



**The Thai Military Since 1957: The Transition to Democracy
and the Emerging of the Professional Soldier**

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Declaration

This dissertation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the dissertation.

I consent to this dissertation being made available for photocopying and loan if applicable if accepted for the award of any degree.

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Summary

This dissertation analyses the role the Thai military played in Thailand's turbulent political history during the second half of the twentieth century. During this period almost 20 successful or aborted coups were staged by the military to takeover from democratically elected governments. Field Marshal Sarit seized control of the country in 1957 and military dictatorship remained for the next 16 years during which another 2 coups were staged. In each case the justification by the military for taking their actions was always publically expressed concern for the welfare and well being of the Thai people. The Thai military has always been a staunch supporter of the Royal Family and have used their influence on the monarchy to legitimize their actions. The last decade, however, has seen a dramatic change in the role of the military. Following the massacre of civilians in May 1992, they were forced to withdraw from absolute power but still strongly influence the Thai political scene. Globalization, a more politically aware public and pressure from the international community were all instrumental in achieving this decline in military power. The Thai military now accepted their role as guardian of the nation and acknowledges that they should serve the country rather than have the country serve them.

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Glossary

<i>chao pho</i>	'godfather'; term applied to ambitious local businessman
Isan /Esan	north-east region of Thailand
Khana Ratsadorn	The group behind the 1932 revolution
<i>nakleng</i>	a person must be kind to friends, cruel to enemy, engage in drinking, womanizing and renowned for gambling
<i>phattana</i>	development

Abbreviations

BIFGO	Board of Inspection and Follow-up of Government Operation
CAT	Communication Authority of Thailand
CCC	Counter Corruption Commission
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
INTERFET	International Force in East Timor
ISOC	Internal Security Operations Command
MCOT	Mass Communications Organisation of Thailand
NAP	New Aspiration Party
NARC	National Administrative Reform Council
NCCC	National Counter Corruption Commission
NEDB	National Economic Development Board
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board
NGOs	Non-government organisations
NPKC	National Peace Keeping Council
NSCT	National Student Center of Thailand
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organisation
STP	Sammakhi Tham Party
TBPP	Thai Border Patrol Police
UN	United Nation
USOM	United States Operations Mission
UTPP	United Thai People's Party

The Thai Military Since 1957: The Transition to Democracy and the Emerging Role of the Professional Soldier.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Thailand has been dominated by military influence since 1932.¹ The military still has a powerful influence on the Thai political and economic arena. After the May crisis in 1992, the military was forced to step down from active involvement in politics and they have greatly reduced their business activities, but they still continue to participate in national peace keeping. The status of the Thai military has radically changed since the May 1992 massacre of civilians by certain factions of the military and Thailand's economic meltdown in 1997. Furthermore, the professional soldier's thinking was tested by external and internal pressures.

Military leaders have led many coups and overthrown democracy and replaced it with authoritarianism. The grassroots of the military philosophy were created by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat in 1957, which was very anti-democratic.² Meanwhile, the American's hegemony in Thailand was established in the 1950s. It resulted in the military attaining a powerful position in society. Moreover, during the Sarit's regime (1958-1963) the growth of Thai democracy was almost non-existent.³

¹ "In 1932, the absolute monarchy was overthrown by the Khana Ratsadorn (the revolution group), which including the military, the Thai scholarship students from abroad", See, Pasuk Pongpaichit and Christ Baker, *Thailand Economy and Politics*, (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 249-256.

² Chai-Anand Samudavanija, Kusuma Sanitwongse, Suchit Bunbongkarn, *From Armed Suppression to Political Offensive*, (Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1990), pp.136-137.

³ *Ibid.* p. 139

Partly, it was similar to the Indonesian concept of dual functions “dwi-fungsi” which claimed that the troops had a dual role, both as a defence force and a socio-political force.⁴

The greatest impact on the military happened in 1973 with the rapid growth of the Thai economy and the emergence of the middle class. These two factors put immense pressure on them. Eventually, the military were overthrown and democratic restored but, nevertheless, during the 70s and 80s they still exerted indirect power over all aspects of Thai society. During this period, the armed forces agreed to allow civilians to participate and co-operate in developing a democratic system of government. At that time there were conflict and factional groups within the military. However, they still protected their interests in the business area and also increased their involvement in it. They tried to legitimise their role to keep control through the public fear of communism. The Thai armed forces had learnt many important lessons from its counter-insurgency experience. The Prime Minister Order No. 66/2523 authorized the military to engage in armed conflict against any person suspected of being communist and this greatly increased their role.⁵

Since the political crisis in 1992, the military has been made accountable for its actions. Their role has become increasingly confined to purely military concerns and has become restricted to that of the professional soldier. Furthermore, the troops have been forced to reduce their interests in business. Perhaps, the most important reason for the decline of military influence is the impact of the new constitution on the armed forces that precludes any military involvement in the politics of the country.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.159.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-157.

This dissertation will focus on what has happened with the Thai military since 1957 and describe its rise and fall in Thai politics. It also analyses the impact on the military during each period from 1957 until the present and what has been the main role of the Thai military during the last four decades.

This paper will focus on three historical periods.

Firstly, from 1957-1973 (The rising of the military).

Secondly, from 1973-1992 (internal and external pressures from within Thailand itself and world power).

Thirdly, from the post-May 1992- the present (how they have been forced to create a defense only role and its transition to a democratic one).

In this study, I will concentrate mainly on the army's role, because the army has been the most powerful force in Thailand since 1957, in both military terms and in a socio-political sense.

Chapter 2 The Rising of the Military.

Field Marshal Sarit Thanarath brought the military and himself to political power in 1957,⁶ following conflict between the government and armed forces. The military marched to political power and became dramatically involved as a playmaker in Thailand's political development process at that time.

This chapter describes the pattern of intervention of the military and its influence on Thai politics and its economy. Ironically, democracy in Thailand was frozen for a decade.

Moreover, the large benefits from external factors, such as American spending to suppress communism directly supported the military's position. Also, this chapter examines the junta's political philosophy, its exercise of dictatorship power and its involvement in corruption. The consequences of economic growth and role of opposing factions in the military during the following 16 years, which led to the fall of the junta in 1973, will also be discussed.

2.1 The Legitimacy for the Coup in 1957.

The government under the leadership of Field Marshal Phibun collapsed in 1957.⁷ Prior to this, there was continued struggle and competition between the army and the government, including the police. The relationship between Sarit and Phao Sriyanond, who was the Director General of Police Department, was especially antagonistic.⁸

⁶ "Field Marshal Sarit Thanarath was appointed to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army in 1954 and staged his coup against Field Marshal Phibun in 1957. He became the Prime Minister in 1958 until his death in 1963". Samudavanija Chai-Anan, *The Thai Young Turks*, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1982), pp.20-21.

⁷ "Field Marshal Phibun Songkham had been the Prime Minister twice, the first time from 1938-1940, and the second time from 1948-1957. He joined the revolution group in 1932 and he was trained in France in an artillery school", Whatt K. David, *Thailand: A Short History*, (Yale University, 1982), pp. 252-266.

⁸ "Phao Sriyanond, who was Phibun's aide-de-camp, and was appointed the Director General of the Police Department during the 50s", Pongpaichit and Baker, *Thailand Economy and Politics*, p.268.

Both the military and the police were trained and supported by the U.S.A. since Thailand became a member of SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organisation) in 1954 to counter communist insurgency in this region. Furthermore, both leaders used their departmental funds to gain a personal following and both supported opposing political factions. Sarit obtained financial support from the Government Lottery Bureau, whereas Phao was involved in the lucrative but illegal opium trade. They became formidable rivals.⁹

Field Marshal Phibun was directly affected by the rivalry between his colleagues and was in a real dilemma. He attempted to find a counterweight to Sarit, who was the Commander-in-chief of the Army, and Phao's police power. He approved Phao's demands to increase the police armed capability and upgrade their weapons to balance that of the military. He assumed that a clear balance between the two would work to alleviate the problem of armed conflict between the two internal forces.

The most important political event before the military coup in September 1957 was when university students demonstrated against Phibun's administration to protest about the election scandal of 1957.¹⁰ Phao used his political position and intervened. He used the police to control the election and assisted Phibun in his campaign and intimidated opposition candidates. He instigated the ballot box fraud where he interfered with the democratic process. Phao used thugs to disrupt opposition political rallies and interfered with ballot boxes by filling them with illegal ballot papers that supported Phibun. Finally, on 14 September 1957 when Sarit made his coup, Phibun's government was forced to resign when the military surrounded all strategic places in Bangkok. Also, the people marched to support Sarit in his coup against Phibun and Phao. Phibun escaped to Cambodia, while Phao was arrested and expelled to

⁹ Wyatt K. David, *Thailand: A Short History*, p. 273.

Switzerland. Following the coup, Sarit took over the Police Department and all internal forces in Thailand were under his control.¹¹

Basically, Sarit justified his military takeover of government after the coup by claiming that he had the approval from the king as well as the people to support his overthrow of the previous government. Immediately after the coup, he went to meet the King and explained his actions. He was able to convince the King that he had done an honorable thing and he was consequently appointed Defender of the Capital by royal decree. Thus, the royal command legitimised Sarit's authority to take control.¹² After his audience with the King he issued the following statement to the people of Thailand:

I do not feel at all glad at the actions taken. Necessity and the popular will demand this... Our action were precipitated by two reasons, that the government should resign, and that Phao also resign from his position as Director-General of Police. Our aims were these two reasons which the people clamored for. The people and the press had always reminded me never to retreat and that I should make them [demands] successful. Now they are achieved.¹³

The change in government had a great influence on Thai society. In Thai society the patron client relations had characterised the exercise of authority. A Thai leader must be strong and portray manliness as perceived by popular opinion. This is the quality of the 'nakleng' Thai (it means that a person must be kind to friends, cruel to enemies, engage in drinking, womanising and renowned for gambling).¹⁴ Sarit had all these

¹⁰ Morell David and Samudavanija Chai-Anan, *Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction, Revolution*, (Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain: Publisher, 1982), p. 138.

¹¹ Pongpaichit and Baker, *Thailand Economy and Politics*, p.272.

¹² Chaloeontiarana Thak, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, (The Social Science Association of Thailand, Thammasart University, 1979), p.124.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.124.

¹⁴ Girling L.S. John, *Thailand: Society and Politics*, (Cornell University Press, 1981), p.123.

qualities and used his status and charisma to gain the support of the subordinate people.

2.2 The Interim Government and the Return of Sarit

Usually, after a coup it was common practice for the coup's leader to become the premier. Sarit knew this but stepped down so a new cabinet would be formed. He and the military officers had no ambitions to hold the position of Prime Minister at least this is what he claimed in the press. The military circle and the politicians (who supported the coup) stated that it was not proper for a military officer or any politicians to assume the position of Prime Minister.¹⁵ In these circumstances, Pote Sarasin was thought to be the most suitable candidate. He came from a wealthy family and never become involved in corruption scandals while he was in public office. The military also supported him and everyone believed that he could normalise relations with foreign countries.¹⁶

The first task of the Pote administration was conducting and preparing for an election. Following the elections, the military established a new party the Chatsangkhomniyom Party (National Socialist Party). Sarit appointed himself as the leader, Thanom as deputy and Praphat as the secretary of the party.¹⁷ No party won a majority in the 1957 election. Sarit endeavoured to challenge the ex-members from Seri Managkhasila (the former government and Phibun's party). The Democrat Party was always in opposition but received a lot of public support. However, it was regarded by the military as its political enemy. Therefore, Sarit formed a new party

¹⁵ Chaloeontiarana Thak, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, p.128.

¹⁶ "Pote Sarasin was a lawyer and diplomat. He was once the ambassador in Washington and also was promoted to the post of Secretary-General of SEATO", *Ibid.*, p.130.

¹⁷ "Thanom Kittikachon and Praphat Charusatien, both of them had close subordinate armies of Sarit. They also were appointed the Commander-in-Chief of the Army after Sarit died. Only Thanom was the Prime Minister-first in 1957, and second from 1963-73." Samudavanija Chai-Anan, *The Thai Young Turks*, p.15

and brought some of the other member parties together.¹⁸ Ironically, Pote did not want to continue in the premiership after the elections and he criticized Sarit for forming a new party and did not wish to become the junta's puppet. Finally, Sarit nominated Thanom to be Prime Minister but Thanom was reluctant to accept this position, because Sarit had gone abroad for medical treatment and he would not have his active support.¹⁹ Problems quickly arose for Thanom's government could not work with the cabinet and the government lost seats in the election held in March to the opposition party. The Democrat Party won thirteen seats but the government took only nine. Furthermore, the government budget had a large deficit. Eventually, Thanom advised Sarit about the crisis, and Thanom resigned when Sarit returned to Thailand and he took control again of the government in October 20, 1958.²⁰

2.3 Sarit's Political Philosophy.

When Sarit took over Thanom's government, he abrogated the political party system and all democratic advances. All political parties and all political activities were banned. This directly halted Thailand's democratic progress.²¹ However, according to Sarit the political system that had existed prior to the coup had failed to establish a stable and strong economic and political system. Therefore, Sarit rejected the Western democratic styles of government. He claimed that:

If we look at our national history, we can very well see that this country works better and prosper under an authority, not a tyrannical authority around which all elements of the nation can rally. On the contrary, the dark pages of our history show that whenever such an authority is lacking and dispersal elements

¹⁸ Chaloeontiarana Thak, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, p.134.

¹⁹ Morell David, *Power and Parliament in Thailand: The Futile Challenge, 1968-1971*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, (University Microfilms International Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1971), p.118.

²⁰ Wyatt . K David, *Thailand: A Short History*, p.280.

²¹ Maj.Col. Chuechai Khanthupath, "Naew Kuam Khit Lae Ponngan Khong Nak Kan Thahan Thai: Thai Suksa Chapoe Koranee Jompon Sarit Thanarath", [The Political Thinking and Task of the Thai Military in Case of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarath], Thesis for Graduate School, (Royal Thai Army Command and General Staff College, Thailand,1993), p.64

had their play, the nation was plunged into one disaster after another.²²

Sarit asserted that Western democratic theory was not suitable for Thailand. He also criticised Thailand as an underdeveloped country. To overcome this Sarit stated that the country needed strong direction and that democracy, in the Western sense, had no relevance for the Thai people. He argued that Thailand had to create a form of government which was suitable for them. He believed that an authoritarian approach was the only way to salvation.²³

Thus, troops were brought in to enforce law and order. He adopted this policy for the following four reasons. Firstly, the political system had failed because the political parties lacked political ideology and just protected their own interests through corruption. In the authoritarian model, there is no undue influence from members of political parties. What happens solely depends on the power of the leader or his personal charisma to gain support from his subordinates. In the democratic process when members of a party were in dissent, they formed factions or a new political party.²⁴

Secondly, the democratic political system in developing countries often collapsed. According to Chai-Anan Samudavanija, Thailand has had 10 coups during the 1932-1958 period (including 4 abortive coups).²⁵ Ultimately, intervention by the troops has been an obstacle to the effective operation of Thai politics.

²² Samudavanija Chai-Anan, Snitwongse Kusuma, Bunbongkarn Suchit, *From Armed Suppression to Political Offensive*, (Institute of Security and International Studies, Thailand, 1990), p.138.

²³ Chaloeontiarana Thak, *Thailand: The Politics and Despotic Paternalism*, pp.158-160.

²⁴ Maj.Col. Vedhsak Duangurai, "*Kan Muang Kab Bot Bath Khong Taharn Nai Prathet Thai*", [The Politics with the Rule of the Thai Military], Thesis for Graduate School, (Royal Thai Army command and General Staff College, Thailand, 1987), p.22.

²⁵ Samudavanija Chai-Anan, *The Thai Young Turks*, p.4.

Thirdly, the vacuum power of the political system through weakness of the civilian government has only promoted instability. Thus, it has been easy for the military to take over government.

Fourthly, most Thai people lacked any encouragement to understand the principles of democracy but, in the aftermath of the revolution in 1932, the intellectualists demanded an upgrade in their own social status.²⁶

Sarit insisted on promoting the old paternalistic style of rule, based on traditional Thai values. He interpreted the role of the king as an active force, responsible for the moral, social and political order required for developing the country. Therefore, the benevolence of the king was like that of the father who has care of his children and concern for their welfare, but his children must learn to accept his discipline without question. Sarit equated his position as identical to the king and that he was also the father who could do anything to the people to ensure proper stability in the state.²⁷

At the same time, Sarit revived the monarchy as an active participant in Thai society, which had not been evident since 1932. The monarchy's restoration to social power further legitimised Sarit's position, and the military had to participate in protecting the national institutions, which included the nation, religion and the monarchy.²⁸ He used the monarchy to endorse his paternalistic thinking and to justify his actions. The Royal Family was encouraged by Sarit and the military leaders to go on frequent tours in the countryside, especially poverty-stricken areas where it offered support in term of relief and goodwill. Nevertheless, Sarit did not encourage an expansion of the King's role to include involvement in politics of the country.

²⁶ Maj.Col.Vedhsak Duanurai, ' *The Politic with the Rule of the Thai Military*', pp.27-28.

Sarit's main idea was to maintain loyalty to the monarchy. In fact, He was an indigenous product.²⁹ He did not have the chance to study abroad and graduated from the army academy in Thailand.³⁰ Thus, it was easy to promote close links with the King. According to Morris Janowitz, an officer who has graduated from military academy is more conservative than a soldier who gains promotion through the rank and file and joins the military as a raw recruit. It shows that a person became more involved if they have had the experience of the military organisation or institution.³¹ The soldier respects past traditions as imposed by the country's history, as they have no other model to follow.

However, Sarit's concept of revolution was based on 'phattana' ('development', in Thai).³² He wished to develop the economy of the country but, at the same time, eradicate the ills of society (crime, drugs, and prostitution). During the five years of this regime, Sarit was actively involved in trying to achieve this but democracy was frozen during his era.

2.4 Dictatorship's Hegemony and the Large Interests.

During Sarit's paternalistic style of leadership, he assumed full control of the state. He used not only his power as Prime Minister, but also the power from his other positions; supreme commander of the armed forces, commander-in-chief of the army and director-general of the police department.³³ He was further empowered by Article 17 of the Interim Constitution. This Article increased his power to order the

²⁷ Wyatt K. David, *Thailand: A Short History*, p.281.

²⁸ Girling L.S. John, *Thailand: Society and Politics*, pp.139-140.

²⁹ Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: the Politics* p.153.

³⁰ Wyatt K. David, *Thailand: A Short History* p.279.

³¹ Janowitz Morris, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*, (The Free Press, New York, 1960), pp. 239-241.

³² Samudavanija, Sanitwongse, Bunbongkarn, *From Armed Suppression to Political Offensive*, p.137

³³ Dhiravegin Likhit, *Demi-Democracy: The Evolution of the Thai Political System*, (Times Academic Press, 1992), p.165.

execution of persons who were considered to jeopardise national security, or the throne, or the law, such as communist suspects, arsonists and heroin producers. The Prime Minister could order executions by his direct power.³⁴ Under the rules of martial law, he prompted and focused on total obedience to the law and used decisive action to solve all internal problems. During his five years of power Sarit strongly maintained this decisiveness to persons who were involved in criminal activities. Crime and hooliganism were reduced, and prostitution was also brought under control. Furthermore, he concentrated on hygiene in a clean, tidy environment. In this country, he pointed out that pedicabs were an antiquated form of transport and looked uncivilised. He banned all such things to make the country's image more modern.³⁵ However, in this period the military officers, especially those of high rank, were deeply involved in business that was often corrupt. Furthermore, these military officers and their families had become a new elite in the Thai society. The Thai-Chinese business communities went into joint ventures with the military, and they invited them to be members on company Boards for their relative power.³⁶

According to Pasuk and Sunsidh, corruption was involved in setting up many companies. The government acted as contractors and suppliers and there were many notorious corruption schemes. If any Chinese or aliens wanted immigration visas, they had to pay bribes to high-ranking government officers.³⁷ All of the senior military leaders had a heavy share in financial and commercial activities, not only to increase their social and economic status but for political support. However, the corruption issue became a big scandal after the death of Sarit in 1963. It was announced to the public that his assets were worth around 2.8 billion baht. He and his

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.158

³⁵ Wyatt k. David, *Thailand: A Short History*, p.280.

³⁶ Morell and Samudavanija, *Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction, Revolution*, p.23.

wife held share interests in 45 companies, not including bank accounts, stock holdings and his own land of around nine thousand acres. He misappropriated money from other financial sources which included the Lottery Bureau where he took a percentage share from all lottery tickets.³⁸ Thus, the military had successfully seized extensive power in the country. It had extended its base to economic interests without challenge and so the high-ranking officers in the military had monopolistic control over the Thai political economy. Subsequent corruption during the Sarit period quickly spread to the grass roots of Thai society especially when it expanded to the civil bureaucracy and successive regimes after Sarit. In its 1986 annual report the Counter Corruption Commission (CCC) released information about a high ranking military officer who had been found guilty of accumulating 213.45 million bath through corrupt business dealings. This was the beginning of many such cases as can be seen in table 2.

³⁷ Phongpaichit Pasuk and Piriyanansan Sungsidh, *Corruption and Democracy in Thailand*, (The Political Economy Centre, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1994), p.37.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.23.

Estimated value of corruption by bureaucrats (million baht/year) .

Ministry	Sarit	Thanom	Sanya-Kriangsak	Prem	Chatichai
Year	<u>1960-63</u>	<u>1964-73</u>	<u>1974-81</u>	<u>1981-88</u>	<u>1988-90</u>
Interior	20	68	232	430	1148
Agriculture	44	206	720	1566	2194
Education	28	92	352	1102	1072
Communication	68	366	960	1596	2512
Public health	8	32	144	280	364
Others	108	420	1584	2144	4388
Total	272	1180	3996	7120	11676

Sources: Pasuk Phongpaichit and Sungsidh Piriyarangsak³⁹

The table shows the rapid increase in corruption by bureaucrats from the Sarit period until 1990, as a result of the kind of evidence summarised in this table.

Thailand has been called a 'bureaucratic polity' that has worked in favour of the military bureaucrats rather than civilians. However, the military only influenced the uppermost echelon of the administration and did not concern itself with civilian bureaucrat.⁴⁰ Also, there was an increase in cooperation and participation between the two. Sarit created this relationship between the military officers and civilian bureaucrats at a high level by establishing the National Defense Academy.⁴¹ It established a cohesive patron-client relationship, but it also led to a rise in corruption in the Thai political system.

³⁹ Phongpaichit and Piriyaransan, *Corruption and Democracy in Thailand*, pp. 32-34.

2.5 The Impact on the Thai Military.

The main factor of the Thai military was its influence on Thai politics, and its involvement with the U.S.A. In the early 1950s, the U.S. was concerned about the rise of communism in Southeast Asia and insurgencies operating in many countries.

Thailand accepted assistance from the U.S. in the form of economic aid and military support. Furthermore, Thailand had sent Thai soldiers to fight in the Korean War under the United Nation (UN) command during Phibun's era. This military involvement by Thailand resulted in close links with the U.S. because the U.S. provided equipment and training for Thai troops after Thailand sent its troops to the war.⁴² The military assistance by the U.S. further established the strength and power of the Thai military, especially when the U.S. built military facilities such as the naval base at Sattahip and an all weather sealed road to the Northeastern region.⁴³ The Americans developed in Thailand an internal military network to prepare against the Chinese communist out of fear of the domino effect a communist takeover would have in the neighbouring countries of Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia.

During the 60s, the political situation in Thailand's neighbouring countries changed: the Laotian's crisis in 1962, the struggle between North-South Vietnam during the 60's, and a deterioration in Thailand - Cambodia relations, because Cambodia was developing a closer relationship with China.⁴⁴

Actually, the problems of communist insurgency for Thailand were not only affected by external pressure, but were compounded when the government introduced the Anticommunist Act in 1952, which included capital punishment for those who

⁴⁰ Morell David, *Power Parliament*, p.134.

⁴¹ Deravegin Likhit, *Demi-Democracy*, p. 166.

⁴² Robert J. Muscat, *Thailand and The United States: Developments, Security, and Foreign Aid*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1990), p.20.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.21-22.

contravened it. During Phibun's era, four political leaders from the Northeastern region (ISAN) were killed because they were accused of being communists. Then, in 1961 Khrong Chandawong who was a politician from this region was arrested and executed.⁴⁵ In fact, the real reason for discontent and the rise of communist insurgency came from the Northeastern areas, which had been neglected by the central government compared with other parts of Thailand. There were also differences in attitude, culture, dialect and language between the Northeastern and Central regions. Moreover, many Northeasterners think their culture and customs are similar to Lao rather than other parts of Thailand. Their request to the government to pay more attention to poverty in this area was consistently ignored.⁴⁶ Immediately, when the news of the execution of Khrong and the four political leaders from the Northeast was released to the public, the Northeasterners felt that they were being persecuted by the central government and consequently were easy recruits for the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT).⁴⁷ As a result, communist insurgency became a serious issue in Thailand. Sarit strongly maintained his opposition to it. He argued that:

What is worse is that the communists have intensified their activities in order to infiltrate the various circles in order to destroy our sacred national institutions including the nation, region and the monarchy. Many members of the House of Representatives have already sold their soul and bodies to this doctrine and became its tool openly...⁴⁸

Sarit openly rejected communist ideologies and promoted a capitalist system to achieve his own goals of personal wealth through corruption. He was a willing puppet

⁴⁵ Morell and Samudavanija, *Political Conflict*, p.84

⁴⁶ Muscat J. Robert, *Thailand and The United States*, pp.150-151.

⁴⁷ Morell and Samudavanija, *Political Conflict*, p.85

⁴⁸ Dhiravegin Likhit, *Demi-Democracy: The Evolution of the Thai Political System*, p.157.

to U.S. ambitions. The U.S. was concerned with the expansion of the Vietnam conflict in the early 1960s, and so Thailand's importance to the American government increased, and was reflected in economic, military and technical assistance. The U.S promoted Thailand as a trade partner.⁴⁹

The initial outcome of this trade agreement was based largely on agriculture during the Korean War. During Sarit's rule, Thailand accepted more U.S. assistance for development from the United States Operations Mission (USOM) or American aid. The purpose of this organisation was to create more training in technology, agricultural development, public health and transportation development, especially in the rural areas.⁵⁰ This had a large impact on the Thai economy and resulted in a strong and successful counter-insurgency campaign in rural regions.

The Thai government established the National Economic Development Board (NEDB) which introduced the first National Development Plan, 1961-1966 and it contained three objectives: Firstly, to increase the living standard of the people.

Secondly, to increase people's income from the sale of products and services and to make wages more equitable in both rural and urban regions. Finally, the government's objective was to support industrial and agricultural development and the necessary infrastructure such as electricity, irrigation and transportation improvement.⁵¹

Nation building by Sarit's policy had a direct impact on Thailand through the inflow of foreign investment and also the development of agriculture, which immediately ameliorated some of the problems in the Thai economy.

⁴⁹ Bowie Alasdair and Unger Danny, *The Politics of Open Economics: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand*, (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.135.

⁵⁰ Bell .F Peter, 'Cycle of Class Struggle in Thailand', in Turton Andrew, Fast Jonathan, Caldwell Malcolm, (eds.), *Thailand: Roots of Conflict*, (Spokesman, 1978), pp.60-61.

⁵¹ Dhiravegin Likhit, *Demi-Democracy*, p. 167.

The Thai military academy changed its curriculum from 3 years to 5 years and adopted the West Point model. From 1950-69, more than ten thousand students were trained in the U.S. International Military Education and Training Program.⁵²

Nevertheless, since the seventies, many soldiers have been trained in the United States and came out with a political ideology based on American ideas amongst top ranking Thai officers in the armed forces.

However, the U.S. presence has also had an impact on the class structure of Thailand with a mass drive to increase the status of the bourgeois and the proletariat, especially in Isan (Northeastern). During this period, Thailand also increased its numbers of construction workers, employees, personal businesses and included the hospitality area (bars, nightclubs). The leap in development of the Thai working class occurred in this period.⁵³ At the same time, the Thai military became wealthier with increases in military expenditure at a time when communism was rising in Thai's neighbouring countries and in some Thai rural areas. These conditions made the military more involved in Thai political, economic and social development.

2.6 The New Successors.

Following the death of Sarit in 1963, the inner core of the military group who had participated with Sarit's coup in 1957 had a referendum to chose Thanom Kittikachorn to be Prime Minister. His selection was based on several factors.

Firstly, he was the most senior of the military leaders in term of both government position and age. Secondly, he was the ad hoc Prime Minister and had had political experience when he was the Prime Minister in 1958. Also, he could promote harmony

⁵² Samudavanija, Sanitwongse, Bunbongkarn, *From Armed Suppression to Political Offensive*, p.142.

⁵³ Elliott David, *Thailand: Origins of Military Rule*, (Zed Press, London, 1978), pp.129-130.

among the military and other members of the inner circle.⁵⁴ His personality was completely different from Sarit who was decisive and charismatic but Thanom had good connections with the military and political factions and a close link with the palace and foreign affairs. Praphat Charusatien, a contender for Sarit's position, was also a powerful member in the military. After Thanom assumed the Prime Ministership, Praphat was appointed to be the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. His character was the opposite to Thanom and more like Sarit. He was strong, assertive and decisive. However, his public image was weak, because the people suspected that he was overly corrupt in his political position.⁵⁵ Ultimately, these suspicions affected both Thanom and Praphat because of their political alliance. Moreover, Thanom's son, Colonel Narong, was married to Praphat's daughter and that expanded their political power.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, another inner core member of the military group was General Krit Srivara, who exerted a powerful influence among other senior army officers. His military career began in the First Army Region, however he was reshuffled from Bangkok to take Command of the Second Army Region in the Northeast. Within a short period, he became involved, and quickly established a political base with local businessmen and politicians. Eventually he returned to Bangkok to be Commander of the First Army Region and he was appointed Army Deputy Commander in 1966. Krit gained more political power than he had previously held and made far more joint-venture business deals than other inner core members during this period.⁵⁷ After the death of Sarit, this inner core clique was the power base of the Thai political pyramid in which concentration of power was in the hands of an increasingly small numbers of

⁵⁴Morell .L David, *Power and Parliament*, pp.118-119.

⁵⁵ David Morell and Chai-Anan Samudavanija, *Political Conflict*, pp. 52-54.

⁵⁶ Samudavanija Chai-Anan, *The Thai Young Turks*, p.22.

⁵⁷Morell L David, *Power and Parliament in Thailand*, pp.125-126.

people. All of its members had risen up through the First Army units, which had its Headquarter in Bangkok- Sarit, Thanom, Praphat, and Krit were all promoted in this region. This Army base had instigated political coups by remote control from 1932-1957. This heart of power was created as a result of these coups.⁵⁸ However, Sarit's successors still maintained their heritage benefits such as political power and business ventures to protected their patron-client rule.

2.7 The Fall of Junta Government.

During the 60's and 70's, Thailand entered increasingly into a capitalist style of government and was supported in this by American influence brought about by the build-up of U.S. forces in Thailand. The democratic political system also began to re-emerge in 1968 and political parties and the constitution were restored. Field Marshal Thanom and his ally, Praphat, set up their party, the United Thai People's Party (UTPP), but their party failed to obtained a majority of seats even though they used some illegal tactics in the election. The UTPP was condemned by most of the public, which included the workers and the bourgeois, because the new elite class created through military rule had mismanaged the economy and had held absolute power for more than a decade.⁵⁹ Thanom also did not gain popular support because he did not have a strong and decisive personality like Sarit. Finally, in November 1971, the 1968 constitution and political parties were abrogated. He used the same method as Sarit.

He claimed the reason for the coup was because of the turmoil created by the insurgency situation. He especially attacked the Chinese people in Thailand and said

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,p.156.

⁵⁹ Elliott David, *Thailand-Origins of Military Rule*, pp.134-135.

that they were involved in promoting Chinese communist doctrines. He asserted that they were a threat to Thai national sovereignty.⁶⁰

However, Thanom's military dictatorship declined in October 14, 1973. In fact, there were three factors that caused the collapse of Thanom's government.

Firstly, let us consider the emergence of the Thai student movement. After Sarit's death, it was initiated by the Thai intellectual activist, Sulak Sivarak, who had studied in England, he used the journal, *Social Science Review*, which was first published in 1963, to criticize Thai's social problems and injustices. This journal influenced many intellectuals and university students. It had many articles which were strongly critical of the junta rule.⁶¹ Actually, Thai's intellectuals became a strong pressure group during the 50s. The Cornell Programme by Cornell University, established for academic research included a study of Thai political, social, economic, and development particularly the rural conditions. Also, the Rockefeller foundation supported Thai projects such as for agricultural development. Furthermore, the U.S. government provided scholarships and training to Thai students. This had an impact on Thai intellectuals and students and they subsequently participated more in the political affairs of the country.

In 1969, university students established the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT).⁶² Their first public action was to focus attention on the sale of Japanese goods in Thailand, because of the large trade deficit that existed between the two countries. The government agreed with the student's action and this was a good beginning for the student movement. However, this state of affair was short-lived.

The student movements were against any extension of Thanom tenure as supreme commander of the armed forces. Nine university students were expelled from

⁶⁰Rajaretnam.M and Lim So Jean, *Trend in Thailand*, (Singapore University, 1973), pp.3-5.

university, because they severely criticized Thanom's extension. As a result, many students marched in protest against the government. They demanded a new constitution within six months but the government replied that it would not be finished for 3 years. Eventually, the military regime ended in bloodshed.⁶³ King Phumiphon had to intervene in the political sphere for the first time. He appointed a civilian Prime Minister himself and ordered Thanom and Praphat into exile. The revival of the monarchy initiated by Sarit, was supported by the Thai people with dire consequences for the military. The Royal Family has always been the core to Thai culture and the military were forced to bow to the King's decrees.

Secondly, the expansion of the Thai economy spread benefits to the new middle classes. The first National Economic Development Plan had pushed for a Thai class structure. U.S. foreign policy at this time was to support Thailand in both economic and military aid in order to stop communism spreading into this region. The Americans acknowledged the Thai middle class had extensive mass mobilization. During the industrialization period between the 60s and 70s, a blue-collar class was formed and became more educated and liberal in their political thinking.⁶⁴ In this period, both capitalism and democracy were promoted, especially to the young generation. Eventually, the tyranny of military rule was challenged by the results of economic development.

Lastly, the most important episode was the deep split among the military factions. After the coup in 1971, Thanom's son and Praphat's son-in-law, Colonel Narong Kittikachorn was appointed to be head of a new Committee to Suppress Elements

⁶¹ Morell David and Samudavanija Chai-Anan, *Political Conflict*, pp.139-140.

⁶² Bell F. Peter, 'Cycle of Class Struggle in Thailand', , p.62.

⁶³ Morell and Samudavanija, *Political Conflict*, pp.143-146.

⁶⁴ Maisrikrod Surin, 'The Making of Thai Democracy: A Study of Political Alliances Among the States, the Capitalists, and the Middle Class', in Anek Laothamatas (ed.), *Democratisation in Southeast and East Asia*, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997), pp.146-147

Detrimental to Society and included the deputy secretary-general of a new anticorruption agency named the Board of Inspection and Follow-up of Government Operation (BIFGO). Narong had ambitions to extend his power. Some military officers felt dissatisfied with his actions, because he initially destroyed their patron-client networks. Narong used BIFGO to lay charges of corruption against these officers, particularly the colleagues of General Krit and business groups who rivaled his own family's business interests. But, his father and father-in-law's interests benefited from this, as BIFGO did not take any action against them.⁶⁵ This nepotism became an obstacle to other military groups who wished to share in the benefits gained through corrupt business dealings. From 1963-1973, this political dynasty dominated all aspects of Thai society. Many people believed that Narong would succeed his father as Prime Minister.

2.8 Conclusion

From 1957-1973 the Thai military intervened and participated in the Thai Socio-political system, during which time they modernised the country and created a growth economy. The military's position was strengthened and became more stable without the constraint of democracy and assumed a despotic paternalistic role in governing the country. Furthermore, the American occupation in Thailand during the counter-insurgency period helped develop the political power of the Thai military through aid, technology and weapons. During the late 60s U.S. support boosted the economy and made Thailand leap forward and became more open and flexible but this had a 'boomerang effect' on the Thai military, and its power dramatically declined in 1973. The strict limit on who could have access to power enforced by Sarit, became a

⁶⁵ Morell and Samudavanija, *Political Conflict*, pp.146-148.

dilemma for Thanom and Praphat because monopolistic power was an obstacle to other military officers who could not ascend to high leadership positions, if they had no charisma or 'stick and carrot' incentives.

The heritage of this dictatorship of more than a decade has become part of the deep structure of Thailand's patron-client system and resulted in absolute corruption in joint-ventures in political and economic terms within Thai society.

Chapter 3: Road to Democracy.

After the political crisis in 1973, the armed forces were forced to step down, but they were still involved in politics. However, the military tried to use the power vacuum in the Thai political system to re-intervene and re-build their rule. 1976 was a period of chaos in the Thai political system. Fighting between the left and right wing increased. Nevertheless, the military changed their pattern of counter-insurgency by supporting a more open system of democracy. Furthermore, they participated more in Thailand's society, especially in rural areas.

This chapter examines the military attempts to follow a democratic model. Also, it explains how external factors influenced internal change, particularly in regard to political unrest in 1976 and 1992. I will also discuss the new factions in the armed forces, which had long-term effects on Thai military and political issues. Although, the military supported democracy more than before, they nevertheless interfered with this process several times during the period 1976-1991. On the 23rd February 1991 they successfully ousted the government for the last time in the 20th century.

The dilemma that constantly faced military rule was to remain in power and at the same time to justify its legitimacy. Eventually, the principles of democracy and their acceptance by the general public brought on another crisis and it ended in bloodshed in 1992 when the military were once more forced to step down. This has had a deep and continuing impact on the Thai military.

3.1 The Political Crisis in October 1976.

The political situation in Thailand changed after the student's victory in October 1973, and saw the rise of democracy. In this period, there was a large increase in the

number of students and university graduates became absorbed in to the work force. Many graduates were interested in the social sciences and became deeply involved in social, political and economic issues.⁶⁶ Their actions brought public attention to many national problems. In 1975, the Thai people participated in the first election since the constitution and political parties had been abrogated in 1971. The National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) was more involved in the political arena as protestors, particularly in their demands for a proclamation of a constitution for human rights and liberties.⁶⁷

In 1975, the civilian government, under Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj, changed Thailand's strategic plan. Because of the communist victories in Indochina, Thailand began diplomatic rapprochement with the Chinese communists. When Kukrit visited China, he noted the scope of the conflict between China and Vietnam. Thailand wanted to use China as a counterweight to Vietnam, which was supported by the Soviet Union.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the civilian government demanded that American armed forces withdraw from Thailand as a result of U.S. failure to halt the spread and development of communism in Vietnam. But, the Thai military leaders objected to the total withdrawal of U.S. troops due to their business interests and military aid.⁶⁹

However, Thailand's political situation was not stable and pro democracy supporters were concerned about the spread of communism in the region. During this period, the right wing movement became more influential and established close links with military intelligence officers. The rightist movement was called '*Navapol*' which

⁶⁶ Elliott James, 'Thailand: The Military and Democracy', *Dyason House Papers: Australia, Asia and the World*, June 1984, Vol.10, No.4, p.10.

⁶⁷ Sanchai Somporn, *The Rising of the Rightist Phoenix*, Southeast Asian Affairs, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1976), p.358.

⁶⁸ Norman Peagan, 'Thailand Joins the Peking Ensemble', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 11, 1975. Vol.89, No.28, pp.20-21.

⁶⁹ Marian Mallet, '*Cause and Consequences of the October '76 Coup*', in Andrew Turton, Jonathan Fast, Malcolm Caldwell, (eds.), *Thailand: Roots of Conflict*, p.88.

means 'soldier of the ninth' and was a symbolic reference to King Bhumibol (Rama IX).⁷⁰ Navapol had a very close association with the CIA, and the founder of Navapol, Wattana Keowimon, had studied in America for a long time.⁷¹ A further source of concern for Thailand was the collapse of the monarchy in Laos in 1975. The ultra nationalist groups were concerned about the threat of the communists to their own Thai monarchy. Wattana was a powerful orator and motivated the public to embrace their current system with his emotional plea to the people. "Do you love Thailand? Do you love your king? Do you hate the communists?"⁷² Finally, the Navapol group claimed that their numbers had expanded to over 50,000 people from all over Thailand.⁷³

Meanwhile, another right wing group; the Red Gaurs, was established by some military staff officers. This group supported the vocational students (Technical Colleges students) in Bangkok. After the political crisis in 1973 when the military lost power, Colonel Sudsai Hasdin, who had established the Red Gaurs, observed that the Thai student movement was becoming a powerful political force. The violence and radical actions by the technical college students against military troops during the 1973 conflict were unexpected. He compared these students as 'the arms and feet' and the university student as 'the brain' of an unstoppable force. If he was to destroy or slow down this force, he had to cut off the head from the remaining body. Eventually, Sudsai managed to divide the Thai student groups. Actually, he appealed to the grievances of the vocational students, because they felt they were an inferior part of society. They lacked the ability or opportunity to matriculate and enter university and when they graduated from technical school, it was difficult to get a good job

⁷⁰ Peagan Norman, 'Rumbling from the Right', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 25, 1975. Vol.89, No.28, pp.20-21.

⁷¹ David Morell and Chai-Anan Samudavanija, *Political Conflict*, p.239.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.240.

compared with the university students. Their lack of job opportunities and low social status was a contentious issue between them. Sudsai exploited this resentment and enticed them to join his own the Red Gaurs group. The technical students moved from the left to the right because they wished to become more involved in the power structure of Thai politics and Sudsai's appeal to them appeared to offer them this opportunity and improve their status in Thai society. This action consequently defused the situation.⁷⁴ The traumas of 1973 came back to haunt Thailand when Field Marshal Thanom returned to Thailand as a monk in 1976. The university students immediately protested to the government about this issue.⁷⁵ The confrontation between the university students and the right wing group became explosive. Basically, the government officers suspected the university students of being communists, especially since some student activists went to the villages on the pretence of working for community development projects, but trained villagers to use weapons. Furthermore, some of the NSCT students had close relationships with the Socialist Party of Thailand.⁷⁶ Ironically, the right wing groups claimed that the university students tried to insult the royal family, particularly in a mock lynching by university students in which one of the participants was made up to look like the Crown Prince.⁷⁷ This incident was used as propaganda by the military to make the Thai people believe all university students were communist. When a Buddhist monk, 'Kittiwutho Bhikkhu', pointed out that 'killing a communist is not a sin but it is the duty of all

⁷³ Peagan Norman, 'Rumbling from the Right', p.13

⁷⁴ Morell David and Samudavanija Chai-Anan, *The Political Conflict*, pp.241-242.

⁷⁵ "Thanom gave the reason for his return from exile in Singapore as a monk as a symbolic gesture to his 91 year old bedridden father. In Thai traditional culture the son is supposed to spend at least 3 months living as a monk to gain merit for his parents and this can be done at any stage in life. Many political observers however thought that this was a well-planned action by Thanom to embarrass the government but it was powerless to do anything about it because Thanom's decision to become a monk is regarded in Thailand as very honourable", See, Richard Nations, 'Tremors As Thanom Returns', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, (October 1, 1976), Vol.94, No.40, p.8.

⁷⁶ Somporn Sangchai, *The Rising of the Rightist Phoenix*, pp.359-360.

Thai, because they will destroy the nation, religion and the monarchy',⁷⁸ it became more explosive and many Thai people felt hatred towards the university students. As a result of this, the university students lost public support and resentment against them grew rapidly. Finally, many Thai students were massacred due to differences in political ideologies by right wing political groups and military goon squads. Their bodies were burnt and others were tortured at Thammasart University.

On the same day, in October 6,1976 the former supreme commander of the armed forces, Admiral Sa-ngad Chalayoo made a successful coup against the civilian government and called himself and his group the National Administrative Reform Council (NARC).⁷⁹ This marked the end of a short democratic period (1973-1976) in Thailand 's turbulent post World War II history.

3.2 Open to Democracy

After the mournful events of 6 October 1976, in which students were killed during the military coup, many Thai University students, leftists' intellectuals and Socialist Party members fled to neighbouring countries such as Laos and Cambodia. They were concerned that the new right wing government would use violent measures to control them.⁸⁰ Thanin Kraivichien was appointed Prime Minister by the NARC⁸¹. In the past, he had been a secret member of the executive committee of Navapol and also was close to the Royal Family and the armed forces. Thanin established very extremist aggressive policies toward the communists. His ultra-right government announced

⁷⁷ Nations Richard, 'October Revolution- Part II', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 15, 1976. Vol.94, No.42, p.10.

⁷⁸ Jumbala Prudhisian, 'The Democratic Experiment in Thailand, 1973-1976', in *Dyason House Paper: Australia, Asia and the World*, Vol.3, January 1997.

⁷⁹ Nations Richard, 'October Revolution-Part II', p.10.

⁸⁰ Peagan Norman, 'The Left Goes Underground', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 22,1976. Vol.94 No.43 p.22.

⁸¹ "Thanin Kraivichien was the Supreme Court Justice, and he was an adviser to the government's Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), which were cooperated with the military and government to communist-suppression operations". Peagan Norman, 'Challenges for the New Order', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 5,1976. Vol.94 No.45 p.9.

that they would maintain their regime and state that there would be no return to civilian or democratic rule for at least twelve years. This created more tension and increased polarisation of the Thai society. The Thanin government assumed total control of the labour movements, strictly censored the media, formed a rigid foreign policy and repressed education, especially in regard to communist doctrines. Thanin believed that his strong stance against communism would halt the spread of its contagion in Thailand.⁸²

Moreover, the university students' allies, the peasants group, went underground to escape government suppression. Prior to the October 1976's event, there were not only two rightist groups- the Red Gaur and Navapol, but two other groups. The 'Village Scouts' movement had strong traditional values and operated in the rural areas and it was supported by the palace. Another influential group that acted as a playmaker in the countryside was the Thai Border Patrol Police (TBPP). It was trained by the US military. Both of these groups supported anti-communist doctrines to suppress the university students and the peasants.

The former Prime Minister, Kukrit, criticised the anti-communist policy of Thanin's government and publicly condemned them.

Any body who looks suspicious would be declared an insurgent, he would be arrested and disappear completely.⁸³

Moreover, he was concerned that this government was totally neglectful of all the problems, particularly in those areas, which concerned the peasants.⁸⁴ In contrast, the military leaders did not expect Thanin's government plan of action to suppress the

⁸² Samudavanija Chai-Anan, 'Thailand: A Stable Semi-Democracy', in Diamond Larry, Linz J. Juan, Lipset Martin Seymour (eds.), *Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia*, (Lynne Rienner Publisher, Boulder, 1989), p.316.

⁸³ Luther U. Hans, *Peasants and State in Contemporary Thailand: From Regional Revolt to National Revolution?*, (Hamburg, 1978), pp.38-39.

communists to be successful. They believed his authoritarian policy would only create more tension and dissatisfaction and allow the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) to become more mobilised in the domestic domain. Past actions against the communists had not been successful and they believed that a softer approach was the only way to overcome the threat. The military lacked the resources and opportunities to wage war against an unseen and unknown foe.

As a result, the military leaders changed their perspective from the past, where violence was a norm to curb the spread of communism, to an easing of aggressive methods. Before October 1976, the military believed that this was proxy war.

In fact, they thought the CPT was only a puppet of the Chinese Communist Party and therefore only coercive measures could suppress them. But, in the past this had created more confrontation. The Thai military were influenced by the American failure to suppress communism in Vietnam. The direct experience from the Vietnam War by the US strategy of 'search and destroy' was a total failure. Consequently, the armed forces tried to reduce this conflict.⁸⁵

Eventually in 1977, the military staged a coup against Thanin whom they helped bring to power one year earlier. General Kriangsak Chomonan seized power as the Prime Minister. He eased social conflict and political tension by being more liberal in his policy.⁸⁶ The military changed their tactics to isolate the CPT. Kriangsak granted amnesty to the students and other people who were arrested because they had joined the CPT and they received pardons from the government. The Chinese Communist Party, through arms supplies and training, initially supported the CPT, but the CPT

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.39.

⁸⁵ Bamrungasuk Surachart, *The Military and Thai Democracy From October 14, 1973 to Present and Future*, (in Thai), (Kerk University, 1998), pp.34-50.

⁸⁶ Samudavanija Chai-Anan, *Thailand Stable Semi-Democracy*, p.316

made joint ventures with China's archenemies, Vietnam and Laos. This led to the steady decline of the CPT and China eventually ceased all aid to them.⁸⁷

In 1980 some military groups withdraw their support for Kriangsak and he was forced resign in the same year. There was a great deal of military unrest during this period, which is dealt with later in this chapter. In 1983 Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda introduced a counter-insurgency policy (Prime Ministerial Order No. 66/2523). This policy directly involved the protection of the communist movement in Thailand. The architecture of this plan was General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth who was Prem's aide-de-camp. He pointed out that only democracy could solve all the national problems. The government and the armed forces were determined to maintain the nation, religion and monarchy. He believed that political action was far more effective than military aggression and was the only way to defeat communist power and influence in the country. Chavalit was convinced that political liberty would solve all Thailand's problems. The military had to be more compromising and should sympathize with, and have more understanding of the people's troubles than it had done in the past. The Order No. 66/2523 was installed to give the military legitimacy in its social and political mission.

During the eighties communist ideologies were beginning to falter in many communist countries and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, which separated the East and the West symbolized its decline worldwide. This change in status was reflected in Thailand and supported Chavalit Order No. 66/2523 to successfully in stop the belief in communism. Prime Minister Prem also issued Order No. 65/2525. This

⁸⁷ The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Thailand Prospects and Policies*, (Special Report No.161, The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 1984), p.17.

doctrine promoted the people to participate in political activities and to help develop democracy, especially in the local level.⁸⁸

The military continued to operate as the Army Directorate for Civil Affairs. This department established the 'Democratic Centers' in the rural areas where reservist organizations were located. The National Defense Volunteers Organization mobilized the people into Village Defense Volunteers and urged rural people to cooperate and adopt democracy through liberal thinking.⁸⁹ Also, the military was a key player in lobbying political parties in the general elections of 1983 and 1986. General Prem was invited by the political parties to take the position of Prime Minister. He did not belong to any political party and did not have to stand for election. Therefore, the military leaders lobbied the political parties to nominate him as the Prime Minister. This period could be called the 'Semi-Democratic' era of Thailand, as there was a political compromise between the armed forces and the political bureaucrats. Both of them were involved in the political development process. The cabinet was composed of political parties' members, but the Prime Minister ship was still held by the military.⁹⁰

The military used their broadcasting stations, radio and televisions as a legitimacy-building tool. They focused on national problems, politics, economy and society and demonstrated the new liberalism of democratic thinking by openly criticizing the

⁸⁸ "The Order No.66/2523 and the Order No.65/2525 created the legitimacy of military rule in the rural areas, especially for the rural soldiers, it mobilised the masses and was aimed at making the people pay more attention and participated more with the Armed Forces. They tried to change the people's perspective of the military from the "Fighter Combat" into "Developer Soldier". Girling John, *Interpreting Development, Capitalism, Democracy and the Middle Class in Thailand*, (Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, New York, 1996), p.28

⁸⁹ Samudavanija Chai-Anan and Paripatra Sukhumbhand, 'The Military and Politics in Thailand', *ISIS Bulletin*, Vol.6 No.1 Jan-Apr, 1987. P.8

⁹⁰ Samudavanija Chai-Anan, *Thailand: A Stable Semi-Democracy*, p.319

government's past actions and failure to solve national issues without fear of repression.⁹¹

The military pointed out their role in promoting democracy. They explained they were not only the 'protectors' of democracy, but they would act as the 'builders' or guardians of democracy, even though it was difficult to have a perfect democracy.⁹²

The military had changed their role from absolute political power to a supporter of the democratic development process.

3.3 The Military Factions

After the monopolisation of power by the military leadership during the Sarit-Thanom period (1958-1973), military factions formed and supported their own groups within the armed forces. But, the political turmoil in 1973 and 1976 caused the military to take power amidst the spread of military conflicts and factions. During the late seventies, middle ranking officers and young military officers group formed an alliance called the 'Young Turks'. The Young Turks was an informal group of army officers who had graduated from the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy in the class 7 of 1960. This group was strongly opposed to political corruption, criticized the weak military and civilian leadership and was concerned with the gap in living standards between people in the urban and rural areas. Furthermore, the Young Turks controlled many core regiments around Bangkok. The central figures in this group were Colonel Manoon Roopkachorn, who was the Commander of the 4th Cavalry Regiment and Colonel Prachak Sawangchit, Commander of the 2nd Infantry Regiment. The Young Turks' wanted to act decisively solve national problems. They supported General Kriangsak Chomonand's coup against the civilian government in

⁹¹ Samudavanija Chai-Anan and Paribatra Sukhumbhand, *The Military and Politics in Thailand*, p.8

⁹² Girling John, *Interpreting Development, Capitalism, Democracy and the Middle Class in Thailand*, p.29

1977, but in 1980 they switched their allegiance from General Kriangsak to General Prem, and formed a 'father-son' relationship with the new Prime Minister⁹³.

Another military group was the Class 5. This group graduated in 1958 from the same Military Academy as the Young Turks, countered and challenged the Class 7 group. They felt that the Young Turks were becoming too ambitious, powerful and disrespectful towards senior officers.⁹⁴ The head of the Class 5, General Suchinda Krapayoon, and his colleagues had maintained the traditional military belief in 'nation, religion and monarchy'. Class 5 was undoubtedly influenced by Sarit's philosophy, because they graduated in 1958 during Sarit's period of power.

In 1981, the challenges by military factions increased. The Young Turks disagreed with the extension of General Prem as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. But, another senior army officer, General Arthit Kamlangek who had collected about one thousand signatures from other officers supported Prem's extension of tenure.⁹⁵

The conflict between Arthit and the Young Turks became more intense. Arthit had a strong and decisive personality and typified the image of his army predecessors. He was promoted in the 1st Infantry Division, which was regarded as the powerful heart of the army. Nevertheless, he was transferred from Bangkok and took up a new position as the Deputy Commander of the Second Army Region in the Northeast.

The Young Turks successfully forced Prem to move Arthit during the annual military reshuffle.

However, Prem's extension of tenure gradually caused more conflict between both sides. Finally, on 1 April 1981 the Young Turks attempted a coup against Prem's

⁹³ Bunbongkarn Suchit, *The Military in Thai Politics, 1981-1986*, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1987), pp.11-13.

⁹⁴ Hewison Kevin, 'Of Regime, State and Pluralities: Thai Politics Enter the 1990s', in Hewison Kevin, Robinson Richard, Rodan Gary (eds.), *Southeast Asia in the 1990s: Authoritarianism, Democracy and Capitalism*, (Allen & Unwin, 1993), pp.165-166.

⁹⁵ Samudavanija Chai-Anan, *The Thai Young Turks*, pp.50-51.

government, but Arthit used his influence on the monarchy to suppress it. Because, Arthit had close links with the Royal Family, the King did not support the coup. The Royal Family fled to Korat, which was under the protection of the Second Army Region. Arthit took command to counter the Young Turks' bid for power. His suppression mission was successful and finally the Young Turks had to abort their coup. The Royal Family trusted Arthit because, during the mid 70s, he promoted the Saichaitai Foundation, which was under the patronage of Princess Sirinthorn.

The Foundation provided for injured soldiers' welfare. His support brought him close to the palace and made him well known to the Thai public.⁹⁶

As a result of the action he took in 1981, Arthit was promoted quickly into the First Army Region with the rank of Lt-Gen. and 5 months later, he became a full general and was appointed Assistant Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Finally, in 1982 Arthit took the top position as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. In 1983, he was the Supreme Commander of the Thai Armed Forces.⁹⁷

During Arthit's rise in power, another military faction was formed. This group was called the Democratic Soldiers, which was composed of some military staff officers who believed that a new strategy needed to be adopted against the communist insurgency. This core member, General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth, adopted a new strategy based on the former communist philosophy- Prasert Supsunthorn.⁹⁸ Chavalit successfully implemented the Order No. 66/2523 and 65/2525 to entice the Thai people who had joined the communist during the late 70s and early 80s to return to

⁹⁶ "General Arthit Kamlangek was the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. He was not clever student and achieved low academic results. But, his behaviour resembled Field Marshal Sarit, because he was very a decisive leader. Most of his promotions were achieved in the upcountry. He was the second Chief Commander of the Army to come from the rural area, and General Prem was the first. Usually, most of the army leaders rose to power in Bangkok. However, this trend and traditional ways have broken since the declined of communism in Thailand". Boonbongkarn Suchit, *The Military in Thai Politics, 1981-1986*, pp.18-20.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.19.

Thailand without fear of prosecution or persecution in order to achieve unity and harmony in the state. Chavalit was a modern and professional soldier. He accepted the philosophy that the military needed to gradually make a transition to democracy. The younger officers, especially the Class 5, supported him. Following the Young Turks failed coup in 1981, the Class 5 was promoted and became the power base for Chavalit in the Armed Forces.⁹⁹ Chavalit supported General Prem and lobbied the coalition parties to maintain his premiership during both elections in 1983 and 1986. Furthermore, Chavalit replaced Arthit as Army Commander in May 1986, because Arthit had severely criticized the Prem government about the devaluation of the Baht and wanted Prem to reshuffle the cabinet.¹⁰⁰ There was also tension between Arthit and the government after a second attempted coup by the Young Turks in 1985. Some of the Young Turks agreed with Arthit's criticism of the government. Finally, Class 5 took this chance to suppress the Young Turks and show their loyalty to Prem.¹⁰¹

The subsequent conflict between the two opposing military factions under the leadership of Arthit and Chavalit was the most serious threat to cohesion and unity in the army ranks during the period 1973-1986.

Military factions are not new for the Thai armed forces, however, they became more influential after the military breakdown in 1973. In the past, the military leaders usually used nepotism to gain and maintain power, like in the case of Thanom and Praphat's network. According to Suchit Boonbongkarn, the new military faction model could be divided into 3 categories. He used Arthit as a model to illustrate this. Firstly, factions were formed by Arthit's Military Academy classmates and he promoted some close friends to core positions to gain power.

⁹⁸ Boonbongkarn Suchit, *State of the Nation, Thailand*, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1996), p.48

⁹⁹ Boonbongkarn Suchit, *The Military in Thai Politics, 1981-1986*, p.22

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.43

Secondly, the group was composed of his military staff and aides. This group had to organize strategies to promote Arthit's position.

Thirdly, the last group included the battalion or regiment commanders, especially, the officers or aides, who were loyal to Arthit.¹⁰² This process has become the military strategy to maintain and increase their power to the present day. It has also had an impact on military thinking and a classic example of this is the Young Turks and the Class 5 who challenged political power during the 80s.

3.4 The Breakdown of Civilian Government and the Return to Military Rule

During the period 1976-1988, all Prime Ministers gained their position either by coups or were nominated by coup leaders. Thai society changed during this era. The rapid growth in population resulted in a growing demand for consumer goods and industry. As a result there was also a growing demand for skilled workers and universities and schools not only expanded in Bangkok, but spread to the upcountry to try and supply this demand. Furthermore, the mass media experienced rapid growth. In 1990, T.V. stations had increased from 5 channels to 11 channels (from 1968). The newspapers increased from 22 to 51. Ultimately, the class structure changed in Thai society and the middle class became for more involved in the Thai economy.¹⁰³

In the late 1980s, many university students and intellectual activists wanted to see a Prime Minister elected through democratic elections. They pressured the government to bow to their demands. Finally, in 1988 General Prem felt that he did not have the mandate and support of the general public to be the Prime Minister after the 1988 election. He stepped down and the military leaders agreed with his decision.

¹⁰¹ Boonbongkarn Suchit, *State of the Nation, Thailand*, pp.51-52

¹⁰² Boonbongkarn Suchit, *The Military in Thai Politics, 1981-1986*, pp.25-26

¹⁰³ Hewison Kevin, *Of Regimes, State and Pluralities: Thai Politics Enters the 1990*, pp.168-170.

In 1988, Chatichai Choochavan became the first politician to be elected as the Prime Minister.¹⁰⁴ Full democracy returned to Thailand after 12 years of military control led by Thanin, Kriangsak and Prem.

Although, the military were supposed to reduce their political power, they were reluctant to do so. According to the 1978 Constitution when the military established Prime Minister Order 66/2523, it was designed to increase greater public involvement in politics by the masses. Especially, in the villages, the military received aid to initiate development programs in the plight areas, and the military were to cooperate with rural people. This also increased their legitimacy in Thai society. Moreover, Army units promoted Royal development projects and motivated the people to participate with the armed forces.¹⁰⁵ The military claimed that the King had asked them to help relieve poverty and famine caused by drought in the northeast through projects, such as the Green Esan Project. Their new role was to co-operate with other government department and gain mass mobilisation power in the rural areas.¹⁰⁶

In this period, many of the senior generals retired, and they formed their own political parties. General Arthit was the pioneer of this exodus and he convinced other senior military officers to join political parties and to seek power in democratic elections. He established the 'Puang Chon Chao Thai' Party. His classmate General Tienchai Sirisamphan, who was a former Deputy Army Commander during the mid eighties, formed the Rassadorn Party after he retired. Both of them joined the cabinet of Chatichai.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, the military did not monopolise their own political power such as in the 60s and 70s. The 80s brought economic growth, especially in the rural areas. This consequently resulted in a growth in small businesses among the Chinese

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.175-177.

¹⁰⁵ Callahan. A William, *Imaging Democracy: Reading "The Event of May" in Thailand*, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1998), pp.90-91.

¹⁰⁶ Boonbongkarn Suchit, *State of the Nation, Thailand*, pp.57-58

second-generation immigrants and they developed close relationship with the military officers and other government agencies.¹⁰⁸ The military transition to joint venture with the rural businessman enabled them to regain political party power.

However, after Chatichai took the reins, he tried to reduce the military role in their political economy. In the past, the military and bureaucratic elite controlled the growth of the Thai economy through a combination of strategies. Particularly they exerted influence on the Ministries of Finance, Defence, Interior, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), and the Budget Bureau. Therefore, they became deeply involved in profit making from the rising economy. But, Chatichai changed his policy. He established direct connections with some members of the business community rather than with the military adviser and finally military and bureaucratic elite involvement in business affairs was broken in 1989 after he adopted this new plan.¹⁰⁹

Confrontation between the civilian government and the armed forces had increased. The armed forces were dissatisfied with the actions of some members of Chatichai's cabinet. Chalerm Yoobamrung, the Prime Minister's Office Minister, controlled the Mass Communications Organisation of Thailand (MCOT), which included a large network of radio and television stations. The military claimed that Chalerm attempted to use a mobile broadcasting unit to eavesdrop on military networks. Previously, Chalerm criticised General Chaovalit when he retired early from his position as Commander of the Armed Forces. He was invited by the Chatichai government to join the cabinet, but Chalerm severely complained that he had not stood for election and it was unfair to appoint him to this position. Eventually, Chaovalit was placed under so

¹⁰⁷ Kulick Elliott and Wilson Dick, *Thailand's Turn*, (St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp.15-16.

¹⁰⁸ Samudavanija Chai-Anan, 'Old Soldier Never Die, They are Just Bypassed : The Military, Bureaucracy and Globalisation', in Hewison Kevin (ed.), *Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Globalisation*, (Routledge, London, 1997), p.51

much pressure that he resigned and formed his own party the New Aspiration Party (NAP) in June 1990.¹¹⁰ The military increased their criticism of the government. Another conflict occurred when Chatichai resurrected and promoted Manoon Roopkachorn, who was the Young Turks leader an opponent of the Class 5 group. The military commanders at that time were all from the Class 5 and they were unhappy with the government's action, especially when Manoon was placed in a position where he could exert influence on Chatichai.

Ultimately, the military overthrew the civilian government on 23 February 1991. They called them selves the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC), and it was under the leadership of General Sunthorn Kongsompong and Suchinda Kraprayoon. They accused the Chatichai government of failing to govern the country properly and gave five reasons for the coup corruption, parliamentary dictatorship, harassment of government official by the politicians, trying to destroy the armed forces institution and plotting to assassinate the Queen.¹¹¹ Indeed, the military leaders were concerned by rumours that Chatichai was attempting to remove General Sunthorn as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.¹¹²

According to an interview by General Suchinda Kraprayoon, he argued that some people could interpret their actions as a step backwards for Thailand, but in reality it was ten stepsforward. He claimed that the previous government's policy prompted and highly promoted too much economic investment too fast. Especially, it had created massive increases in the price of real estate and annual inflation was at an unacceptable level. Consequently foreign investment had to back off from Thailand.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.52

¹¹⁰ Bhuchongkul Ananya , *Thailand 1991: The Return of the Military*, (Southeast Asian Affairs, 1992), p. 317

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.313

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.318

He attempted to show his vision as a professional soldier from the Thai military and stated he did not want to become involved in politics and attempted to convince the public that he had no political ambition. He compared politicians with car salesmen. He just wanted to be a soldier and not interfere with politics as his predecessors had done. General Suchinda claimed that the 1991 coup was staged to establish democracy and insisted that the military had no desire to be directly involved in government and politics. He stated however that following the March election the military would still have the same status in Thailand. His political strategy was quite plain. The military would not tolerate criticism from politicians and warned them that the military would intervene again if its leaders thought it were necessary.¹¹³

Following the coup, the NPKC appointed Anand Panyarachun to be Prime Minister as part of their political strategy. He had credible qualifications and had been involved in international relations for many years. He used to be ambassador to Washington and the UN. Anand and NPKC co-operated with each other to select a cabinet. The military took the Ministries of the Interior and Defence, which were the most powerful ministries, while Anand chose some businessmen and senior government officers to form his cabinet. The military leaders chose Anand to lessen the impact of the coup on Thailand's relationships with other countries. In spite of this, the US suspended economic aid and military aid, but other ASEAN's members stated that they would consider their relationship with Thailand after the new Prime Minister had visited them. Only two countries initially recognized the new government China and Burma. The Thai business communities were also very concerned and warned the new interim government that it must appoint a person in charge who had an impeccably honest background and had no previous involvement with the military.

¹¹³ "The Interview of General Suchinda Kraprayoon", *Business in Thailand*, March 1992, Vol.23 No.3

They also insisted that there be a quiet and quick transition back to civilian democratic rule.¹¹⁴

3.5 The People Power in May 1992

Following the 1991 coup, the coup leaders promised to hold a general election, on 22 March 1992.¹¹⁵ But, the military modified the constitution and the Prime Minister no longer had to run for election.¹¹⁶ The mass media and general public immediately put pressure on the NPKC to change this amendment but General Suchinda declared that he and his military comrades would not be involved with the next Prime Minister. Many people still suspected that the military would continue to be involved in spite of the ruling in the 1991 constitution.¹¹⁷

In 1992, the NPKC members all took over the top posts in the security forces Supreme Commander roles in the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and also expanded their power to the police. Although, the NPKC stated to the public that they had no political ambitions, they formed their own political party to prepare for the 22 March 1992 general elections. The Sammakhi Tham Party (STP) received heavily financial supported from its NPKC connections. The STP was formed to oppose the other political parties, particularly the New Aspiration Party headed by General Chaovalit. The NPKC was worried that the NAP was getting popular and there was a good chance that Chaovalit would be the next Prime Minister. There was a lot of in fighting between various military factions.¹¹⁸ Finally, the NPKC's puppet, the STP, under Narong Wongwan, won the election, but foreign countries rejected him, because the

pp.20-23

¹¹⁴ Bhuchongkul Ananya, *Thailand 1991: The Return of the Military*, pp.313-314.

¹¹⁵ Callahan A. William, *Imagining Democracy: Reading 'The Events of May' in Thailand*, pp.116-117

¹¹⁶ Godement Francois Translated by Parcell J. Elisabeth, *The New Asian Renaissance: From Colonialism to the Post-Cold War*, (Routledge, 1997), p.215

¹¹⁷ Callahan A. William, *Imagining Democracy: Reading 'The Events of May' in Thailand*, p.117

¹¹⁸ Maisrikrod Surin, *Thailand 1992: Repression and Return of Democracy*, (Southeast Asian Affairs, 1993), pp.327-328.

US Foreign Affairs Department refused him a visa. They suspected that Narong had been involved in drug trafficking, and he was unsuitable to be Prime Minister.¹¹⁹ Suddenly, General Suchinda resigned from the post of the military (the Supreme Commander of Armed Forces and the Army Commander) and accepted the premiership but claimed that he did so only reluctantly. After the March 1992 election the general public protested against the new government, particularly in regard to the position of Prime Minister, because they believed it should only be filled through the democratic process of elections. Finally from 17-20 May 1992 or the Black May events, the public reacted violently, resulting in the massacre of many demonstrators.¹²⁰ King Bhumibol repeated his actions after the political crisis in October 1973, and intervened and requested the political opponents to come to a compromise with each other. The crisis was resolved, because of the King's intervention. Even though, he has no political power according to the monarchy's role under the constitution, the King is still a powerful figure because he is the spiritual leader of the Thai people.¹²¹

The uprising of the people in 1992 was not an isolated incident in Thai society. In 1973 and 1976 the working class revolted against the government because of inequitable social conditions between the elite and the poor and the low wages in an inflated economy. In each incident the military reacted violently and under the orders of its generals murdered and tortured thousands of workers and students. Constant harassment by military and government thugs during the 70s managed to

¹¹⁹ "Narong Wongwan had joined Prem's cabinet and Chatichai during the eighties as Agriculture Minister, his businesses included logging, resorts and tobacco growing. He became very wealthy and had strong personal influence in Northern Thailand", Rodney Tasker, 'Premier of Last Resort: Parties Turn to Military Chief to End Leadership Stalemate', *Far Eastern Economic Reviews*, 16 April 1992 Vol.155 No.15 pp.10-11

¹²⁰ Connors Kelly Michael, 'Political Reform and the State in Thailand', (*Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 1999), Vol.29 No.2 p.205

¹²¹ Maisirikrod Surin, *Thailand 1992: Repression and Return of Democracy*, p.334.

control the working class but a series of small strikes eventually forced the government to legalize the union movement in 1981. However, when the military again seized power in 1991, they immediately banned union membership in the public sector. The students, 'mobile phone' working class and the working class again revolted in May 1992 and managed to overthrow military rule due mainly to the courage of the working class who refused to retreat. According to employment data in 1992, Thailand had around 9 million private sector workers and nearly 2 million public sectors workers, 10.7 million workers were employed and approximately 10 million were self-employed people. This included the people in the urban and rural workforces. The high rate of employment was a result from the transition of economic growth from rural industries to industrial growth through foreign investment, especially from Japanese investors during the 70s and 80s. Thailand became more industrialized and developed its stock market through foreign companies.¹²² This has prompted the Thai working class to participate more in politics than in the past. Following the end of the Cold War between the Communist bloc countries and the West, human rights and democratization were promoted in Thailand by the US. However, the US was unable to influence the Thai military that continued to have close links with the Burmese junta and the Khmer Rouge.¹²³ The growth of trade in the world market of the nineties and democratization of many Asian countries has forced the Thai military to accept more liberal views and to change their role in Thailand. The New World Order has also had an impact on the free media. It has become an effective voice of the Thai people. The government could not control the situation during the Black May crisis. Finally, the junta government and the troops

¹²² Ungpakorn Ji, 'The Tradition of Urban Working Class Struggle in Thailand', (*Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 1995), Vol.25 No.3 pp.369-376.

¹²³ Samudavanija chai-Anan, 'Old Soldier Never Die, they are Just Bypassed', p.51

stopped the vicious circle of coups after they overthrew the civilian government in February 1991 for the last time up to the present.

3.6 Conclusion

The road to democracy in Thailand during 1973-1992 was very complicated. Many times, the armed forces used their power to interfere in the political system. At the same time, the military also had to change their role to support democratic regimes. It meant that the Thai armed forces were architects and terminators of democracy. The external change after the US troops withdrew from Thailand in 1976, affected the military, as it had to fight against communist insurgency. The new legitimacy of the Order No. 66/2523 and Order No. 65/2525 was successful in protecting democracy from internal and external factors. The new role from 'combat fighters' to 'social developers' had become their goal. Also, internal factors had directly involved the Thai military. Firstly, there was constant challenge by the military factions, which severely affected the armed forces unity. Because of the lust of power and the struggle between conservatives thinking and democratic ideas, the military leaders had to often compromise in order to achieve 'semi-democracy' during the eighties. Secondly, the rapid growth of the Thai economy has improved the Thai people's status and they consequently have participated more in political affairs such as the events of 1976 and 1992.

Furthermore, the New World Order wished to see a democratic regime in the region as Thailand has become linked to the world community. Therefore, it forced the Thai military to be less aggressive and to step down their role to that of peacemaker.

However, the Thai military's attitude still remains guarded. They have always claimed that Thailand's security and stability were threatened by external factors and communist insurgency. They state that they had the moral and legal

obligation to intervene in politics in the 70s and 80s. Later, when they interfered again in 1991, they still claimed that they had no choice because of the weakness and corruption of the civilian government. Military intervention through coups has both encouraged and prohibited democracy. Nevertheless, many military groups also joined and participated in democratic regimes such as the political parties. This is the only way to protect their social and power status. They were forced to democratization rather than authoritarian controls because internal and external conditions had changed.

Chapter 4: The Guardian of Democracy

Following the political crisis in May 1992, the Thai military received pressure from the Thai public and international condemnation. Made uneasy by this, the political ambitions of the military have not continued and they have been forced to step down from their political role. However, the Thai military is still trying to find a way to “climb down from the tiger’s back” and at the same time to save their dignity.

In this chapter, I examine how the military were affected during the post Black May period from 1992 and the Thai military’s motivation to withdraw from politics. In addition, I will discuss how the Thai economic meltdown directly affected the armed forces. I will study the new role of the Thai military since 1992 to the present and how it has resulted in a new image for the Thai military. They not only support democracy but on many occasions, they have been involved in promoting it. Definitely, the Thai military presented this new image to the world, when it participated in the peacemaking – campaign during the East Timor conflict in 1999. Also, I discuss how the Thai military have adjusted to their role to improve military and civilian relations. The military supports the 1997 constitution, which retains the old beliefs in the ‘nation, religion and monarchy’, and moreover, it is not only these aspects, which are supported, but also the military recognise and defends the rights of the individual.

4.1 The Post Period of the Black May’s Event.

After General Suchinda resigned as Prime Minister, Anand Panyarachhun was appointed to this post again, by the interim government. This time, he had to prepare for the general election on 13 September 1992. Even though he and his cabinet were an interim government, Anand was able to reshuffle the senior military officers who were involved in the May crisis. He moved the Supreme Commander and Air Force

Commander, Air Chief Marshal Kaset Rojananin, to the armed forces inspector-general. General Issarapong Noonpakdi was moved from Army Commander to Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Defence Ministry and Lt-Gen. Chainarong Noonpakdi, the 1st Army Region commander was transferred to head the institute of army academics. All of their new positions were inactive posts to defuse their power.¹²⁴ At the same time the professional soldiers were appointed to fill these vacant positions. General Vimol Wangwanich became the new Army Commander, Air Chief Marshal Gun Pimarnthip was promoted as the Air Force Commander, and Air Chief Marshal Voranart Apichari was appointed supreme commander. Moreover, Prime Minister Anand continued to sweep his broom through the old military network, especially in the 2nd and 3rd army region commands and many core division commanders were reshuffled. When the annual military reshuffle was declared, many officers were transferred from influential positions because of their involvement in the massacre of the 1992 demonstrators.¹²⁵

Following the massacre in May, the military was forced to reduce its involvement in public affairs but it was reluctant to lose its commercial ventures. Many state enterprises were controlled by the armed forces. After the coup in 1991, many senior armed forces officers joined the boards and gained benefits from many state companies such as the Telephone Authority of Thailand, the Port of Thailand, the State Railways of Thailand, the Airports Authority of Thailand. According to a count taken one year after the 1991 coup, the armed forces held 36% of the directorships of the 16 largest non-bank state enterprises.¹²⁶ A classic example when

¹²⁴ Tasker Rodney (1992), 'Order in the Ranks', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 August, Vol. 155 No.32 p.8

¹²⁵ Tasker Rodney (1992), 'Shunted Sideways: Many Generals Shifted in Military House-Cleaning', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 24, Vol.155 No.38 p.14

¹²⁶ Handley Paul (1992), 'Boardroom Brass: Premier Tries to Ease Army Out of State Sector', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 9, Vol.55 No.27 p.13

the military was put under public pressure following the May 1992 massacre was when the chairman of the Communications Authority of Thailand (CAT) was replaced by a civilian. The public also continued to demand that the supreme commander, Kaset Rojananin who was the chairman of Thai Airways International resign from the board. The company's profits slumped during his period, as conflict was rife.¹²⁷ Finally, a civilian chairman replaced him.

As a result of democratic fever inspired through the September election, the political parties which resisted the military before and after the May crisis, particularly the Democrats, Palang Dharma, the New Aspiration and the Solidarity Party were accepted by the general public and were called 'angels'. These parties condemned the military connection with the Chat Thai and the Social Action Party, which were accused of being in partnership with the 'devils'.¹²⁸ Chat Thai and the Social Action Party were essentially pro-military and included political relationships with rural businessmen and 'Jao Poh' (the godfather). The network still has a strong influence on the people in the countryside. This patron-client circle between the rural voters and the rural godfathers has a close link to the pro-military parties. The pro-military parties initiated village development projects, and the building of schools and roads. Finally, because of Thai values expressing recognition of the logic of patron client relations, they had to vote for them.

However, victory for the 'angel' over the 'devil' in the September 1992 election occurred, in spite of the rural vote the 'angel' parties gained a majority of seats in Bangkok and the urban cities.¹²⁹ Eventually, Chuan Leekpai from the

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13

¹²⁸ Phongpaichit Pasuk and Baker Christ, *Thailand Economy and Politics*, p.360

¹²⁹ Phongpaichit Pasuk (1992), 'The Thai Middle Class and the Military: Social Perspectives in the Aftermath of May 1992', selected papers from the Thailand Update Conference in Jackson A. Peter (ed.), *The May 1992 Crisis in Thailand: Background and Aftermath*, University of Sydney, 16 October 1992, National Thai Studies Centre, Australia National University, No.2, June 1993.

Democrats Party became the Prime Minister. He brought the 'angel' alliances together in the cabinet. He was the first Prime Minister who was not involved with the military or the bureaucracy. He had been a Member of Parliament since 1969, and is one of the few politicians in Thailand who has not been involved in public scandal over corruption.¹³⁰ Thailand's democratic regime had revived again after the military coup of 1991.

4.2 The Withdrawal from Politics

The military had to step down following the post-Black May's crisis in 1992. The Thai armed forces had to turn around and re-examine their strategy. Subsequently, the Thai armed forces gradually reduced their active involvement in politics by themselves. According to Samuel Huntington, he argued that during the U.S. election campaign in 1976, Jimmy Carter put human rights policy at the center of his campaign. Finally, when he became the U.S. president, he used human rights as a prominent aspect of U.S. foreign policy. In the aftermath, his successor, Ronald Reagan still continued Carter's policy and used the United Nations (UN) to identify, criticize and put pressure upon human rights abuses, especially in Latin America and Asia in countries, which were controlled by authoritarian regimes or military governments.¹³¹ The U.S. encouraged this moralistic norm with the third world countries by offering economic and military assistance to those countries that promoted human rights or imposing sanctions against those countries, that did not, which included diplomatic action.¹³² As a result of the political crisis in Thailand in

¹³⁰ Phongpaichit Pasuk and Baker Christ, *Thailand Economy and Politics*, p.361

¹³¹ Huntington Samuel (1991), *The Third Wave Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press: Norman and London, pp.91-93.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.93

1992, external pressure from the West forced the Thai military to reduce their role. Also internal problems motivated them to withdraw from politics.

In the case of Latin America countries, in Brazil the military assumed power in 1964. Their coup became an example to other military forces in South America nations to follow. The military staged a coup in Peru in 1968 as well because it believed that the civilian government could not run the nation and solve any of its problems.¹³³ During the sixties, all of the Latin American States were under the authoritarian rule of militarism. Particularly in Brazil, the military were concerned about internal security rather than external security. Actually, the US, because of US military policy towards South America, created this concept since 1961. They encouraged the Latin military to adopt an anti-communist counter insurgency plan and take civil-action in nation-building as a safeguard against communism. The US also encouraged the military to take a more professional approach in their training methods and operations.¹³⁴ However, after the seventies, the weakness of military regimes in Latin America gradually appeared when they could not solve economic problems such as high inflation rates, increased strike levels and international debt and balance of payment problems. Furthermore, the US condemned the lack of human rights and non-accountability of the military in the junta regimes, particularly in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. These issues tarnished the military's image. At the same time, the middle class and business communities forced them to change from a less authoritarian rule to a more liberal one because, when communist insurgency declined, the military legitimacy's was also reduced. The most influential military officers wished to bring the armed forces back to the primary role of defending the

¹³³ Stepan Alfred (1973), '*The New Professionalism of Internal Warfare and Military Role Expansion*', in Stepan Alfred (ed.), *Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Policies and Future*, Yale University Press, pp.58-65.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.52-56

country and safeguarding its values and traditions. The middle ranking officers also wanted the military to withdraw from politics. A classic example was when the Brazilian military decided to withdraw from politics in 1974 and accepted the civilian government's democratic regime.¹³⁵ Nonetheless, the Brazilian military still played an important role behind the political scene. In 1985 the military held the most important positions in the civilian cabinet. However, in 1990 President Fernando Collor de Mello commenced his campaign to reduce the influence of the military in political affairs. Firstly, he reduced the number of military cabinet ministers. Secondly, he severely cut down on recruitment in the armed forces. Thirdly, he lowered the salaries of army personnel through parliament acts. Lastly, he appointed a civilian to head national intelligence. Although, the military influence seemed to decline, they still retained some clout to bargain for their own interests. They decided to contest general elections rather than gain their positions through military appointment, because the military needed to protect the defence ministry and its strategic functions.¹³⁶ The Brazilian military, even though it withdrew from politics, still had influence in Brazil.

At the same time, the Thailand military's paradigm was considered to be similar to Brazilian military, as it also was forced to climb down from power. The Thai military overthrew the authoritarian civilian government in 1977. They introduced a more liberal policy. It was similar to the Brazilian armed forces withdrawal from politics, but they still maintained their power. The Thai armed forces gradually reduced their role from politics and in 1988, an elected civilian prime

¹³⁵ Bamrungsuk Surachart, *The Military and Thai Democracy: From October 14, 1973 to Present and Future*, pp.82-84

¹³⁶ Agüero Felipe (1997), 'Toward Civilian Supremacy in South America', in Diamond Larry, Platter Marc, Yun-Han Chu, and Hung-Mao Tien (eds.), *Consolidating Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*, The John Hopkins University Press, pp.185-186.

minister was once again elected into office. Moreover, Thai politics survived two abortive coups during the eighties.¹³⁷

S.E. Finer, discussed the conditions of the military withdrawal from politics. His analysis covers four key conditions. Firstly, the military 'disposition' to withdraw, and the 'societal conditions' which make it attractive for withdrawal. The other key factors are 'motivations'-why the military want to step down and the 'necessary conditions', which force it to withdraw from politics despite their possible reluctance to do so.¹³⁸ S.E. Finer's table can be applied to the Thai military's situation from 1992 to the present.

Table 4.1: The conditions of military withdrawal

	Dispositions	Societal Conditions
Motivations	(i) Belief in civilian supremacy	(i) Internal challenges
	(ii) Threat to cohesiveness	(ii) External factors
	(iii) Lack of self-confidence	
Necessary Conditions	(i) Internal consensus to withdraw	Civilian organisation to hand over to
	(ii) Adequate protection of corporate interests	

The 'necessary conditions' have forced the Thai military to withdraw from politics. They were forced by the public to step down after the political crisis in 1992. After the military coup in 1991, the Thai military image was criticised and this had a serious impact on economic growth, especially through decreased foreign investments. Furthermore, during the crisis in May 1992, the junta government was

¹³⁷ Bamrungsuk Surachart, *The Military and Thai Democracy From October 14, 1973 to Present and Future*, pp.95-96.

¹³⁸ Finer S.E. (1988), *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, Westview Press: Boulder, Colorado, pp.299-300.

forced to accept modern communication networks such as global information, satellite news, CNN and the Internet, which resulted in a more informed public opinion. It mobilised the middle class or 'mobile phone mob' to move against the military. The effectiveness of the Thai military political propaganda was reduced because of global communication. Also, Thailand's economic growth encouraged more professionals, technocrats and non-government organisations (NGOs) to become more involved in Thai politics.¹³⁹ Following the September election of 1992, only alternative was to withdraw from politics, because the political situation made it too difficult to retain their status. However, in the period following the May crisis, the military agreed to the full control of the civilian government. This prompted some retired generals to form their own political parties and General Chavalit's party won the election and he became the Prime Minister in 1996. Another example was Major-General Chamlong Srimuang who won the Bangkok governor election during the early 1990s and he ran in the parliamentary elections in 1992.¹⁴⁰

Moreover, the military role's during the late nineties has changed to a more constructive, diplomatic role. They were the playmakers in the resignation of General Chavalit as Prime Minister, because of the currency crisis in 1997. The army listened to public opinion, which was in favor of the Democrat Party, and it became the government to try and solve the economic problems. In the past, if this situation had happened, the military would have intervened and assumed power, the military is now a major supporter of the new constitution. In an opinion poll by Bangkok University, it showed that nearly of 40 percents of the Thai people felt confident that the army would not interfere in the political system. This illustrated that the Thai people have

¹³⁹ Phongpaichit Pasuk and Baker Christ (1996), *Thailand's Boom!*, Allen & Unwin, pp.184-189.

¹⁴⁰ Crouch Harold (1997), 'Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia', in Diamond Larry, Platter Marc, Yun-Han Chu, and Hung-Mao Tien (eds.), *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*, p.227

favored the armed forces constructive role during the current economic crisis and endorse the political reforms in 1997.¹⁴¹ The new face of the military used compromise to reduce confrontation and conflict among the Thai people, especially in regard to the Muslim terrorists in Southern Thailand. The army commander, General Chetta Thanajaro suggested that politics must be used to overcome conflict and military force should only be used as a last resort. He also guaranteed that the military will not seize power by coup in the future. This non-interference concept in politics by Chetta has also been adopted by his successor, the present army commander General Surayud Chulanont. He was the first army chief to resign from the senate, because of his belief that the army should no longer be involved in politics.¹⁴² This action became a norm for the new Thai professional soldier. Definitely, civil-military relations have improved since 1992. Chuan Leekpai became the Prime Minister in 1997 and is the first civilian Minister of Defense since 1976. This is only the second time in Thai political history in which a civilian minister has headed the military. The military now accept their role as subservient to the elected government.¹⁴³ According to Finer's strategy of the military abdication from politics, the Thai military was initially forced to step down and internal and external forces have gradually reduced their role. Eventually, they were motivated to withdraw from politics. The military institution now stands behind the political arena and has installed a more professional military force to serve the country rather than wanting to have a country that serves them.

¹⁴¹ Vatikiotis Michael, Tasker Rodney and Thayer Nate (1998), 'New Rule, Same Game: Military Affairs', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, January 29, Vol. 161 No.5, pp.22-23.

¹⁴² Region Outlook (1999), *Southeast Asia 1999-2000*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, p.19

¹⁴³ "Chuan Leekpai is now the Prime Minister and also the Minister of Defence. The first civilian Minister Defence was Seni Pramroj in 1976, but he was overthrown by the military in October 6 of the same year. He held this post for only 44 days. Chuan has now this served in this position from 1997, which is a true indicator of the military changing role". 'The Transition of the Armed Forces: With the Military Problems' *Matichon Weekend Magazine* [in Thai], 17 March 1998, p.23

4.3 Thailand's Political Reform

After the elections in September 1992 through to the elections in 1995 and 1996, democracy was headed by coalition government and there was a rise in corruption and instability among them. Money politics was involved more in vote buying in the countryside, and it is now common in Thai society. Many Thai people, especially the political reformists demanded to drafting of a new constitution to create a better political system. They wanted to abrogate the 1991 constitution, which was designed by the military group, when they overthrew the government in 1991. Furthermore, the faith of the Thai people in civilian governments was getting worse, particularly through the scandal of corruption by Banharn Silpa-Archa government in 1995.¹⁴⁴ Because of Thailand's lack of transparency and accountability, the politicians were involved in the money politics of the financial institutions, and the weakness in the legal system enabled them to do this with impunity. Therefore, many politicians increased their business involvement in profitable areas such as the banking system. Political corruption and nepotism increased and bribe money was used to influence the outcome of elections.¹⁴⁵ In July 1997, Thailand announced it was floating the baht currency, because of the attack by currency traders. Thailand's falling economy forced the closure of 56 finance companies and eventually General Chavalit resigned as the Prime Minister and the opposition leader, Chuan Leekpai, replaced him in November 1997.¹⁴⁶

Therefore, through the economic crisis and the weakness of the political system, many Thai people from the middle class and foreign analysts believed that only political

¹⁴⁴ Bubongkarn Suchit, 'Thailand's Successful Reforms: Southeast Asia After the Crisis', *Journal of Democracy*, October 1, 1999, Vol.10 No.4, pp.57-58.

¹⁴⁵ MacDonald B.Scott, 'Transparency in Thailand's 1997 Economic Crisis: The Significance of Disclosure', *Asian Survey*, July 1998, Vol.38 No.7, p.692

¹⁴⁶ Punyaratabunthu Suchitra, 'Thailand in 1997: Financial Crisis and Constitutional Reform', *Asian Survey*, February 1998, Vo.38 No.2 pp.161-164.

reform could get rid of corruption and restore the Thai economy. Actually, the political reform movement was involved in the writing of the new constitution, and it was ratified before General Chavalit resigned from the office in October 1997.¹⁴⁷ Before the 1997 Constitution was passed, there was extreme tension between the two sides.

The Green flag supported the new constitution because of its political reforms and included business people, NGOs, professionals, the press and the middle class. The opposing group, the Yellow flag, was against the new constitution and included rural politicians, conservative senators and the Interior Minister Sanoh Thienthong. Sanoh mobilized many thousands of village leaders to reject this constitution, because it would put pressure on the Interior Ministry to decentralize, Thailand and thus would remove power from the rural areas. Sanoh also warned village heads and the Interior Ministry that they would lose their joint ventures, especially from the government budget, because they would be accountable for all their budget spending.¹⁴⁸ They would also lose their popular vote and thus their own position in their communities. Chavalit's government lost the confidence of the general public, when it would not accept the draft in 1997. However, because of public concern over the economic crisis, and pressure from the military, business and reformist politicians, he and other conservative politicians reluctantly agreed to vote for the new constitution.¹⁴⁹ This constitution involves greater participation by the people and protective of human rights and focuses particularly on a directly elected senate and allows investigation into political corruption. Sections 291 and 301, were created by the National Counter

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.165

¹⁴⁸ Connors K. Michael, '*Political Reform and the State in Thailand*', pp.216-220.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.221

Corruption Commission (NCCC), which gave them power to investigate politicians who were unusually wealthy.¹⁵⁰

Although, the 1997 constitution has increased the people's role, the power of the military was also affected, particularly in their business ventures. They owned radio stations and two television stations, also a large portion of the Thai Military Bank.

Matichon Magazine Weekend's table 4.2 shows the military radio's station holdings.

The number of radio station under the ministry of defense

	A.M	F.M
Army	79	50
Navy	7	14
Air Forces	18	18
Supreme Command Office	9	7

According to the table 4.2 the armed forces have total control of 203 stations or 39.4 % of all radio stations in Thailand.¹⁵¹ But, the new constitution has been forcing them to withdraw from this commercial involvement; especially section 40 stated that

Transmission frequencies for radio or television broadcasting and radio telecommunication are national communication resources for public interest. There shall be an independent regulatory body having the duty to distribute the frequencies under paragraph one and supervise radio or television broadcasting and telecommunication business as provided by law. In carrying out the act under paragraph two, regard shall be had to utmost public benefit at national and local levels in education, culture, state security, and other public interests including fair and free competition.¹⁵²

As a result, some senior military officers were dissatisfied and argued that

¹⁵⁰ Bunbongkarn Suchit, *Thailand's Successful Reform*, pp.60-61.

¹⁵¹ 'The Special Article: General Surayud with the Radio Army', *Matichon Magazine Weekend*, May 11, 1999, p.12

The soldier looks at the people and asks 'What do they want us to do?' why are they playing game with us? Will they break our rice cookers, or will they break them only a little bit so we can still make rice, or will they completely break them, and then we can't eat. We don't want to make problems but they must be fair with us, because the soldier holds a gun. If they have a full rice cooker, there will be no problems, but if the soldier gets hungry trouble might happen...¹⁵³

This argument was the opinion of some military officers, but it reflected the military's thinking about this action. According to Colonel Paradorn Pattanabut, most military officers, especially the cadet students, respected authoritarian values rather than democratic thinking, because they were encouraged to obey the command hierarchy. Therefore, various aspects of democracy had no appeal to them.¹⁵⁴ At the same time, many military officers still worry that civilian rule will intervene in the promotion of high-ranking officers. They are concerned that it will cause the patron-client system to reappear and increase corruption in the military.¹⁵⁵ However, Colonel Paradorn shows in his research that the new military officers, especially the middle-ranking officers, believe in democracy more than authoritarian thinking. 91.6 % gave their support to it in a military's political perspectives poll. They supported a democratic regime providing that the government has an efficient administration. Then, the soldier will be the guardians of the government and promote its policy.¹⁵⁶

The military are now supporters of democratic values and they have played a key role in supporting the new constitution partly because the domestic situation had changed. The public does not want outsiders or the military to interfere with politics. At the same time, support of the army leaders was essential in order to introduce the

¹⁵² 'Constitution of The Kingdom of Thailand', URL:
<http://www.krisdika.go.th/law/image/lawpub/e11102540/10.htm>

¹⁵³ 'The Special Article' *Matichon Magazine Weekend*, May 11, 1999, p.12

¹⁵⁴ Colonel Paradorn Pattanabut, 'A Case Study of Political Opinion on Democracy and the Acceptance Level of Democratic From of Government By Mid-Level Military Officers in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area', MA. Thesis, (Graduate School Command and General Staff College, 1991), pp.41-48.

¹⁵⁵ Bunbongkarn Suchit, 'Thailand's successful Reforms', p.67

¹⁵⁶ Colonel Paradorn Pattanabut, 'A Case Study of Political Opinion', p.45

constitution.¹⁵⁷ Despite their loss of power from the Senate, because they used to be appointed senators by the government, they agreed to reduce their role. Senators must now be elected by public majority vote according to the new constitution. This was a good example of how the military climbed down from the tiger's back with their glory intact. The blossoming of Thailand's democracy is just beginning to emerge. The Thai military have gradually made a transition to their new role as guardians of democracy, and they are trying to forget their traumas during May 1992. They believe that supporting the new constitution is an effective way to show the Thai people that they accept their new role and state they will maintain their respect of civilian control.

4.4 The New Role of the Thai Military

From the 1930s until the 1990s, the armed forces have interfered in the Thai political process with nearly 20 coups. During the last decade of civilian control, the military have been forced to understand and exist in a new social environment. The new professional soldier is far more tolerant of Thailand's democracy because of the slump in the economy. Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai has appointed General Surayud Chulanont as the new army commander, which is the most powerful position in the Thai armed forces. Surayud wants the military to keep away from politics and any business involvement.¹⁵⁸ Ironically, the economic crisis has affected the military's status through lack of adequate budget allocation to buy new weapons. The Thai military have had to cancel an order for US aircraft and did not receive any reimbursement of the US\$ 74.5 million deposit on them.¹⁵⁹ Definitely, the economic crisis forced the Thai military to reform the armed forces to a smaller organization but

¹⁵⁷ Vatikiotis Michael, 'Democracy First: Army's Refusal to Back Curfew Show Political Maturity', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 6, 1997, Vol. 165 No. 45 p.21.

¹⁵⁸ Tasker Rodney, 'General Agreement: Surayud is Good Choice to Take the Army Out of Politics', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 1, 1998, Vol. 161 No.40

¹⁵⁹ Review: *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 'Asia 1999: Year Book A Review of the Events of 1998', Review, Hong Kong, 1999, p.208

with more capability. At present the army have 230,000 personnel, however the army commander has already announced plans to further reduce the number in the Thai army to 190,000 troops by 2007. Moreover, within 10 years the armed forces want to also downsize the number of generals in the army, navy and the air force to approximately 1,000 from its present body of 1,600 general. At the same time, the military leaders are planning to have more professional armed forces and want it to be an all-volunteer one, not compulsory, as it has traditionally been.¹⁶⁰ As a result of the economic crisis, some military companies such as those, which produced batteries, glass and leather, will be sold to the private sector. Also, in the Thai Military Bank the army commander automatically holds the position of chairman of this bank.¹⁶¹ However, the army commander has agreed to let 'outsiders' assume control in order to improve its operation and make it more competitive with other banks.

The armed forces are still trying to clean up their own house, especially as some military officers are still involved in business. For many years, some soldiers had part time jobs as bouncers and bodyguards in nightclubs. Others have been employed as collection agents to recover debts for powerful businessman and some senior officers have used mafia style tactics to do this. In the past, the military leaders had often protected their institution from public accusations. But, now the military leaders are trying to remove such officers who are involved in these activities.¹⁶² The military's direction still continues to change. They are concerned about public opinion, and in June 1999 the military leaders had a referendum about whether to disclose classified documents to the public about the May 1992's crisis, because of the demands of political activist. In addition, the army commander, General Surayud, suggested that

¹⁶⁰ Tasker Rodney, 'Military Make-Over: the Army is Changing From Secretive and Coup-Prone to Apolitical, Open and Outward- Looking', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 25, 1999, Vol.162 No.47 p.28

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.28

this secret report should be open to the public. He argued that the political crisis in 1992 should be a lesson that should never be forgotten and must never happen again. However, if the Thai military release this information it could have a serious backlash because it could arouse much public hostility against the military again. When many classified documents became declassified documents, such as the documents about the US troops actions in the Vietnam War, which were called the 'Pentagon Papers', there was a great public outcry.¹⁶³ The US example of transparency caused the Thai military to release only part of the report for fear of a similar reaction from the public.

The Thai military do not wish to destroy their new image in the country. They also are looking forward to assuming a greater role in regional security. In recent years, the Thai armed forces have held military exercises with the US troops called 'Cobra Gold'. The US military encourages the Thai armed forces to take an active role in promoting peace and in democratic campaigns to deter aggression.¹⁶⁴ The new professional approach of Thai military thinking has gradually become true, and now the Thai military willingly accepts UN orders. Thailand sent 1,580 soldiers into East Timor as part of a regional peacekeeping force. It was the second biggest of the International Force in East Timor or INTERFET. Furthermore, a Thai general was appointed the deputy commander of the foreign troops in this mission.¹⁶⁵

The Thai military at present has made a transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The military love unity and they offer allegiance to a single military commander who speaks with one voice instead of three or more.¹⁶⁶ According to

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p.28

¹⁶³ 'The New Direction of the Thai Army', *Matichon Magazine weekend*, July 6, 1999, p.34

¹⁶⁴ 'Thai-US Military Manoeuvres Begins', *United Press International*, May 12, 1999, (Accessed at <http://www.comtexnews.com>)

¹⁶⁵ 'Thailand Commits Troops For UN in East Timor', *United Press International*, December 14, 1999 (Accessed at <http://www.comtexnews.com>)

¹⁶⁶ Huntington Samuel, *The Soldier And The State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, Harvard University Press, 1957, p.87

Huntington, he states that the military mind is disciplined, tolerant and rigidly obey their commander hierarchy.¹⁶⁷ If the Thai military leaders had democratic minds rather than authoritarian values, it would possibly change their subordinates' views to follow their command. No army could possibly operate effectively, if it were based on democratic ideal in which the soldier can continually question authority. The armed forces by their very nature must obey their superior's offices.

4.5 Conclusion

The Thai military have already accepted to the need step down from their power, because of the extreme public pressure following the political crisis in 1992. There are two major reasons why the Thai military have reduced their role from politics. Firstly, domestic conditions where there is consensus for them to withdraw from politics, especially now that staging a coup has become an anti-democratic action that is condemned by the major powers. The 1997 constitution directly affected them, particularly because it forced them to keep away from any business involvement. Secondly, the deep impact of the Asian economic crisis in 1997 on the Thai military meant that they had to limit the numbers of personnel and operate on a much lower military budget. Eventually, they were forced to reform and improve their image, and adopt a neutral role to support political reform. They further encouraged and promoted a more professional approach to be taken by all of the armed forces to promote their new role. The Thai military's role in East Timor gave them a great opportunity to show the rest of Asia and the world that they fully supported democracy and the legal democratic process and were prepared to oppose any countries that threatened democracy in the region.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.60

Chapter 5: Conclusion

From 1957 until the present, the Thai military has gradually withdrawn from active involvement in politics, even though they still maintain an important role in the country. The military dictatorship established in 1957 lasted for 11 years and there were no elections for public office during this time. The military froze the political system several times and dramatically expanded their business interests. It was an uneasy period in Thai democratic development and, during Sarit's era, he insisted that only decisive authoritarian measures could effectively run the country. Furthermore, external factors such as the threat of communism gave the military the excuse to continue their regime in order to protect the country. At the same time, the highest institution in Thailand, the monarchy, supported them and this was used as a political tool to control the unity of the Thai people. However, the breakdown of the military in 1973 caused by the development of military factions and the rising middle class, forced this nepotistic regime to collapse. In spite of authoritarian rule, Thailand developed and opened the economy through foreign assistance during the 1960s, especially from US military and economic aid.

During the 1973-1992 period, a democratic model was implemented many times but nonetheless confrontation between the left and the right wings created continuous tension and the military staged many successful and aborted coups. The transition to authoritarian regime re-occurred in 1976, and the military again took over the government in 1977. The military then adopted a more liberal policy to ease conflict among the various sections of the Thai people, because, after the withdrawal of the US troops in Thailand, the Thai military were left in isolation to fight communist insurgency and needed public support. In 1980-1988, there was a succession of semi-

democratic periods. During those years, the military installed democracy through Order No. 66/2523 to combat communism and to legitimize their continued involvement in politics. Also, the communist states declined in this region. In 1988, Thailand ran full democratic elections for the first time in 12 years and the Prime Minister was not appointed by the military but was an elected member of the Chart Thai Party, Chatichai Choonhawan. However, the weakness and corruption of this government by many politicians and government officials were reasons for the coup in 1991. The subsequent junta interim government failed to control the tension between various groups in Thai society and it finally resulted in the mournful events of May 1992.

Following the May 1992 crisis, Thai military thinking has radically changed and they are now endeavoring to support democracy without direct involvement in the political system. However, they have issued a stern warning to politicians that the military will not tolerate any further corruption by politician or government bureaucrats. Because of traditional Eastern culture in which obedience is a virtue, it has been difficult for the Thai military to immediately accept a full democratic concept in the Western sense. Some military officers are still attracted to the authoritarian model. However, the Thai military is making a slow but successful transition to democracy. In spite of occasional media pressure to intervene, the military continues to maintain its neutrality in political affairs. They still stand behind the scene to support or show their opinion to the public.

The Thai military have needed time to learn how to be fully professional soldiers, and demonstrated this new image to the world through their actions in Timor.

Traditionally, the Thai military have always believed that their first allegiance is to the nation, religion and monarchy and not any other political or democratic

institutions. Consequently, the military have always believed they have been justified in staging coups in the past when corrupt governments have threatened these three institutions. Now the times and the perspective of the Thai military are changing.

Appendix I

The Thai Prime Ministers Since 1957

Pote Sarasin	September 1957-December 1957
Thanom Kittikachorn	January 1958-October 1958
Sarit Thanarath (1)	October 1958-December 1963
Thanom Kittikachorn (1)	December 1963-October 1973
Sanya Thammasak	October 1973-January 1975
Seni Pramoj	February 1975-March 1975
Kukrit Pramoj	March 1975-April 1976
Seni Pramoj (2)	April 1976-October 1976
Thanin Kraivichien	November 1976-November 1977
Kriensak Chomanand (1)	November 1977-February 1980
Prem Tinnasulanonda	March 1980-July 1988
Chatichai Choonhavan (1)	August 1988-February 1991
Anand Panyarachun	March 1991-April 1992
Suchinda Kraprayoon (1)	April 1992-May 1992
Anand Panyarachun	June 1992-September 1992
Chuan Leekpai	September 1992-May 1995
Banharn Silpa-Archa	July 1995-September 1996
Chavalit Yongchaiyuth (1)	November 1996-November 1997
Chaun Leekpai (2)	November 1997- Present

(1) Defense Minister who came from the military.

(2) Defense Minister who came from the civilian population.

Appendix II

The Commander-in-Chiefs of the Royal Thai Army since the Military Coup in 1957

Sarit Thanarath *	June 1954-December 1963
Thanom Kittikachorn *	December 1963-October 1964
Praphat Charusatien	October 1964-October 1973
Krit Srivara	October 1973-September 1975
Bunchai Bamrungpong	October 1975-September 1976
Serm Na Nakhon	October 1976-September 1978
Prem Tinnasulanonda *	October 1978-August 1981
Prayuth Charumanee	August 1981-September 1982
Arthit Kamlangek	October 1982-May 1986
Chavalit Yongchaiyuth *	May 1986-March 1990
Suchinda Kraprayoon	March 1990-April 1992
Issarapong Noonpakdi	April 1992-July 1992
Vimol Vongvanich	August 1992-September 1995
Pramol Plasin	October 1995-September 1996
Chetta Thanajaro	October 1996-September 1998
Surayud Chulanont	October 1998- Present

* Prime Ministers who were military officers

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