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Introduction

This book is my first research project on the Thai military. My interest began soon after the coup d'état mounted by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) on 22 May 2014 but my interest was not in the NCPO junta itself, but in the junta's non-military activities. One incident in particular piqued my curiosity: the forced eviction of thousands of families from the forest reserves. Less than a month after the coup d'état, on 14 June 2014, the junta leader General Prayut Chan-o-cha issued an order about encroachment and destruction of forest resources. Several thousand people were forcibly rooted out of forest reserve land immediately. Their crops were destroyed. Several hundred people faced charges. Then, in August, the junta introduced a master plan to resolve the problems of forest destruction, citing encroachment of forest land by small farmers as one of the major causes. The Internal Security Command Operations (ISOC), together with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, was entrusted with the task of determining and implementing a strategy in coordination with other state agencies. The master plan claimed that the principal objective of this effort was to increase the forest coverage in Thailand from 31.57 per cent of the country's total area to 40 per cent within ten years, which meant around 26 million *rai* of land (approximately 10.24 million acres or 4.16 million hectares) had to be expropriated (Internal Security Operations Command and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment 2014, p. 2; *Prachatai*, 15 June 2014; 17 December 2014).

To begin with, it is intriguing that the management of natural resources would become one of the priorities of the military junta. Perhaps even more intriguing is the fact that the forced eviction took place so soon after the coup and that the junta was able to introduce the master plan within a few months, indicating that the military has been deeply involved in the management of forest reserves long before. The question is when and how did this begin and what was the source of the junta's legitimacy for claiming this role (Puangthong 2015b). I asked experts on the Thai

military, staff of non-governmental organizations working with the affected people, and a member of the Phuea Thai party who was an army general in charge of the national security and military affairs. None could give me a satisfactory answer.

The book *Khor Jor Kor: Forest Politics in Thailand* by Oliver Pye (2005) was useful as it provided me with background on a similar incident that had occurred in 1991–92 under the military junta, the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC). Pye's research shows that the military involvement in this area went back to the counterinsurgency period when the idea of development for security was formulated. The main questions that stood out to me while conducting this preliminary research were: why has the military's involvement in natural resource management continued until the present day, and what sort of political or legal legitimacy has the military acquired to justify its role in the area?

Apart from the question of land management, I also wondered what other non-military areas was the Thai military involved with. I found that the military has been very active in a wide range of non-military affairs since the coup d'état in September 2006, which toppled the elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra (February 2001–September 2006). Indeed, it turned out that the origins of their involvement in non-military activities extended back over decades. To my astonishment, ISOC often appeared in these activities after the 2006 coup.

The main duty of ISOC (its original name was the Communist Suppression Operations Command or CSOC) is to carry out intelligence, ideological, psychological and political programmes in the name of internal security. It is known to have employed both violence and propaganda techniques during the counterinsurgency period against student, peasant and worker movements. Importantly, ISOC is not officially a branch of the military, but rather falls under the authority of the Prime Minister Office. Hence, it looks like a civilian agency. However, this is only nominal as the army has managed and controlled ISOC from its inception in 1965 until the present day, with army officers holding key positions across the organization. It is not an exaggeration to claim that ISOC is the political wing of the military.

ISOC's activities became increasingly visible again when the country was engulfed in the polemics of colour-coded politics. Some of its activities at this time were reminiscent of its role in the Cold War era, including establishment of mass surveillance of political dissidents, remobilization and expansion of the ISOC-controlled mass organizations, and threats to and coercion of political opponents. Other of its activities appeared new,

such as forcing people from forest reserve areas and narcotic suppression. Below are some examples of these activities.

In March 2009, during the government of Abhisit Vejjajiva (December 2008–August 2011), Jatuphon Phromphan, leader of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), known as the Red Shirts movement which supports the former prime minister Thaksin and his parties, accused the government of funding and using ISOC to block its activities. In response to Jatuphon, Colonel Thanathip Sawangsaeng, ISOC's spokesperson, countered that the budget of 1,000 million baht (approximately US\$28.57 million) was aimed at promoting the sufficiency economy philosophy of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej (5 December 1927–13 October 2016) in the Red Shirts-dominated areas. He, nevertheless, admitted that ISOC was monitoring the activities of the Red Shirts in the northern region (Channel 3 News, 25 March 2009). Then, in April 2011, ISOC authorities shut down thirteen local radio stations belonging to Red Shirts groups, accusing them of insulting the monarchy (*Thairath*, 28 April 2011).

After the coup of 2014, ISOC assumed authority over cyber surveillance. In 2015, the spokesperson for ISOC disclosed to the media that the agency had discovered 143 websites, with 5,268 separate URLs, carrying content deemed insulting to the monarchy. It ordered the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to shut down 3,426 of these URLs (*Manager Online*, 7 September 2015). This action bypassed the authority of both the police and the judiciary. ISOC and the ICT did not need to explain to the public or to the administrators of the websites how the content insulted the monarchy or threatened national security, thanks to section 44 of the Interim Constitution of 2014, which provided the Head of the NCPO, General Prayut, with absolute power.¹ Section 44 stipulates that in any case deemed necessary by the head of the NCPO, he shall issue orders, restrain or perform any acts, with the approval of the NCPO, regardless of whether the enforcement of such acts falls to the legislature, executive or judiciary; all orders, acts as well as performance in compliance with such orders shall be deemed lawful and constitutional. On 22 May 2014, General Prayut issued NCPO Order No. 26/2557, authorizing the ICT to shut down or remove websites, social media, video and audio clips that were deemed to violate laws, instigate disorder and unrest, or contravene the NCPO's policies and actions (*Royal Gazette*, 29 May 2014).

Immediately after the coup d'état that toppled the elected government led by the Phuea Thai party on 22 May 2014, many Red Shirt leaders in the northern and northeastern provinces were detained, summoned or threatened by soldiers (*Prachatai*, 1 July 2014; BBC, 9 June 2014). These

local Red Shirt leaders had to request permission from the military chief in their province if they wanted to travel to other provinces. As a result, some of them took refuge in neighbouring countries, while many others decided to leave their localities and lie low in other provinces. Some were still afraid to return home almost three years after the coup.² Whenever the military junta was worried that the Red Shirts might gather together to show opposition to the junta and support for the Shinawatra family, many Red Shirts in the provinces received phone calls from police or military officers ahead of time, warning them not to join the gathering.³

During the counterinsurgency period, the Thai army and ISOC mobilized several mass organizations in the rural areas. The demise of communism from the mid-1980s, which subsequently led to the repeal of the Anti-Communist Act in 2000, resulted in a decrease of paramilitary activities. The emergence of the colour-coded political conflict in the mid-2000s evidently reinvigorated the paramilitary and civic groups under ISOC command. A 2012 progress report of the Thai National Defence Volunteers (TNDV or *Thai asa pongkan chat*), one of ISOC's paramilitary organizations, indicates that the activities of TNDV had been in decline since 1992 but were revived in 2006, the year the Thaksin government was toppled by a military coup. The report quotes the order of General Prayut, then army commander and deputy director of ISOC, that the agency must hastily re-establish a strong TNDV network nationwide and link it with other mass organizations (ISOC 2012, pp. 6–7, 9–10).

In advance of the referendum on the NCPO's draft constitution scheduled for 7 August 2016, ISOC's spokesperson claimed that over 500,000 people were ready to support the referendum campaign (*Post Today*, 7 May 2016). At the same time, opponents of the draft constitution were prohibited from campaigning by threats of criminal charges.

In November 2016, social media was ignited by a controversy sparked by a famous royalist speaker, Oraphim Raksaphon, nicknamed Best. Her sensational speaking skill, particularly on the topic of the benevolence of King Bhumibol, often drove audiences to tears. One of her famous lines, widely quoted across social media, was “even if one is reincarnated ten times, one would not be able to find a great monarch like King Bhumibol”. The controversy began when people criticized one of her talks, posted on YouTube. In that talk, she had suggested that the people in the northeast, known as the base of the Red Shirts movement, appeared not to love the king enough, even though he had done many great things for them. People accused her of being divisive and of insulting people in that region. Oraphim has been a regular speaker for ISOC, and the talk in question was organized

by ISOC as part of a project called “Promoting the works of King Bhumibol and the royal members”. Over 3,000 students from thirty-five schools and four vocational schools in Maha Sarakham province in the northeast were assembled for the talk. Despite the controversy, ISOC senior officer insisted that Oraphim was a useful resource person for the programme (*Manager Online*, 16 November 2016; *The Nation*, 28 November 2016).

In recent years ISOC and army websites along with YouTube have carried posts on ISOC’s engagement with high school students, along with numerous military training programmes about imbuing the love of the king and the nation, the wisdom of the king’s sufficiency economy philosophy, and watching out for threats against the nation.⁴

The case of Oraphim gave the public insight into the activities of ISOC’s modern mass organization and psychological warfare. The military government of General Prayut appeared to especially favour the services of ISOC. Prayut himself was once the deputy director of ISOC and is currently its director. The ongoing activities of ISOC have, however, gone unnoticed and unquestioned by political parties and civil society.⁵

The role of ISOC/military has quickly expanded from managing political order to managing social order, such as the traffic problem in Bangkok and beyond. The motorcycle taxi and vans business in Bangkok is a source of lucrative under-the-table money for the authorities. These services help people to commute faster but also cause congestion in many areas, especially where streets are turned into temporary parking lots for motorcycles and minibuses. The military appeared to take this issue seriously. Immediately after the 2014 coup, the NCPO ordered the minibuses on many congested roads to move to the suburbs immediately, causing problems for both the commuters and the minibus drivers. ISOC admitted that it had taken over the management of the motorcycle taxis and minibus services in Bangkok and surrounding provinces since 2014 (*Thairath*, 19 June 2019). In July 2014, the army officer, who was in charge of the matter, told me that he had been annoyed by this problem for a long time because he had to drive past a congested area twice every day.⁶ The Thai military is clearly obsessed with establishing social order with military-style measures. Dictatorial power allowed the military to act on this obsession.

The above examples suggest that the junta and ISOC reactivated their Cold War apparatus in order to exert control over civil society. As I will show in the following chapters, the Thai military’s role in the socio-political and economic arena has been much more intensive and extensive than the examples above. In response to the persistent political conflict since 2006, the military and conservative elites have carefully reconstructed their

infrastructure of power. One of their crucial political weapons is the internal security apparatus under the command of ISOC and the armed forces.

STUDIES OF THE THAI MILITARY

Thailand's intransigent political crisis and polarization, marked by two military coups and persistent mass demonstrations since 2006, is often seen as the orchestrated work of an anti-democratic alliance of the old powers against the rise of electoral politics. The alliance is conceptualized as "network monarchy" by Duncan McCargo (2005), a "parallel state" by Paul Chambers (2015), "deep state" by Eugénie Mérieau (2016), and "royal democracy" by Thongchai Winichakul (2019). Despite their differences in some aspects, these authors agree that the monarchy is the bedrock of the alliance while the military is its least popular component, especially since the violent crackdown on the popular uprising in May 1992 by the military government led by General Suchinda Kraprayoon (7 April–24 May 1992). Following the May 1992 crackdown, the military was perceived to have retreated to its barracks (Surachart 1998, p. 17). These studies seem to consider only coups and military governments as political intervention by the military. They overlook the military's Cold War-era political apparatus.

A study of the Thai military's internal security apparatus is needed for understanding the entrenched power of the Thai conservative elites. These networks operate actively and openly even when the country is under elected civilian governments. Particularly after the 2014 coup, the military appeared so confident in its power that it made no attempt to conceal the widespread activities of the internal security apparatus, backed by budgetary support and legal power. While the concept of a "deep state" suggests that conspiracy is the dominant mode of operation used to undermine elected governments, the Thai establishment has always worked openly to undermine its political rivals. Bureaucracy is the major apparatus used to perpetuate its power. Given the transparency of this aspect of ISOC's operations, the concept of a "deep" state does not apply.

Since the coup in 1947, which effectively brought Thailand under a full military regime with Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram (1948–57) as prime minister, the Thai military has never restricted itself to an exclusively military role. The military believes itself to be the core institution responsible for protecting the Thai nation from internal and external threats, maintaining peace and order, and actively engaging in national development. Its victory over the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) further increased

its confidence. A “coup-prone” politics has become a mark of the country’s recent history. Since the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, the country has been governed by military rulers for fifty-seven years in total, much longer than the thirty years under democracy (1932–33, 1947–73, 1976–88, 1991–92, 2006–8, 2014–19).

Some historians have argued that the Thai army from its very beginning was formed for internal security, not external defence (Baker and Pasuk 2005, p. 61). However, studies of the Thai military’s internal security operations have been few and all of them focus on the counterinsurgency period only. Works of Chai-anan, Kusuma, and Suchit (1990), Suchit (1987), Suchit and Kanala (1987) and McCargo (2002) have contributed to a good understanding of the origin of the Thai military’s internal security operations, which defined the military’s extensive role in the nation’s social, economic and political life. Despite their warnings about the military’s attempt to sustain its political power and influence through its internal security apparatus after the end of the counterinsurgency period, there have been few studies focusing on the matter since the coup in 2006. Most studies of the Thai armed forces tend to focus on internal factionalism, conflict between elected civilian governments and military leaders, networks of cliques and classes, and personal ties between military leaders and the palace (Chambers and Napisa 2016; Surachart 1998, 2016; Yoshifumi 2008).

This is rather astonishing as studies of the military role in internal security affairs in other military-dominated authoritarian states, such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and various countries in Latin America, have been abundant for decades (Crouch 1988; Mietzner 2008; Lowenthal and Fitch 1986; Farooq 2012). Studies of the Thai military have left a big research gap. Possibly, the plummeting political legitimacy of the military after the bloody crackdown of the popular uprising in May 1992 led to a general belief that there would be no further coups, and a decline of research into Thai military affairs until the coup in 2006. As many believed that the Thai military had retreated from politics after 1992, this led to a misunderstanding that its continuing socio-economic and political programmes, disguised under a euphemistic term “*kitchakan phonlaruen khong thahan*” or the civil affairs of the military, were apolitical in nature.

The name ISOC, the nerve centre of the state’s internal security affairs, disappeared from public view after the demise of the CPT. People may have thought that ISOC’s function had ended long time ago. Despite the fact that ISOC has always been mentioned in studies of the Thai military, rightist movements, and problem in the three southern Muslim-dominated

provinces (Bowie 1997; Ball and Mathieson 2007), there has been no serious dedicated study of ISOC. Although the threats to internal security in the post-counterinsurgency period have moved away from the battlefield to civil space, such as environmental issues, disaster management, illicit drugs and human trafficking, ISOC and the army comfortably sustained their leading role. The involvement of ISOC and the army in these non-militaristic areas began without any serious objection from elected governments, which seemed to lack a solid understanding of the implications of the military's internal security operations.

Moreover, while ISOC has been known publicly as the key agency in charge of internal security, all branches of the Thai armed forces have been active in internal security affairs. They have had their own operations and budgets. In fact, internal security projects account for a significant part of their activities. This study shows that the power of the Thai military lies not only in its use of force but also in its political arm. Its seemingly apolitical projects can be turned into dangerous weapons when the situation demands. This political weapon was initially created in order to counter the communist insurgency. After the collapse of the CPT in the mid-1980s, the establishment has consciously expanded these internal security operations and has worked to legitimize the military extensive role in the socio-economic and political sphere.

Since the creation of the modern Thai armed forces by King Chulalongkorn in the early twentieth century, the Thai military has never fought a full-scale war on Thai territory. When the Japanese imperial troops invaded and occupied Thailand in 1941, military leaders quickly gave in to their demands without resistance (Thaemsuk Numnon 2005). Internal security affairs, rather than external threats, have long been the *raison d'être* of the Thai military, the justification of its power, and the leading mission of the Thai military from the counterinsurgency period to the present day.

The military and its conservative allies have distrusted and despised civilian politicians and have not accorded them the authority that is standard in functioning democracies around the world. Although it has become increasingly difficult to suppress parliamentary democracy since the popular uprising in 1973, civilian control of the armed forces in Thailand has always been weak and ineffective. When the country was controlled by elected civilian governments between 1992 and 2006, politicians and civil society made little attempt to carry out any substantial reform of the security forces.

The main strategy to enhance civilian control over the armed forces was to appoint trusted generals in top positions of the army, simply to

prevent another coup (Chambers 2015). Though some civic groups and scholars call for the military to “return to their barracks” in an effort to enhance democratic governance and civilian control over the military, none of them advocate dismantling the military’s internal security apparatus or closing down its extensive involvement in socio-economic and political matters. The lack of any attention to the military’s extensive role in the socio-political arena is reflected in most recommendations for security sector reform, which tend to follow the standard guidelines for professional militaries in democratic societies, such as reducing the size and budget, increasing capacity and technological know-how, adapting to the dynamics of globalization and new security threats, and strengthening civilian control over the armed forces (Surachart 1999; Chambers 2015, p. 9). As Raymond (2018, pp. 131–32) argues, the fear of coups deters civilian politicians and governments from any attempt to exert civilian control over the armed forces. They lack understanding of defence issues, military strategy and strategic planning. They try to placate the military leaders by giving in to their demands, particularly over the annual military budget and arms purchases. Moreover, after the defeat of the CPT, politicians, academics, and civil society possibly thought that the military’s internal security operations no longer functioned. This area has thus been left solely in the hands of the military.

In *Thai Military Power: A Culture of Strategic Accommodation* (2018), Gregory Raymond argues that deterring and defending Thailand from external threats has been at the core of the Thai military’s strategic and organizational culture since the establishment of the modern Thai armed forces by King Chulalongkorn in the late twentieth century. In his comprehensive analysis, the root causes of the Thai military’s weakness and inefficiency in this defensive role lie in royal nationalist history, the hierarchical interdependence between the military and the monarchy, and civilian-military power relations. In contrast, this book will show that the Thai military has been heavily invested in internal security affairs, particularly in the post-counterinsurgency period, when Thailand’s concern over external threats significantly declined.

ISSUES AND SCOPE

The main topic of this book is Thailand’s internal security affairs, which have been under the domination of the Thai army and ISOC, its political arm, since the counterinsurgency period. This study will show that, not only the ISOC, but all branches of the Thai armed forces, including the

supreme command, the air force, the navy, and especially the army, have been active in internal security affairs in the post-counterinsurgency period until present day. Their activities are similar to those of ISOC. However, ISOC alone has coordinating power over other state agencies concerning matters of internal security. ISOC's special role is to coordinate and control other civilian agencies in order to discreetly and effectively infiltrate the society. ISOC thus figures prominently in this study.

The conservative elites have given great importance to maintaining the military role in the country's socio-political life even after the CPT was defeated. In order to maintain the relevance of internal security organizations after the demise of the CPT, the definition and scope of threats to national security were modified and expanded. The major questions of this book are:

- How did the Thai state's counterinsurgency approach open a gateway for the military's intrusion into the socio-economic and political sphere?
- How and why did such a role continue after the fall of the communist insurgency?
- How were threats to national security defined in the post-counterinsurgency period and how did the change of definition help perpetuate the military extensive role and power?
- What were the objectives and rationale used to legitimize the military's socio-political role?
- How was the internal security apparatus employed by the ruling elites to protect their power and interests, especially after the coup in 2006?
- How were state-dominated mass organizations turned into an apparatus of mass surveillance and ideological reproduction?

In the counterinsurgency period between the 1960s and 1980s, the military's framework, ideology and methods were formed for the internal security battle in the decades to come. The legacy of this period is still prevalent in the age of electoral politics. This book thus covers three major phases of the development of the military's internal security operations. The first phase was the counterinsurgency period, which was marked by the emergence of the concept of political offensive as part of counterinsurgency operations, the incorporation of socio-economic and political and psychological measures in the counterinsurgency strategy, the establishment of the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC), later ISOC, in 1965, and the forging of the modern monarchy-military tie.

The second phase covers the semi-democratic period under General Kriangsak Chamanan (October 1977–March 1980) and General Prem

Tinsulanonda (March 1980–August 1988). This period witnessed a crucial transition: demise of the CPT, reform of counterinsurgency operations, and preparations for sustaining the military's internal security apparatuses in the post-counterinsurgency period. The Prime Minister Order Nos. 66/2523 and 65/2525 under the Prem government have been vaunted as the origins of a political offensive leading to triumph over the CPT. This study will offer a new interpretation of these orders and their implication for the military's power in the post-counterinsurgency period. The ramification of these orders extended far beyond the struggle against communism. From their inception they were intended to lay the groundwork for the military's political activity in the post-counterinsurgency period.

The third phase began with the coup in 2006 and continues until the present day. This phase was marked by the looming royal succession, the unprecedented popularity of Thaksin Shinawatra, polarization of Thai politics and society, the rise of the Yellow Shirts and Red Shirts movements, two military coups and the NCPO's authoritarian military rule. Alongside these political developments, ISOC was empowered to an astounding degree and the internal security apparatus, especially the military-dominated mass organizations and royalist ideological indoctrination programmes, were vigorously revived.

FRAMEWORKS

Internal security has been broadly defined as “the act of keeping peace within the borders of a sovereign state or other self-governing territories, generally by upholding the national law and defending against internal security threats”. Crucial factors affecting security include social, political and economic conditions. The modern definition of internal security as “human security” extends the scope to include environmental degradation, poverty, migration, illicit drugs, human trafficking, and so on. Maintaining internal security requires the state to manage all kinds of threat to the well-being of its people (Katoch 2016, p. 18).

In the Cold War era, many post-colonial and developing countries faced challenges to their nation-building process, ranging from poverty, political and ethno-religious secession, and radical insurgent movements. The major task of the armed forces, which often captured political power, was to eliminate threats to internal security. Because internal security depended on domestic socio-economic and political well-being, the military expanded its role in politics. As Alfred Stepan (1986) has suggested, during the counterinsurgency period, the armed forces not only developed their

standards of professionalism, armed strength, strategies and missions, but also became increasingly politicized. In other words, internal security affairs preoccupied the armed forces and acted as a justification for the expansion of their roles within, and authority over, other areas of governance. Such was the case of many military-dominated authoritarian regimes, such as those in Brazil, Peru, Argentina, and, alas, Thailand. The Thai military's leading role in internal security affairs during the counterinsurgency operations served as a springboard for its massive expansion into activities concerned with the country's socio-economic and political development. Any obstacle to the military's role in these areas was easily overcome when the military controlled the government.

The definition of threats to internal security can shift in accordance with changing situations. The broader the definition of internal security—such as the defence of the national pillars of nation, religion, and particularly monarchy—the greater the sphere of military power. Repeated calls by civil society, both nationally and internationally, for the Thai military to stop intervening in politics fell on deaf ears among the military and its conservative allies. The military's leading role in the counterinsurgency operations and the defeat of the CPT certified its high status within internal security affairs.

This study benefits from several studies on the Thai monarchy and military. Under the seventy-year reign of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the monarchy shaped the unique character of modern Thai politics. The special relationship between the monarchy and the military underpinned the expansive role of the army. The military should, therefore, be viewed as part of the conservative elites, consisting of the military, top bureaucrats, judiciary and business elites, or what McCargo (2006) has termed “network monarchy”. This conservative alliance has intervened in the political process through the palace and its proxies. King Bhumibol's royal hegemony was a licence for the network to exercise considerable influence over important issues. The various elements of the network were adaptable to changing situations. Some might be prominent at particular political moments, but keep a low profile when their roles were increasingly questioned. This study will show that collaboration among these conservative elites has been essential for the expansive role of the military in internal security affairs.

Several scholars have confirmed how the interdependent relationship between the monarchy and the military, with support from the US government during the anti-communist period, is essential for understanding the rise of the monarchy's political hegemony after the end of absolute monarchy in 1932. The military government of Field Marshal

Sarit Thanarat and the US government enthusiastically promoted the role of King Bhumibol and the palace members as a symbol of Thainess and the Thai state in fighting against the alien communist threat. The synergistic relationship, in which the military became subservient to the monarchy, became the major source of legitimacy for the military's political power. In return, the military has been committed to promoting a royal-nationalist ideology, depicting the monarchy as the embodiment of the nation (Thak 1979; Kobkua 2003; Hyun 2014; Chambers and Napisa 2016; Thongchai 2019). Chambers and Napisa (2016) suggested that the close association between the palace and generations of military leaders has turned the Thai armed forces into a "monarchized military", which in turn helped build and sustain the monarchy-centred political power. This book shows that the military-monarchy nexus has developed far beyond the personal or informal relationship between the palace and military leaders. It has involved the establishment of an infrastructure of political power for the military. The monarchy has been active in supporting and promoting the military's socio-political and economic role since the counterinsurgency period. In return, the military has pledged loyalty to the monarchical institution.

"Royal democracy" is a socio-political order which the network monarchy has been trying to entrench. The official name is "the Democratic Regime with the Monarch as the Head of the State". According to Thongchai (2019) royal democracy operates within an ostensibly normal parliamentary democratic polity, yet the power of elected bodies are restricted within parameters prescribed by the palace. Civilian governments do not have substantive power because true power is with the monarchy and its network. Despite the image of "being neutral and above politics", King Bhumibol often appeared as a source of legitimacy, particularly for military regimes, and a determining factor in major political issues. The palace often intervened via the network of the military, bureaucracy, judiciary and the Privy Council. The royal hegemony of the monarch is pivotal to the success or failure of the network's operations. For the Thai conservative elites, this Thai-style democracy, which honours and allows purportedly moral or good people to rule and intervene when it is necessary, is more suitable to Thailand than Western-style liberal democracy.

Internal security mechanisms have proven essential for ensuring the military plays a leading role in entrenching and protecting this socio-political order in the aftermath of the counterinsurgency period. The military employs hard power, such as coercion, oppression, and execution as well as soft power, including royal-nationalist indoctrination, propaganda, development and other incentive programmes, and the deployment of mass organizations.

Soft power strategies aim to create a sense of social unity by binding people together with the royal-nationalist ideology. According to Thongchai (2014), the narrative used to justify royal nationalism is based on two main strands. One claims that Thailand is facing constant external aggression, as exemplified by the fall of Ayutthaya to the Burmese on two occasions, and the loss of territories to the French and British. The second strand exalts the capabilities of the past monarchs, who had built the Thai nation to the present day and are responsible for the relative prosperity that has been achieved along the way. Such royal nationalist history has prevailed in the military's indoctrination programme until today.

Planting royal nationalism into the hearts and minds of the Thai people is seen as vital for building *khwam samakkhi khong chat*, or national unity. As Raymond (2018, pp. 32–36) argues, national unity is of paramount importance in the Thai military's strategic culture. It has been emphasized by the Thai kings and the military from the reign of King Chulalongkorn until today. They contend that disunity will lead the nation to another tragedy like the fate of Ayutthaya. Only the royal hegemony of the monarch is able to unify Thailand and lead the country out of deep-rooted conflict. National unity has been a matter of grave concern among the military since the political polarization after the 2006 coup. As this book will show, the remobilization of a royalist mass by the military and the revival of royalist indoctrination programmes through mass organizations shows how the military are trying to protect the social order through internal security mechanisms.

However, soft power is not the only measure the Thai state has used for building national unity. It has not hesitated to use coercion and violent force to suppress dangerous political opponents, particularly those accused of being un-Thai or anti-monarchy. This unity is a unity without diversity and hence is unrepresentative of the complexity of Thai society today.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The presentation is not based on chronological order, but structured around three major aspects of the military's internal security operations: first, their development, rationale and legitimacy; second, socio-economic development programmes; and third, mass organizations and mobilization programmes.

Chapter 2 is divided into two sections. The first provides a historical background of Thailand's counterinsurgency operations and the vital role of the monarchy, the military and the United States. It then explains

the origin of *kanmueang nam kanthahan* or the political offensive, and the development of the concept of security, and civilian-police-military operations during counterinsurgency operations in the 1960s, and shows how these concepts were modified for the expansive role of the military in the post-counterinsurgency socio-political sphere. It shows that all branches of the Thai armed forces have been engaged in internal security. The second section examines the sources of political and legal legitimacy for the military's wider socio-political role from the counterinsurgency period until the present day.

Chapter 3 discusses the emergence of the development military in parallel with the development monarch, and the expansion of the military's development programmes into new areas. This chapter argues that the concept of development for security and the perception of threats were modified to facilitate the military's role in the post-counterinsurgency period. The military's early development programmes in the rural areas were transformed and extended into urban areas. On the one hand, the role of the monarchy was crucial in the expansion and transformation of the military's development role. On the other hand, the military was enthusiastic in promoting the image of King Bhumibol as a development monarch.

Chapter 4 begins with a discussion of the state-sponsored mass organizations during the counterinsurgency period, including their objectives and practices, and an assessment of the success and limitations of the military's political offensive operations. This will lead to a new interpretation of the Prime Ministerial Orders Nos. 66/2523 and 65/2525. These two executive orders have been praised as the most successful policies behind the Thai state's victory over the CPT. The treatment here explains why the governments during the subsequent semi-democracy period continued the same mass control operations. Importantly, the bad reputation of the ISOC-dominated rightist groups following the student massacre on 6 October 1976 had little impact on their operations.

Chapter 5 focuses on the remobilization of mass organization since the coup in 2006. State-sponsored mass organizations were in decline immediately following the counterinsurgency period. However, once the Thai establishment could claim to be facing new political enemies, they easily revived the remnants of the Cold War organizations as well as creating new ones. As the politics became more polarized, the mass organizations became larger and more varied. This chapter looks at the objectives of the mass control programmes, the membership, and methods used by ISOC and the military government to establish a broad base of loyalist citizens and mass surveillance by deploying Cold War methods.

RESEARCH MATERIALS

When I was first drawn to this subject, I was not sure if I could do research on this topic. I thought it would be difficult to obtain empirical data related to security affairs because it would be highly classified. I do not have connections with personnel in the armed forces either. Despite these obstacles, curiosity got hold of me. The more I searched for data on the military's non-military affairs and ISOC, the more interesting information I found, including websites, Facebook accounts, photographs, and video clips on YouTube channels belonging to various branches of the army, ISOC, paramilitary forces, and mass organizations. Some of the sources are official documents from meetings between ISOC officers and members of mass organizations. In this Internet age, the military and civilian government agencies utilize cyberspace to promote their activities, connect with their members, and conduct psychological operations. Numerous pictures and video clips about their activities which appear on the web were possibly intended to impress their superiors about the success of their operations.

The websites and Facebook accounts of ISOC headquarter, ISOC regions, and army regions provide rich information on the military's civic activities and their network of collaborators. ISOC's provincial branches have regularly uploaded their training activities onto YouTube.⁷ Whenever ISOC had a new programme, it would create a new Facebook account to promote and persuade people to join the programme. One interesting programme is the *007 sai khao khwammankhong* or *007 Intelligence*, which is a channel for people to report intelligence information to ISOC. The unit also has an account on the social media *Line*.⁸ Many ISOC-dominated mass organizations created Facebook accounts to display their group activities and to invite people to join them.⁹ Numerous video clips, particularly about ISOC's ideological training programmes, have been uploaded to YouTube. One only needs to type the names of those mass organizations to get the results.¹⁰ Websites and Facebook pages of the Supreme Command, army, air force, and navy are useful as well.¹¹ Thammasat University Archives carry numerous documents related to the Thai state's counterinsurgency operations. They have been underutilized.

Although it was difficult to find ISOC officers willing to be interviewed, it was possible to interview government officials who worked with ISOC and people who were recruited for training and ideological programmes. This was possible partly because many activities took place outside the military barracks, in the public civic sphere, such as schools, village meeting

places, and the forest reserve areas. Their confidentiality was lax. It is also possible that the military regime under the NCPO was overly confident in its power. ISOC often organized press conferences to inform the public, if not to show off, what it was doing. If one tuned into a rural radio channel, one would often hear the voices of military officers talking about various problems in the area and how the military was trying to solve them. This happened during my trip to the northeastern provinces during floods in late 2017. A minibus driver turned on the radio and instead of hearing the voice of a provincial governor talking about the floods, as one would expect, I heard a top military officer of the Second Army Region talking about the military's role in mitigating natural disaster. All these sources are useful for understanding internal security operations since 2006.

Notes

1. Article 44 of the Interim Constitution of 2014 states that in any case deemed necessary by the Head of the NCPO, with the approval of the NCPO, shall authorize, issue an order, restrain or perform any act regardless of whether such act enters into legislative, executive or judicial force. In this regard, all orders, as well as actions and performances in compliance with such orders shall be deemed lawful and constitutional.
2. Interview Mr Wat (pseudonym), 30 March 2017, Bangkok. He is the leader of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD).
3. Interview with Somchit (pseudonym), 21 August 2017, Ubon Ratchathani. She identified herself as a Red Shirt who holds a leading position in the government-sponsored programme of promoting women's role in community development.
4. "Op-rom phunam yaowachon kongthap thai" [Training Young Leaders by the Thai Armed Forces], 8 March 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rga76bHeZU4> (accessed 14 December 2017); *Chiangmai News*, "Yaowachon Thai ru rak samakkhi" [Thai Youths United], 27 January 2020, <https://www.chiangmainews.co.th/page/archives/1244426> (accessed 20 February 2020); Interview with a vocational student, 2 November 2018, Kanchanaburi.
5. I gave a public seminar on the anti-democracy role of ISOC and the military's civil affairs project at the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University on 14 November 2017. The seminar was reported by the press: *Prachatai*, 17 November 2017; *Way Magazine*, 15 November 2017; and *Khom Chad Luek*, 15 November 2017. Later, it was followed by two in-depth interviews I gave to *Prachatai* (27 February 2018) and *The 101 World* (14 December 2017).
6. The army officer's name is Major Colonel Pasakon Kulrawiwan. On 3 July 2014, he escorted me to the NCPO headquarters at the 1st Infantry Regiment Camp on Phahonyothin Road for the junta's "attitude adjustment" of people considered to be anti-military. He bragged that he was in charge of reorganizing the minibuses in Bangkok. He was also involved in many arrests of anti-military activists.

7. For example, www.isoc.go.th (previously www.isocthai.go.th until 4 July 2017), www.facebook.com/isocnews1/ of ISOC Headquarter; <http://www2.army2.mi.th/th/category/isoc2> and http://th-t.facebook.com/pg/กองรบภาค-2-176558233055660/posts/?ref=page_internal of the Army Region 2; <https://www.isoc.go.th/?tag=%E0%B8%A0%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%84-3> of ISOC Region 3; <https://www.isoc.go.th/?tag=%E0%B8%A0%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%84-4-%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%99> of ISOC Region 4; <https://www.isoc.go.th/?tag=%E0%B8%A0%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%84-4-%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%99> of the Army Region 4; https://www.facebook.com/massisocsmtr/?__tn__=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARBQQ5_A_i4GggrZ1ClIEF9oz5X-GV_PhTL5pvBb2mSqDUYiqoqjDwPRYxi05tMVPUOhNVTa89HCwlHp of ISOC News.
8. See https://www.facebook.com/isoc007/?__tn__=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARD2wHDTzvnSXUdPSvFWVsZnKQDmgaShgq64Ico9R_8inb-EAsSTHjFWT34Gxg-FkHbtDwpnK8O7oS9
9. Such as <https://www.facebook.com/thai.asa.pongkanchat/> of the Thai National Defence Volunteers; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1581194052132176/> of the Military Reservists for National Security of Phuket province; Such as *Chomrom bikbaithai chairakphaendin ko.o.ro.mo.no.* (Club of Thai Big Bikers Love the Nation, ISOC), see its Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/Bigbike.center/>; <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100006388475830> of Club of Village Scouts, Bangkok.
10. Such as <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGXU9iIhl5s> of the Thai National Defence Volunteers (TNDV); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlXc7ZjFl7Y> of the TNDV, The Military Reservists of National Security and the Military Veterans.
11. Directorate of Civil Affairs of the Air Force's Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/กรมกิจการพลเรือน-ทหารอากาศ-1468497056773884/?ref=page_internal; Directorate of Civil Affairs of the Army's Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/pg/doca.thaiarmy/posts/>; Directorate of Civil Affairs of the Navy's Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/navalcivil/>; Directorate of Joint Civil Affairs' website <https://j5.rtarf.mi.th/web/index.php>