

Reproduced from *Praetorian Kingdom: A History of Military Ascendancy in Thailand*, by Paul Chambers (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2024). This version was obtained electronically direct from the publisher on condition that copyright is not infringed. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of ISEAS Publishing. Individual chapters are available at <<http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>>.

# Praetorian Kingdom

**The ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute** (formerly Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) is an autonomous organization established in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security, and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute's research programmes are grouped under Regional Economic Studies (RES), Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS), and Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS). The Institute is also home to the ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC), the Singapore APEC Study Centre, and the Temasek History Research Centre (THRC).

**ISEAS Publishing**, an established academic press, has issued more than 2,000 books and journals. It is the largest scholarly publisher of research about Southeast Asia from within the region. ISEAS Publishing works with many other academic and trade publishers and distributors to disseminate important research and analyses from and about Southeast Asia to the rest of the world.

# Praetorian Kingdom

*A History of Military Ascendancy in Thailand*

PAUL CHAMBERS

**ISEAS** YUSOF ISHAK  
INSTITUTE

First published in Singapore in 2024 by  
ISEAS Publishing  
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace  
Singapore 119614

*Email:* [publish@iseas.edu.sg](mailto:publish@iseas.edu.sg)  
*Website:* [bookshop.iseas.edu.sg](http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

© 2024 ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

*The responsibility for facts and opinions in this publication rests exclusively with the author and his interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views or the policy of the publisher or its supporters.*

---

### ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

---

Name(s): Chambers, Paul, 1966-, author.

Title: Praetorian kingdom : a history of military ascendancy in Thailand / Paul Chambers.

Description: Singapore : ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2024. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: ISBN 9789815104240 (paperback) | ISBN 9789815104257 (PDF) | 9789815104264 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Thailand—Armed forces—Political activity. | Military government—Thailand. | Thailand—Politics and government. | Civil-military relations—Thailand.

Classification: LCC JQ1743.5 C58C44

---

*Cover photos* (Thai military “strongmen”, 1932–2023): Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkram, Field Marshal Phin Chanhavan, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, Field Marshal Phraphas Charusathien, General Krit Sivara, General Prem Tinsulanonda, General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, General Prawit Wongsuwan, General Anupong Paochinda, General Prayut Chanocha and General Apirat Kongsompong. The images of Phibun Songkram, Phin Chanhavan, Sarit Thanarat, Thanom Kittikachorn, Phraphas Charusathien and Krit Sivara are in the public domain. The rest are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 licence. Full attribution and licensing details for these follow. Prem Tinsulanonda: [Prem Tinsulanonda \(talk\)](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prem_Tinsulanonda_2010-01-20.jpg) ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prem\\_Tinsulanonda\\_\(Cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prem_Tinsulanonda_(Cropped).jpg)), “Prem Tinsulanonda (Cropped)”, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/legalcode>. Sonthi Boonyaratglin: The Official Site of The Prime Minister of Thailand Photo by Peerapat Wimonrungrakart ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sonthi\\_Boonyaratglin\\_\(cropped\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sonthi_Boonyaratglin_(cropped).png)), “Sonthi Boonyaratglin (cropped)”, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/legalcode>. Prawit Wongsuwan: <https://www.flickr.com/people/68842444@N03> ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prawit\\_Wongsuwan\\_\(2018\)\\_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prawit_Wongsuwan_(2018)_cropped.jpg)), “Prawit Wongsuwan (2018) cropped”, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/legalcode>. Anupong Paochinda: [Kamthorn\\_Phumhiran\\_-\\_Anupong\\_Paochinda\\_-\\_Songkitti\\_Chakkrabat.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kamthorn_Phumhiran_-_Anupong_Paochinda_-_Songkitti_Chakkrabat.jpg): Government of Thailand derivative work: [Anupong\\_Paochinda\\_\(in\\_1st\\_Infantry\\_Regiment's\\_royal\\_guard\\_uniform\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anupong_Paochinda_(in_1st_Infantry_Regiment's_royal_guard_uniform).jpg)), “Anupong Paochinda (in 1st Infantry Regiment’s royal guard uniform)”, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/legalcode>. Prayut Chanocha: Government of Thailand ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prayuth\\_Jan-ocha\\_2010-06-17\\_Cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prayuth_Jan-ocha_2010-06-17_Cropped.jpg)), “Prayuth Jan-ocha 2010-06-17 Cropped”, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/legalcode>. Apirat Kongsompong: Unknown author ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gen\\_Apirat\\_Kongsompong.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gen_Apirat_Kongsompong.jpg)), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>.

Cover design by Lee Meng Hui

Copyedited and Typeset by Stephen Logan

Printed in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

*To my wife, Napisa,  
my late father, Richard, and mother, Peggy,  
and to Kit, Rhonda, Callahan, and Ford Chambers*



# Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
1. Origins	15
2. The Initial “Caesars:” Phraya Phahon and Phibun (1932–44)	41
3. Establishing Tetrarchy: Phibun, Phin, Phao and Sarit (1944–57)	77
4. Sarit’s Stratocracy (1957–63)	156
5. The Diarchy of Thanom and Praphas (1963–73)	198
6. Krit Sivara and the 6 October Massacre (1973–76)	259
7. The Palace’s Attempted Coup (1976–77)	350
8. Consensual Kriangsak (1977–80)	371
9. Arch-Royalist Prem (1980–88)	403
10. Sunthorn, Suchinda and “Black May” (1988–92)	436

11. Prem, Chavalit and Military-Guided Democracy (1992–2001)	466
12. Thaksin, Sonthi and Surayud (2001–8)	499
13. Enter Prawit, Anupong and Prayut (2008–14)	554
14. From Prayut “Heavy” to Prayut “Light” (2014–23)	619
15. Conclusion	648
<i>Appendices</i>	657
<i>Index</i>	671
<i>About the Author</i>	705



## Figures

	Conditions Stimulating Praetorianism	3
1.1	Evolution of Military Institutions in Siam, 1590–1932	28
2.1	Commanders under the Army Structure Act, 1933	53
2.2	Thailand’s Legislature, 1932–46	57
2.3	Phibun Family Tree	61
3.1	Thailand’s Legislature, 1937–46	78
3.2	Thailand’s First Senate, 1946–47	86
3.3	Principal Military Members of the Chuhavan Family	90
3.4	Thailand’s Senate, 1947–51	101
3.5	Military Hierarchy of the Initial 1951 Junta: “Temporary Executive Power”	115
3.6	Thailand’s Legislature, 1952–57	117
3.7	Thailand’s Legislature, 1957–57	135
4.1	The Fourteen Army Officials in General Sarit Thanarat’s First Cabinet	161
4.2	Thailand’s Senates, 1957–58 and 1959–68	167

5.1	Kittikachorn Family Tree	204
5.2	Charusathien Family Tree	205
5.3	Total Number of US Troops and Aircraft Stationed in Thailand, 1964–68	207
5.4	Principal US Military Facilities in Thailand	208
5.5	Thailand’s Senate, 1968–71	221
6.1	Krit Sivara Family Tree	260
6.2	Thailand’s Senate, 1975–76	262
6.3	Known Members of Nawaphon Leadership, 1974–78	267
6.4	ISOC Leadership, 1975–76	278
6.5	Principal Military factions on 1 October 1976	320
6.6	Principal Leaders, Units and Their Roles in the Massacre and Coup of 6 October 1976	330
7.1	Legislative Assemblies, 1976–77	352
8.1	Kriangsak’s Family Tree	372
8.2	Thailand’s National Legislative Assembly, 1977–79	375
8.3	Thailand’s National Legislative Assembly, 1979–81	386
9.1	Thailand’s Senate, 1981–85	413
9.2	Arthit Kamlang-ek Family Tree	416
10.1	Thailand’s Senate, 1989–91	442
10.2	Sunthorn’s Family Tree	445
10.3	National Peace-Keeping Council (NPKC) Leaders	449
10.4	Kraprayoon-Noonpakdi Power Structure	451
10.5	Legislatures Deriving from the 1991 Coup	453
11.1	Thailand’s Senate, 1996–2000	477
11.2	Chavalit Yongchaiyudh Family Tree	479

11.3	Surayud Chulanont Family Tree	485
11.4	Thailand's Senate, 2000–2006	488
12.1	Thailand's Senates, 2000–2006	500
12.2	Sonthi Boonyaratklin's Family Tree	514
12.3	Council for National Security (CNS) Initial Junta Leadership (2006)	525
12.4	Thailand's National Legislative Assembly, 2006–8	531
12.5	Anupong Paochinda's Family Tree	538
13.1	Thailand's Senate, 2008–14	555
13.2	Chanocha Family Tree	583
14.1	NCPO Junta Leadership	620
14.2	NCPO Board of Advisors	621
14.3	Thailand's National Legislative Assembly (2014–19) and Senate (2019–24)	641



## Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge the help of those people whom I interviewed, taught me various aspects about the Thai military, or assisted me in my research or in making this book come to fruition. Though several of these people remain anonymous, I specifically want to thank Dr Napisa Waitoolkiat, Dr Kullada Kesboonchoo-Mead, Lt. Gen. Nipat Thonglek, Pradab Phibunsongkram, Lt. Gen. Pongsorn Rodchompoo, Dr Puangthong Pawakapan, Ajaan Ukrist Pathmanand, Dr Chaiyan Rajchagool, Dr Srisompob Jitpiromsri, Dr Surachart Bamrungsuk, Dr Katsuyuki Takahashi, Poowin Bunyavejchewin, General Siri Tiwapan, Ambassador Edwin Corr, Dr Michael Montesano, Tom Seale, and Rebecca Weldon. Others have helped me along the way, giving me the key ideas that enabled me to write this book. These persons include my early advisor at Northern Illinois University, Dr Clark Neher; my mentor at Northern Illinois University, the late Dr Ladd Thomas; my dissertation advisor, the late Daniel Unger; and the late Kraisak Chunhavan. I am grateful to everyone at ISEAS for their support, especially that of Stephen Logan and Mr Ng Kok Kiong. I furthermore want to thank the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript for their thought-provoking comments.



## Introduction

This study looks at praetorianism in Thailand; specifically, the second most powerful political institution in Thailand in 2023—the armed forces. The study contends that this military, as led by military strongmen, has been able to persevere as a leading political actor principally because it has managed to hold on to its monopoly of violence outside of any oversight by elected civilian actors. This is because the military has continuously ousted those civilian governments that it has perceived to be harmful to its interests, has ensured that laws are in place that have maximized its legal benefits, has possessed an enormous budget, remained beyond the scrutiny of the judiciary, retained its power over the years as junior or senior associate of the monarchy in a partnership of power, and rationalized its clout as essential for protecting that monarchy (thus becoming a “monarchized military”) while guaranteeing national security. Persistent interventions by the military in Thai politics across time have led to the socially constructed belief among civilians that the military is either justified in protecting the king or cannot be stopped; soldiers themselves feel that they are privileged as royal protectors to intervene as they please. Thus, the praetorian character of the Thai polity is masked by the apparent need to guard monarchy, and the Thai armed forces have in many respects become a tool of the palace.

To be clear, the focus of this study is on the rapidly changing military strongmen and factions across Thai history. A secondary focus is placed upon the Thai military as an institution. In fact, the book looks at Thai

military history within the context of Thai political history, especially with regard to US-Thai relations after World War II, topics that are closely interrelated. Far less scrutiny is given to other aspects of the military—its role in social life, politics, economics, culture, administration, art and technology. While the study’s spotlight might seem limited, a thorough analysis of this sort across the period 1932–2023 has been sorely lacking from Thai studies, and this book thus fills an important gap. Other parts of the Thai military deserve research in other studies.

This book sets out to answer three questions: Why did Thailand evolve to become a praetorian kingdom? What is the detailed history of Thai praetorianism? And why has Thai military influences across politics never been curtailed? These questions necessitate an examination of the analytical concept of “praetorianism”. Praetorianism has been at the bedrock of Thai politics, especially since the ouster of the absolute monarchy in 1932 (despite the post-1980 upsurge in palace influence). The proclivity for praetorianism in Thailand necessitates an examination of the academic term “praetorianism” in and of itself. In brief, since 1941, scholars have provided different formulations explaining military influence in politics. The earliest term, “garrison state”, was vaguely conceived as a “developmental construct” where political/military “elites” led by the “specialist on violence, the soldier”,<sup>1</sup> ruled supreme.

Though he never mentioned praetorianism, Huntington emphasized that the responsibilities of the professional soldier and officer involve expertise in the management of violence, responsibility in maintaining the national security of the country, and bureaucratic corporateness. But the participation of military officials in politics undermined their professionalism.<sup>2</sup> The term “praetorianism” became fashionable in the 1960s, with one of the earliest conceptualizations defining it a constitutional form of “government without consent”.<sup>3</sup> McAlister further characterized it as “the frequent overthrow of governments by military ... coups d’état for nonmilitary purposes”.<sup>4</sup> According to Huntington, “typical of the corrupt, *praetorian* [emphasis added], or mass societies is the violent oscillation between extreme democracy and tyranny”.<sup>5</sup>

Perlmutter differentiated historical from modern praetorianism. The former referred to the ancient Roman Empire’s Praetorian Guard (the military unit tasked with protecting the emperor). The power of this contingent revolved around three factors: “the Guard’s monopoly on local military power, the absence of definitive rules of succession, and the prestige of the Roman Senate. But, over time, with the Praetorian Guard being the only military in Rome, it came to impose its preferences on who would be emperor.



On the other hand, Perlmutter's "modern praetorian state" was defined as "one in which the military tends to intervene and potentially could dominate the political system".<sup>6</sup> He also described the factors that contributed to praetorianism (see figure).

Meanwhile, a "praetorian army" is one that is not dictated by ability, expertise or professionalism, but instead by social class, partisanship, personal connections and factionalism.<sup>7</sup> Though he never used the label "praetorian army", Huntington implied its existence when he argued that "subjective civilian control" can exist when civilian groups control the armed forces in "the absence of a professional officer corps".<sup>8</sup>

Perlmutter differentiated arbitrator-type praetorian armies from ruler-type praetorian armies. The former usurps control for a limited amount of time then relinquishes power and becomes a trustee of a civilian government. The latter seeks to maximize military rule, never committing to return a polity to civilian control.<sup>9</sup> To sustain their dominion, however, ruler-type armies often create political parties.<sup>10</sup> This is because some militaries believe that the best method for institutionalizing their rule is through the establishment of political parties that represent them.<sup>11</sup> Nordlinger added a third type of praetorian army: the moderator-type praetorian army, which seeks to dominate politics from behind the scenes.<sup>12</sup> Nordlinger's three types of praetorian army are praetorian guardian, praetorian moderator and praetorian ruler. Though all three exercise veto power over civilian institutions, it is only

### FIGURE Conditions Stimulating Praetorianism

<i>Social conditions</i>	<i>Political conditions</i>
Low degree of social cohesion	Centre-periphery conflict
The existence of fratricidal classes	Low level of political institutionalization and lack of sustained support for political structures
A non-consolidated middle class	Weak, ineffective political parties
Insufficient mobilization of state resources	Frequent civilian influence in the military/frequent civilian endorsement of military intervention

*Source:* Amos Perlmutter, "The Praetorian State and the Praetorian Army: Toward a Taxonomy of Civil-Military Relations in Developing Polities", *Comparative Politics* 1, no. 3 (1969): 385–91, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/421446>.

the ruler-type military that seeks a long-term military government. On the other hand, praetorian guardians assume power for only a limited period of time, while praetorian moderators at most engage in displacement coups.

Thailand has experienced all three of these praetorian categories. Some countries, such as Turkey, Pakistan and Guatemala, have been “praetorian republics”,<sup>13</sup> whereby secular governments are overshadowed by powerful militaries that regularly involve themselves in politics and sometimes putsch elected leaders from office. Other countries, like Spain, Japan or Nepal, have been “praetorian kingdoms” because the heads of state are monarchs, the heads of government are civilians, and there are militaries of enormous clout that often intervene in politics.

Turning to praetorian-led polities, Janowitz devised five types of polities in “peripheral” areas of the world, of which two involved military dominance over civilians. These were: (1) a military oligarchy, where a cabal of senior military officers control society; and (2) a civil-military coalition, in which the military expands its political activity and becomes a political bloc, with senior officers usually dominant over the civilian leadership.<sup>14</sup> Geddes contended that

A military regime, in contrast to a personalist dictatorship led by a military officer, is one in which a group of officers determines who will lead the country and has some influence on policy. In an institutionalized military regime (many are not), senior officers have agreed on some formula for sharing or rotating power, and consultation is somewhat routinized. Military hierarchy is respected.<sup>15</sup>

Siddiqā classified praetorian regimes into six types, including (1) civil-military partnership, (2) authoritarian-political-bureaucratic partnership, (3) ruler military domination, (4) arbitrator military domination, (5) parent-guardian military domination and (6) warlord domination.<sup>16</sup>

Most recently, E-Shimy argued that

The differences ... between a military government and a praetorian state are that the former tends to be short-lived with a small chance of survival... Praetorian states, conversely, tend to be long lasting... Also, in praetorian systems, the officers may have a civilian cadre in government, but they will continue to enjoy tremendous power over that government both overtly and covertly. It is safer, therefore, to consider military dictatorships as either a distinct category separate from praetorianism, or that concept could, incidentally, characterize [Perlmutter's] ruling type praetorian military.<sup>17</sup>

Yadav has pointed out that the popularity of praetorianism as a concept seems to have declined since the end of the Cold War. He surmises that this owes to the fact that the apparent necessity to differentiate among authoritarian regime-types and armies amidst socio-economic changes (with threats from communist revolutions) appeared to become irrelevant as liberal democracy and capitalism seemed to have triumphed at the end of the Cold War.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, since the 2010s, there has been a rise in military interventions (including coups) in various parts of the world. Such phenomena have rationalized a re-examination of praetorianism in contemporary comparative politics, including in Thailand.

The first post-Cold War study on Thai praetorianism (using the term “praetorian”) conceptualized Thailand as a “praetorian kingdom” involving proactive military interventions in the name of the king, with the polity “heavily influenced by monarchical ideology and identity”.<sup>19</sup> Since 1932, Thailand has been and remains a praetorian kingdom. According to Puangthong, the concept of praetorianism has been useful in analysing the political power of the Thai military from the 1947 coup to the 2014 putsch: the armed forces have utilized the legal system, administrative clout and internal security authority to intervene in politics through varying methods, with guarding the monarchy becoming the paramount rationale for such intervention.<sup>20</sup> Praetorianism in Thailand might specifically be interpreted in terms of what Croissant et al. see as military influence (formal and informal) over civilians in five decision-making areas of “elite recruitment [sway over who governs]”: public policy, internal security, external defence and military organization.<sup>21</sup>

As this study will show, Thailand’s armed forces (particularly senior military officers) have played a leading role across the Thai political landscape. Since 1980, that role has remained overwhelming, though junior to the palace. Thailand thus represents a classic case of praetorianism. As such, this book examines the chronology of praetorianism in Thailand—the political history of ubiquitous military influence across the Thai kingdom. The polity is in fact a praetorian kingdom. Originally, security servants either served Siamese monarchs or managed to overthrow them. During the current Chakri dynasty, a twenty-four-hour, seven-days-a-week security force only came into existence in 1852. The purpose of the military was to ensure the monarchy’s domestic survival, protect the kingdom from outside threats and spearhead monarch-led development schemes. The military thus became essential in the formation, expansion and consolidation of Siam’s absolute monarchy.

Military reforms in the late 1800s served to expand the armed forces to consolidate royal control across the kingdom. But, in 1932, the military (with support from other groups) overthrew monarchical absolutism and effectively became the country's dominant institution, although Siamese kings continued to exist weakly. Between 1947 and 1951, royals exercised some small power. But the period 1951–57 saw the armed forces again completely lord over Thailand. Following a 1957 putsch, the then military coup-maker relied on the monarchy to enhance his own legitimacy. After 1963, a reciprocal relationship intensified between military and monarchy, though a 1976 coup saw the monarchy try to usurp control from military rulers. Though that attempt failed, the subsequent post-1977 military ruler could not lead for long without sufficient royal backing and had to step down in 1980. After 1980, Thailand's military became quite “monarchized” in the sense that it functioned as the junior partner to the palace. A “monarchized military” conceptualizes a military in terms of

ideological dynamics, symbols, rituals, and processes which enhance its legitimacy [based upon] historical-cultural legacies, whereby soldiers secured a patrimonial monarchy that evolved to oversee a capitalist, centralized state. In this sense, the term should not be understood as turning the military into a monarch but instead reflects the extent to which the armed forces have depended upon a discourse of [monarchism to heighten their clout].<sup>22</sup>

Monarchised military was part of a palace-led “parallel state”, akin to such concepts as “network monarchy”<sup>23</sup> and “deep state”,<sup>24</sup> which weakened the forces of democratization.

[A] parallel state is defined as a shadowy network or institutional arrangement that is connected to the state and possesses formal political, social, and economic authority as well as informal clout, prerogatives, and interests outside those of civilian leaders—who must acquiesce to the autonomy of the informal power structure because the parallel state is insulated from and can exert influence over them. The linchpin of a parallel state is the informal structure's influence over “experts in violence”—such as the military—to maximize the informal structure's interests.<sup>25</sup>

The intensifying symbiosis between monarchy and military, with the military as junior partner since 1980, embedded a “khakistocracy” (military plus aristocracy) across the country. This khakistocracy entrenched a sense of entitlement among the military, especially regarding its perceived right to influence decision-making in terms of national security and national development, as a means of serving the monarch.<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, the military's formal and informal monopoly over instruments of violence over time allowed it to accumulate sufficient power to remain the physically strongest institution in the country, with its actions rationalized to support the monarchy. Though the advent of elected prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra created a democratic threat to the dominance of the partnership between monarchy and military, the double coups of 2006 and 2014, followed by post-2019 façade democracy, once again strengthened the status quo ante of khakistocracy.

This book thus chronicles the historical evolution of military power and civil-military relations from before 1932 until 2022 in Thailand. It surveys the history of Thai military clout and the major military personages who have led it, as well as efforts by Thais to achieve democratization. Both internal and external factors facilitating Thailand's powerful military—including factionalism and national emergencies—are discussed. The study is crucial to comprehending how and why Thailand's military acquired enormous political influence, its fluctuations over time, what level it possesses in 2023, and what might be the future of the military's clout across Thailand's political landscape. The book also asks a series of secondary questions. Have security sector reforms ever taken hold? Why does Thailand's military remain such an obstacle to democratization in 2023? What has been the history of military-monarchy relations in Thailand? And how have senior military officials been able to insert themselves into Thai democratization efforts?

In terms of methodology, the work is based upon primary (original) and secondary sources. These include personal interviews, government documents and journalistic as well as academic articles and books in Thai and English. The government documents used include those from Thailand (e.g., the state's *Royal Gazette*), the United States and the United Kingdom. With regard to English-language government documents, the study has sought to use specifically only those directly relevant to the military.

Most books about Thai politics focus on political parties, electoral politics or the monarchy. This work is significant because it focuses upon an institution of perennial political prominence in Thai society—the military—which is only junior to the monarchy. The role of the military as the guardian of the palace has legitimized its power and privileges, with the monarch usually endorsing such clout. As an authoritarian institution, Thailand's military has been reluctant to allow elected civilians to effectively monitor or control them, and has, as such, been the chief impediment to democratization in Thailand.

Generally, the leading studies about the Thai military are written in Thai. One of these, a textbook published by the Thai military itself, is mundanely titled เอกสารประกอบการสอน วิชาประวัติศาสตร์ทหาร (A textbook on military history). The opus offers a formal chronological survey from the forerunners of the Thai army until the 1980s, the Thai military's participation in United Nations Peacekeeping operations, a few other details, but little more.<sup>27</sup> A second important book in Thai is that of acclaimed Thai military specialist Chai-yanan Samudavanija. It illuminates the role of Thailand's "Young Turk" soldiers in politics during the 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>28</sup> He also wrote an English-language version of this book.<sup>29</sup> A useful Thai-language source on Thai military influence in terms of coups is that of Pracha Thepkasetkul.<sup>30</sup> A more recent Thai-language study, that of Surachart Bamrungsuk, argues that in the vortex between Thailand's elections and coups the army has become the core instrument of resolving political problems, and thus it is important to reform the Thai military.<sup>31</sup> There have also been books written in English about the history of Thailand's armed forces. While all of them are excellent, these works generally look at a particular period in time or a specific subject area. For example, Daniel Fineman investigates Thai military power during the period 1947–58.<sup>32</sup> Noranit Setabutr analyses the role of the Thai military during 1958–70.<sup>33</sup> David Elliott, using a Marxist approach, looks at Thai military rule between 1932 and 1976.<sup>34</sup> Suchit Bunbongkarn looks at the political role of the military during the 1980s.<sup>35</sup> Thak Chaloeontiarana focuses upon the regime of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat.<sup>36</sup> David Murray covers the Thai military during 1991–92.<sup>37</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand investigate Thai civil-military relations under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.<sup>38</sup> Two useful books on Thailand's 2006 coup and subsequent junta include *A Coup for the Rich*<sup>39</sup> and *Good Coup Gone Bad: Thailand's Political Development since Thaksin's Downfall*.<sup>40</sup> Puangthong Pawakapan offers a fascinating examination of the Thai military through the lens of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC).<sup>41</sup> Michael Montesano et al. bring together a collection of articles scrutinizing Thailand's 2014–19 junta.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, several important publications have examined civil-military relations in Southeast Asia. These works examine several countries but do not put special emphasis on the "case" of Thailand. Prominent among them are the following: Alagappa;<sup>43</sup> Hack and Rettig;<sup>44</sup> Beeson and Bellamy;<sup>45</sup> Croissant et al.;<sup>46</sup> Mietzner;<sup>47</sup> Grabowsky and Rettig;<sup>48</sup> and Matei, Halladay and Bruneau.<sup>49</sup>

Within the last decade, a flurry of books about the Thai military have been written—paralleling the resurrection of the influence of armed forces across politics. One recent book by Thamrongsak Phetlertanan in the Thai language focuses on Thai coups.<sup>50</sup> Another study by Wanwichit Boonprong and Thiraphong Bualah, based upon the period 1992–2020, argues that when military leaders became highly popular in society they could maintain and expand the military’s role in the political sphere.<sup>51</sup> Yet another book offers an excellent analysis of the relationship between monarchy and military. This study, by Thep Bunthanon, is called ทหารของพระราชากับการสร้างสำนึกแห่งศรัทธาและภักดี (The king’s soldiers and the fostering of faith and loyalty).<sup>52</sup> Three recent English-language books have analysed Thai military history at an expansive and macro level. Gregory Raymond offers an outstanding opus about the evolution of Thailand’s military and how it was shaped by a framework of “strategic culture”.<sup>53</sup> Supalak Ganjanakhundee magnificently illustrates the evolution of relations between the Thai military and the monarch.<sup>54</sup> One edited book—which includes contributions from Napisa Waitoolkiat, Arisa Ratanapinsiri, Eric Haanstad, Srisompob Jitpiromsri and myself—looks at the history of Thailand’s military and police (with one chapter focusing on the counterinsurgency in the Deep South).<sup>55</sup> The work at hand seeks to build upon that 2013 edited volume to produce a much more detailed and updated appraisal of Thai military history.

Beyond books, there have been numerous articles or book chapters written about various aspects of the Thai military, though few recent works focus on its overall history. Some seminal works of this sort include that of Anderson,<sup>56</sup> Morell,<sup>57</sup> Bamrungsuk,<sup>58</sup> Ockey,<sup>59</sup> Pathmanand<sup>60</sup> and Winichakul.<sup>61</sup> More recent relevant work includes that of Chambers and Waitoolkiat, which coined the term “monarchised military” to refer to a regal-led “parallel state”.<sup>62</sup> Another recent work, by Sirivunnabood and Ricks, uses interviews with Thai military officers to measure their attitudes toward professionalism.<sup>63</sup> Finally, Kongkirati and Kanchoochat analyse the 2014–19 junta in terms of entrenched power and hierarchical capitalism.<sup>64</sup>

Several excellent works on Thai history and politics in general do look at the Thai military. These include studies by Wright,<sup>65</sup> Chaiyan,<sup>66</sup> Thongchai,<sup>67</sup> Kobkua,<sup>68</sup> Kullada,<sup>69</sup> Handley,<sup>70</sup> Ferrara,<sup>71</sup> Nattapoll,<sup>72</sup> Baker and Phongpaichit,<sup>73</sup> and Marshall.<sup>74</sup> These studies, however, are not focused upon Thailand’s armed forces per se. Ultimately, there has never been a book written in English about the detailed history of Thailand’s permanent military from its founding in 1852 up until 2023 centred upon strongmen in the Thai military, as well as other features,

including yearly military reshuffles, budgets and new insights from new sources such as Wikileaks. In fact, there has been no detailed historical survey of the Thai military written in Thai covering this period. This study is thus relevant in filling this significant gap, making it a valuable addition to the literature on the history of Thailand's military, its relations with the Thai monarchy and how the armed forces have obstructed democratization until 2023. It is to be hoped this book fulfils its purpose. In terms of organization, following this introduction, the book is structured into fifteen chapters, each detailing an evolutionary stage in the political role of Thailand's armed forces until 2023.

## Notes

1. Harold Lasswell, "The Garrison State", *American Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 4 (January 1941): 455.
2. Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 10–16, 71.
3. David C. Rapoport, *Praetorianism: Government without Consensus* (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1960), pp. 14–15.
4. L. McAlister, "Civil-Military Relations in Latin America", *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 3, no. 3 (1961): 343.
5. Samuel Huntington, "Political Development and Political Decay", *World Politics* 17, no. 3 (1965): 417, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2009286>.
6. Amos Perlmutter, *Military and Politics in Israel, 1948–1967: Nation Building and Role Expansion* (New York: Cass, 1969), p. 382.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 391–92.
8. Huntington stated that an officer corps could be politically influenced by (1) group affiliations of the officer corps, (2) economic and human resources related to the officer corps, (3) interpenetration of officers in non-military power structures, and (4) the prestige and popularity of the officer corps and its leaders. See Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1957), pp. 80–89.
9. Perlmutter, *Military and Politics*, p. 392.
10. Amos Perlmutter, *Egypt, the Praetorian State* (New York: Transaction, 1974), p. 132.
11. Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 249.
12. Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Hoboken: Prentice-Hall, 1977), pp. 20–27.
13. See Shamsul Khan, "The Military and the Praetorian Regimes in Pakistan Politics: Political Usurpers or Protectors of an Incipient Democracy?" *Journal of International Studies* 5 (January 2009), <https://e-journal.uum.edu.my/index.php/jis/article/view/7890>; Birikim Yayinlari,



- “The Praetorian State and its Owners”, <https://birikimdergisi.com/articles/7407/the-praetorian-state-and-its-owners>.
14. See Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).
  15. Barbara Geddes, “What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?”, *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 124, <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.115>.
  16. Ayesha Siddiqi, *Military Inc: Inside Pakistan’s Military Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 33.
  17. Yasser El-Shimy, “A Model of Praetorian States”, Working Paper, Middle East Initiative, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 2016, [https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/2016-01-MEI\\_RFWP\\_ElShimy\\_0.pdf](https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/2016-01-MEI_RFWP_ElShimy_0.pdf).
  18. Vikash Yadav, “Wither the Praetorian State”, *The Duck of Minerva*, <https://www.duckofminerva.com/2011/06/wither-praetorian-state.html>.
  19. Paul Chambers, “Assessing the Monarchized Military and Khakistocracy in Postsucession Thailand”. In *Coup, King, Crisis*, edited by Pavin Chachavalpongpun (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), p. 171.
  20. Puangthong Pawakapan, “The Making of Thailand’s Praetorian State from the 1947 Coup to the 2014 Coup”, *Journal of Social Sciences* 52, no. 1 (2022): 1, <http://www.library.polsci.chula.ac.th/journal2>.
  21. Aurel Croissant, David Kuehn, Philip Lorenz, and Paul Chambers, *Democratization and Civilian Control in Asia* (Palgrave, 2013).
  22. Paul Chambers and Napisa Waitookiat, “The Resilience of Monarchised Military in Thailand”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46, no. 3 (2016): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2016.1161060>. See Supalak Ganjanakhundee, *A Soldier King: Monarchy and Military in the Thailand of Rama X* (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2022), pp. 164–65.
  23. Duncan McCargo, “Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand”, *Pacific Review* 18, no. 4 (2005): 499–519, <http://doi.org/10.1080/09512740500338937>.
  24. Eugenie Merieau, “Thailand’s Deep State, Royal Power, and the Constitutional Court (1997–2015)”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46, no. 3, <http://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2016.1151917>.
  25. Paul Chambers, “Democratization Interrupted: The Parallel State and the Demise of Democracy in Thailand”. In *Stateness and Democracy in East Asia*, edited by Aurel Croissant and Olli Hellman (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2020).
  26. Chambers, “Assessing the Monarchized”.
  27. Royal Thai Armed Forces, เอกสารประกอบการสอน [Textbook on Thai military history], 2011.
  28. Chai-anan Samudavanija, ชังเติร์กกับทหารประชาธิปไตย การวิเคราะห์บทบาททหารในเมืองไทย [Still a Turk with democratic soldiers: An analysis of the role of the military in Thai politics]. Bangkok: Bangit, 1982.

29. Chai-anan Samudavanija, *The Thai Young Turks* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).
30. Pracha Thepkasetkul, การแทรกแซงทางการเมืองของทหารไทย: ศึกษาเฉพาะกรณี. การรัฐประหาร เมื่อวันที่ 23 กุมภาพันธ์ 2534 [Political interference of the Thai military: Case study 1991 coup] (Master's thesis, Thammasat University, 1992).
31. Surachart Bamrungasuk, เสนาธิปไตย: รัฐประหารกับการเมืองไทย [Militocracy: Military coup and Thai politics]. Bangkok: Matichon, 2015.
32. Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947–1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).
33. Noranit Setabutr, *The Role of the Military in Thailand: 1958–1970* (Bangkok: Praeppittaya Company, 1971).
34. David Elliott, *Thailand: Origins of Military Rule* (London: Zed Books, 1978).
35. Suchit Bunbongkarn, *The Military in Thai Politics* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990).
36. Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotism* (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1979; Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2007).
37. David Murray, *Angels and Devils* (Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1996).
38. Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2004).
39. Giles Ji Ungpakorn, *A Coup for the Rich* (Bangkok: Workers Democracy Publishing, 2007).
40. Pavin Chachavalpongpun, ed., *Good Coup Gone Bad: Thailand's Political Development since Thaksin's Downfall* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2014).
41. Puangthong Pawakapan, *Infiltrating Society: The Thai Military's Internal Security Affairs* (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021).
42. Michael J. Montesano, Terence Chong, and Mark Shu Xun Heng, eds., *After the Coup: The National Council for Peace and Order Era and the Future of Thailand* (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019).
43. Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).
44. Karl Hack and Tobias Rettig, eds., *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2005).
45. Mark Beeson and Mark Bellamy, *Security Southeast Asia: The Politics of Security Sector Reform* (London: Routledge, 2008).
46. Aurel Croissant, David Kuehn, Philip Lorenz, and Paul Chambers, *Democratization and Civilian Control in Asia* (Palgrave, 2013); Aurel Croissant, *Civil–Military Relations in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

47. Marcus Mietzner, ed., *The Political Resurgence of the Military in Southeast Asia: Conflict and Leadership* (London: Routledge, 2013).
48. Volker Grabowsky and Frederick Rettig, eds., *Armies and Societies in Southeast Asia* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2020).
49. Florina Cristiana Matei, Carolyn Halladay, and Thomas Bruneau, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, 2nd ed. (2021), <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Handbook-of-Civil-Military-Relations/Matei-Halladay-Bruneau/p/book/9780367540425>.
50. Thamrongsak Phetlertanan, ข้ออ้างการปฏิวัติ-รัฐประหาร ในการเมืองไทยสมัยใหม่ [Pretext for the revolution-coup d'état in modern Thai politics] (Bangkok: Social Sciences and Humanities Textbook Project Foundation, 2018).
51. Wanwichit Boonprong, Thiraphong Bualah, การเปลี่ยนแปลงบทบาททางการเมืองของกองทัพไทยตั้งแต่ พ.ศ. 2535–2563 [Changes in political roles of the Royal Thai Army from 1992 to 2020] (Doctor of Philosophy Program, Department of Strategy and Security Burapha University, 2021).
52. Thep Bunthanon, ทหารของพระราชา กับการสร้างสำนึกแห่งศรัทธาและภักดี [The king's soldiers and the fostering of faith and loyalty] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2022).
53. Gregory Raymond, *Thai Military Power: A Culture of Strategic Accommodation* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2018).
54. Supalak, *A Soldier King*.
55. Paul Chambers, ed., *Knights of the Realm: Thailand's Military and Police, Then and Now* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2013).
56. Benedict Anderson, "Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scientists* 9, no. 3 (special supplement, October 1976, the coup in Thailand): 13–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1977.10406423>.
57. David Morell, "The Political Dynamics of Military Power in Thailand", in *The Armed Forces in Contemporary Asian Societies*, edited by Edward Olsen and Stephen Jurika (London: Routledge, 1986).
58. Surachart Bamrungsuk, "Thailand: Military Professionalism at the Crossroads", in *Military Professionalism in Asia: Conceptual and Empirical Perspectives*, edited by Muthia Alagappa (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2002).
59. James Ockey, "Thailand's 'Professional Soldiers' and Coup-making: The Coup of 2006", *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 19, no. 1 (2007): 95–127, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40860870>.
60. Ukrist Pathmanand, "A Different Coup d'Etat", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (February 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472330701651994>.
61. Thongchai Winichakul, "Toppling Democracy", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472330701651937>.
62. Paul Chambers and Napisa Waitoolkiat, "The Resilience of Monarchised Military in Thailand", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46, no. 3 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2016.1161060>.

63. Punchada Sirivunnabood and Jacob Ricks, “Professionals and Soldiers: Measuring Professionalism in the Thai Military”, *Pacific Affairs* 89, no. 1 (March 2016), <https://doi.org/10.5509/20168917>.
64. Prajak Kongkirati and Veerayooth Kanchoochat, “The Prayut Regime: Embedded Military and Hierarchical Capitalism in Thailand”, *TRANS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 6, no. 2 (July 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2018.4>.
65. Joseph Wright, *The Balancing Act: A History of Modern Thailand* (Bangkok: Asia Books, 1991).
66. Chaiyan Rajchagool, *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy: Foundations of the Modern Thai State from Feudalism to Peripheral Capitalism* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994).
67. Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994).
68. Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Kings, Country, and Constitutions: Thailand's Political Development, 1932–2000* (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2003).
69. Kullada Kesboonchoo-Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism* (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2006).
70. Paul Handley, *The King Never Smiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).
71. Federico Ferrara, *The Political Development of Modern Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015).
72. Nattapoll Chaiching, *ขุนศึก สักดินา และพญาอินทรี [Junta, lords, the eagle]* (Bangkok: Fa Diew Kan, 2020).
73. Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2022).
74. Andrew MacGregor Marshall, *A Kingdom in Crisis, Thailand's Struggle for Democracy in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Zed Books, 2014).