press and Information Service

The reign of Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej may be on its last legs, if the fascist repression of the Red Shirts results in a backlash against the monarchy. The British are willing to accept its ouster as the price for their chaos scenario.

the rural heartland. He also pledged that Thailand would work to develop its much poorer neighbors, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. He became a hero of the poor—and the monarchies of Europe became most concerned.

The Counter-Example of South Korea

In the 1950s, Thailand and South Korea had about the same population and were both relatively poor agrarian economies. The World Bank released a study recommending that both nations would be best served by remaining agrarian in nature, based on traditional farming methods. Thailand's King, and his British-trained advisors and economists, strongly supported this policy, and 60% of the population has remained in relative rural backwardness ever since. Although Thailand has extensive arable land and is one of the world's largest rice exporters, its productivity per hectare is extremely low, which condemns the peasants to relative poverty. What industrialization did take place since that time, was almost entirely concentrated in consumer goods, much of it for export.

South Korea, by contrast, rejected the agrarian model, choosing instead to transform itself into a

modern agro-industrial nation. While launching a national nuclear power development program in the 1960s, the Park Chung-hee regime began the mechanization of agriculture, and developed a government-community cooperation program known as the New Community Movement, which provided villages with the material means for modernization and the building of agro-industries, provided that the community mobilized and educated the population to carry it out themselves. A domestic agricultural machinery industry developed, and soon was able to export machinery across Asia. South Korea's rice productivity

became one of the highest in the world, with over 5 tons/hectare, compared to Thailand's 2.7 tons/hectare today. South Korea is now the 15th-largest economy in the world, and has recently become a major exporter of nuclear power facilities for other developing nations.

Whither Thailand

Thailand now stands in political ruin, with a monarchical/military elite which has rejected democracy in favor of dictatorial institutions, and an economy which is far too dependent on primitive agriculture, tourism, and the sleaze that goes with it. With the simultaneous breakdown of its internal social order, and the rapidly collapsing world financial system, Thailand could face ruin, or take advantage of the crisis to establish a new political/economic structure capable of joining with the emerging Asia-centered infrastructure development policies pursued by China, India, Russia, South Korea, and Japan. The U.S. foreign policy establishment centered on Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, despite the Obama Administration's economic insanity, would welcome such a change.