

Thailand's Legitimacy Conflict between the Red Shirt Protesters and the Abhisit Government: Aspects of a Complex Political Struggle

Michael H. Nelson*

Abstract: The recent deadly mass protests in Bangkok signified a conflict between a stream of struggle against former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and a counter-stream that developed in opposition to the 2006 military coup. The article sketches elements of the first stream, and outlines five dimensions of the second: the similarity of the 1992 and 2010 protests, the role of Thaksin, the shape of Thai democracy, the red shirts as politicized mass movement, and elements of the protest action. Thai politics remain uncertain and volatile. Factors include the continuing protest potential, the strengthened role of the military, the succession issue, and the consequences of future elections.

Keywords: Thailand, Demokratie, Massenproteste, Thaksin Shinawatra, Abhisit Vejjajiva
Thailand, democracy, mass protests, Thaksin Shinawatra, Abhisit Vejjajiva

1. The Situation

On 19 May 2010 the Thai government, led by Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, used the military to overrun the barricades erected by the protesters of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD)–Red in the Land (the “red shirts”) in Bangkok’s most luxurious shopping district around Rajaprasong intersection. The protests had started on 12 March 2010, and resulted in a first violent clash near the Democracy Monument on Rajadamnoen Road on 10 April 2010. Altogether, 91 people died (mostly unarmed protesters, very few armed protesters, and a number of soldiers), while around 2,000 were injured. An earlier round of massive UDD protests had been dispersed by the military on 13 April 2009. Abhisit has become the only civilian in a triumvirate of Thai prime ministers who are responsible for the killing of dozens of anti-government protesters by the military. Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn suppressed mass student demonstrations in October 1973, while General Suchinda Kraprayoon did the same with middle-class protesters in May 1992.

2. The Problem

The key problem of Thailand’s prolonged political conflicts during the past decade has a name: Thaksin Shinawatra. However, one must not fall into the trap of merely adopting the position of his enemies who posit that he had been the evil cause of all politically bad things that had happened to an otherwise innocently democratic political system. Rather, Thaksin’s actions contributed to the conflicts as much as did the political worldviews and actions of the traditional establishment that felt threatened by the rise of this fabulously rich and ideologically independent outsider to power by means of popular elections, and the legitimacy that comes with it. Although a detailed account of the eventful years since Thaksin first became prime minister in early 2001 cannot be provided here, it is noteworthy that illustrious members of the establishment started to issue

warnings as early as October 2001. Former two-time premier Anand Panyarachun said, “Danger caused by people with dictatorial inclinations has not disappeared from Thailand” (*Matichon* 8 Oct. 2001). More importantly, King Bhumiphol, the symbolic heart of the establishment, criticized Thaksin publicly—in his presence. “He said arrogance, intransigence, disunity and double standards would be the ruin of this country” (*Bangkok Post* 7 Dec. 2001).

In the following years, the main points of criticism against Thaksin became authoritarianism, conflicts of interest, “parliamentary dictatorship” (in other countries seen as stable parliamentary majority), “policy corruption” (using state policies to benefit him and his cronies rather than directly siphoning off state funds), and the undermining of the constitutional system of checks and balances. Yet, to the great disappointment of his Bangkok-based critics, the majority of Bangkokians joined the up-country voters in overwhelmingly returning Thaksin to power in the election of February 2005. This result was based on the voters’ perception of his outstanding performance since 2001.

Nevertheless, not too long after Thaksin’s electoral triumph, known intellectual Sulak Sivaraksa said, “We must organize ourselves to overthrow Thaksin” (*The Nation* 20 Dec. 2005). The left-leaning intellectual Kasian Tejapira assisted by writing that, “the immediate task should be to remove the linchpin of the corrupt and criminalized system, who should face the due process of law for the crimes alleged against him.”¹ Led by friend-turned-foe, Sondhi Limthongkul, tens of thousands of people demonstrated against Thaksin, though Sondhi’s movement seemed to have lost steam by the end of December 2005. In mid-January, however, Thaksin committed his first big

* Dr. Michael H. Nelson is a visiting scholar at the faculty of political science, Chulalongkorn University. This article has benefited from regular conversations with Nick Nostitz. See his *Red vs. Yellow. Volume 1: Thailand’s Crisis of Identity* (White Lotus Press: Bangkok, 2009). Two more volumes about the events of 2009 and 2010 are in preparation.

1 Kasian Tejapira, ‘Toppling Thaksin’, *New Left Review* 39 (May/June): 5-37, 2006 (p. 37).

mistake—he sold his telecom company tax-free to Singapore's state investment holding Temasek for around 73 billion baht.

This caused an outburst of criticism, with the allegation that Thaksin had lost his legitimacy to govern the country, and therefore had to resign immediately. On 9 February 2006, the "People's Alliance for Democracy" (PAD, or "yellow shirts") was founded. In an attempt to counter the withdrawal of legitimacy that dominated the public sphere in Bangkok, Thaksin made his second big mistake—he dissolved parliament; new elections were set for 2 April 2006. A columnist noted that fresh elections, "will mean a nightmarish déjà vu of conflict of interest, policy corruption, destruction of checks and balances and the deterioration of political morals. ... [Therefore, if Thaksin] is to be neutralized in a somewhat undemocratic manner, it sounds like [a] fair deal."²

This "somewhat undemocratic manner" was the election boycott by the biggest opposition party, the Democrats, and two smaller parties, Chart Thai and Mahachon. Their leaders (with Abhisit Vejjajiva for the Democrats) vowed to "free the country of Mr Thaksin's rule" (*Bangkok Post* 25 Feb. 2006). In particular, the Democrats were able to create a severe state crisis because the party's stifling dominance in some southern provinces prevented the election of a number of members of parliament. The House could therefore not convene for the election of the prime minister, and thus the country was indefinitely left without a regular government. Even before this crisis, the Democrats had staged a "Stop the Thaksin Regime" rally, at which Abhisit joined a chorus of PAD, academics, and NGOs demanding that Thaksin resigned so that King Bhumiphol would appoint a prime minister and cabinet at his own discretion (*The Nation* 25 March 2006). After the inconclusive April elections, these calls became even louder. King Bhumiphol rejected these demands, saying that "asking for a royally appointed prime minister is undemocratic" (*The Nation* 26 April 2006). On the same occasion, he suggested that the courts could nullify the election, which the Constitutional Court swiftly did on 8 May 2006.

Afterwards, the king signed a royal decree for new elections to be held on 15 October 2006. Yet, the key political issue was the same that had derailed the April election—the fear by his enemies that Thaksin would return to power with an unassailable mandate from the voters, and therefore with strengthened legitimacy. He was pressured to resign from politics, or to declare that he would not take up the position of prime minister. Even factions within Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party (TRT) thought that this would be the best way to avoid further complications.

Even before the new election date was announced, another serious line of conflict had been opened. "Amid rumors of a possible coup" (*The Nation* 30 June 2006), Thaksin had delivered a speech in which he claimed that a "charismatic person outside the constitution" had been trying to replace him as prime minister. He dramatically exclaimed, "I will protect democracy with my life" (*Bangkok Post* 30 June 2006). This "charismatic person outside the constitution" was a

thinly veiled reference to the greatly influential chairperson of the king's Privy Council, Prem Tinsulanonda.³ Prem reacted by delivering anti-Thaksin addresses at military academies on 14 and 28 July, and 31 August 2006. One particularly ominous remark was, "The nation is sacred. People who think about using it for personal benefit or group benefits will be met with misfortune. Phra Sayam Thewathirat [Thailand's guardian spirit] always protects good people and condemns bad people to a life of suffering" (*Bangkok Post* 1 Sep. 2006). Thaksin, who used to be so proud of his fast thinking, hesitated endlessly about whether he should resign or not—his third and most decisive mistake. Not even three weeks after Prem's final address, the military removed Thaksin Shinawatra from power in their coup of 19 September 2006, and his "life of suffering" began.

Although the Democrats were—in principle—against the coup, important members of its leadership nevertheless were very understanding. After all, according to Chairperson Abhisit Vejjajiva, "the Thaksin regime had brought the country's democracy back to square one" (*Bangkok Post* 21 Sep. 2006). Moreover, "the mess created [by Thaksin] in the last half decade" had "to be cleaned up" by the coup government.⁴ A few years later, Abhisit's fellow conservative hardliner, Finance Minister Korn Chatikavanij, cast his actions in an almost heroic light, writing "if there is any lesson I have learnt during the past four-five years' struggle with Thaksin's regime, it is that we do not have the privilege nor the luxury to pass this difficult responsibility on to others."⁵ Hundreds of their fellow members of the established elite eagerly served on bodies established by the coup plotters.

3. Dimensions of the Red-Shirt Protests

However, there was a fatal miscalculation expressed two days after the coup in a statement made by NGO activist Surichai Wun'Gaeo, who thought that the military coup, "was an effective tool to stop the political polarization never before seen in Thailand" (*Bangkok Post* 21 Sep. 2006). In fact, the coup produced the continuing political conflict Thailand suffers from, because the stream of struggle against Thaksin was confronted by a counter-stream struggling against the usurpers. The establishment simply had been so much fixated on its own disgust of Thaksin that it entirely ignored his vast and genuine popular support. Thus, only a few months after the coup, which the middle-class Bangkokians had very much welcomed, a movement against military rule developed. In the following, I will briefly describe five important dimensions of this movement.

³ Prem is portrayed as the king's key proxy sitting at the center of a supra-constitutional royal network in Duncan McCargo, 'Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand', *The Pacific Review* 18 (4): 499-519.

⁴ Abhisit Vejjajiva, 'Road map needed to restore confidence', *The Nation* 18 Nov. 2006.

⁵ Korn Chatikavanij, 'Personal reflections on the assets seizure case', *Bangkok Post* 5 March 2010.

² Tulsathit Taptim, 'PM puts semblance of faith in democracy', *The Nation* 25 Feb. 2006.

3.1 From May 1992 to the Red-Shirt Protests

The post-coup elections of 23 December 2007, rudely awakened the establishment when Thaksin's supporters, though without him at their helm, returned to power as the People's Power party (TRT had very controversially been dissolved by the coup plotters' Constitutional Tribunal; this had included the disqualification of its 111 board members from politics for five years). The elite powers, however, would not give in easily. Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej lost his position by a very doubtful Constitutional Court verdict. His successor became Somchai Wongsawat, Thaksin's brother-in-law. The middle-class PAD, which shared the royalist outlook of the established elite (or *aphichon*), resumed its protests (supported by many Democrat party members, including Abhisit and Korn), that lasted for 193 days. The PAD stormed and occupied the Government House compound, and blocked Don Mueang and Suvarnabhumi airports. Even when the government declared a state of emergency, the military continued to ignore its orders. When the Constitutional Court, again controversially, dissolved the People's Power party, the army's leadership played an important role in separating one of the party's factions from it and make it form, as Bhumjaithai party, a new government under Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. Army commander Anupong Paojinda became seen as the "coalition formation manager."⁶

Interested parties tried to allay their own concerns (and determine the public's assessment) by portraying Abhisit's assumption of power in early December 2008 as a completely ordinary realignment of parliamentary forces. Yet, even conservative papers recognized that, "The 'red-shirt force' is an important factor that the new government cannot avoid to encounter" (*Post Today* 12 Dec. 2008). However, they also tried to calm themselves by playing down the UDD's capacity to mobilize protesters. Moderate UDD leader Veera Musikapong sounded more urgent when he said in an interview, "The red shirts are a movement that opposes dictatorship and builds democracy. This current dictatorship is not done in the form of direct dictatorship, by ... rolling out the tanks in the streets. The present dictatorship is concealed" (*Post Today* 29 Dec. 2008). Others used the expression "silent coup,"⁷ making the Abhisit government appear as essentially a continuation of the power that the coup group had usurped. Abhisit thus knowingly took a great risk. Contrary to what the establishment had hoped for, the first round of massive protests occurred soon enough.

In general terms, an important segment of the population perceived Abhisit's takeover as illegitimate—as was the case with Suchinda Kraprayoon in May 1992 (only that then it was the Bangkok middle class, while the new round was carried by lower classes mainly from Bangkok, the North and the Northeast). As in 1992, an infrastructure and ideological basis for mobilizing great masses of protesters had existed before Abhisit took over. While the anti-Suchinda protests were helped by the charismatic figure of Chamlong Srimuang,

Thaksin Shinawatra took this role in 2009 and 2010. The fourth element—the government using soldiers to suppress the protests, and killing scores of mostly unarmed people—was also the same as in 1992. Unlike then, however, King Bhumiphol did not intervene in 2010, and so PM Abhisit remained in his position, pursuing a policy of suppression, with a vague touch of what he called "reconciliation." The protesters (and the dead and injured) were not declared democracy heroes, as in 1992, but seen as mindless people led by "terrorists" who had banded together to "topple the monarchy" (the dominant official royalist-nationalist ideology considers this high treason).⁸ Therefore, unlike in 1992, there was no positive political closure for the protesters. On the contrary, they were defeated, left alone with their casualties, political concerns, and deeply felt anguish. They were criminalized (with most of their leaders incarcerated), segregated from the "good" (Abhisit-supporting) Thais, and surrounded by countrywide campaigns of conformist indoctrination.

3.2 Thaksin Shinawatra

When Thaksin was overthrown, he enjoyed great popularity, had one of the biggest egos in the country, and was one of its richest individuals. He did not quietly fade into obscurity but kept on fighting, even after he went into exile to avoid serving a two-year prison term. After "four years of attempts to dismantle and diminish his influence by his political enemies—an alliance of the elite establishment, the military, the yellow shirts ... and the now ruling Democrat Party—Thaksin remains a menace."⁹ Some members of the UDD might have seen his role as an undesirable personalization of a mass movement that should rather fight for its political goals. They included more democracy, social and economic justice, no more double standards in the application of laws, the reduction of the political role of an elite (military, bureaucracy, technocrats) that often considers itself to be above the constitution, and the limitation of the monarchy to symbolic functions (such as in England and Japan).

The opponents of the UDD often perceived this movement solely as a creature of Thaksin, who allegedly pulled all the strings and financed the movement. Even well meaning observers noted that a key goal of the protests—ostensibly to force PM Abhisit to dissolve the House and call fresh elections—was to reverse the consequences of the coup. These would include the annulment of all court cases against Thaksin and his family, the return of his property, and his return to Thailand (and possibly to power). From this perspective, the UDD protests were the continuation of a ferocious struggle between Thaksin and the established elites that had already begun soon after he assumed power in 2001. Thaksin daily consulted with the protest leaders, and he repeatedly addressed demonstrations in Bangkok and smaller meetings in the North and Northeast by video link. Many politicians of Thaksin's TRT (dissolved in 2007), its successor People's Power party (dissolved in 2008),

6 Wassana Nanuam, 'Govt hopefuls rendezvous with Anupong 'the manager'', *Bangkok Post* 11 Dec. 2008.

7 Pravit Rojanaphruk, 'Questions loom over new prime minister's legitimacy', *The Nation* 17 Dec. 2008.

8 See the PAD book *Khabuankan lomchao* [The Movement to Topple the Monarchy] (ASTV Phuchatkan: Bangkok, 2009). The Abhisit government adopted this view.

9 Suranand Vejjajiva, 'Four years after coup, four months after bloodshed', *Bangkok Post* 17 Sep. 2010.

and the current incarnation of Phuea Thai party were closely linked with the protests. In short, Thaksin's role in the protests was of great importance, not the least as its central symbolic resource that created both identity and motivation. Yet, the protests had also more far-reaching implications.

3.3 Thailand's Democracy

Thailand does not have a democracy in the western sense. Rather, it features a dual polity with democratic elements.¹⁰ Its upper part comprises the established elites (monarchy, military, bureaucracy, technocrats). The red shirts attack this level as "aristocracy" or "bureaucracy" (*amart*). The highest value at this level is the pre-democratic trinity of "nation, religion, and monarchy." Irrespective of widespread corruption in elements of these circles, they derive their sense of legitimacy from a supposed orientation towards the national good. Their modus operandi is the totalistic control of the population, which consists of conformist subjects, while their idea of the political order is paternalism.

The lower part of the dual polity comprises the people, politicians, and political parties. These groups occurred or became important after the establishment got used to its privileges. Their political model contests the elite's traditional claim to power. The highest value in this model is the constitution, while the claim to legitimacy rests on the assumption of popular sovereignty, a view that turns conformist subjects into self-confident citizens. Here, the modus operandi is the pluralism of opinions, while parliamentary democracy is the idea of the political order.

The PAD's anti-Thaksin protests used the ideology of "nation, religion, and monarchy," and not the idea of a parliamentary democracy with equal voting rights.¹¹ The PAD and many members of the establishment held that parliamentarism had failed in Thailand, because politicians allegedly gained their seats in parliament by vote buying, and afterwards used them for corruption. When critics of the coup insisted that Thaksin was twice democratically elected, supporters of the establishment retorted that one could not equate elections with democracy. Rather, Thai elections resulted in the "tyranny of the [uneducated, rural, corrupt] majority" over the enlightened minority elite and middle class in Bangkok (this includes the Democrat party).

Obviously, the UDD rejected this view insisting that the parliamentary system fundamentally worked. Moreover, the voters had consciously elected Thaksin, because he had been the first premier who took seriously the needs of ordinary people, and implemented respective policies (universal health care, microcredit schemes). By toppling Thaksin, the military and the supporting elites had deprived the ordinary people of their democratically chosen patron. The Bangkok-based

establishment had to give up its contempt of ordinary up-country people, as well as its assumption that it was considerably more enlightened than the rest of the population and thus enjoyed privileges in determining the political course of the country. Rather, all citizens had the same political rights, and all social groups had to accept the outcomes of elections. Seen in this light, the UDD protests appeared as a democratizing element in the Thai polity.

3.4 The Red-Shirt Movement

Earlier anti-government mass protests were organized by the population in the capital city. This was the case in October 1973 (students), May 1992 (middle class), and 2006/08 (PAD-middle class). The UDD, on the other hand, comprised many members of Bangkok's lower-income groups, with the great majority of protesters coming from lower-income strata (not "the poor") in rural and small-town areas. For the first time in Thai history, broad sectors of these strata politically organized and carried their protest to the capital. When they were on their way, the establishment's *Bangkok Post* (13 March 2010) memorably labeled the protesters "rural hordes."

This mobilization was based on a process of politicization that had turned the "political apathy" of the rural masses, long complained about by the establishment, into political awareness. The people's political learning was driven by Thaksin's broad-based policies, the PAD protests, the military coup, the constitutional referendum, four general elections, the dissolutions of the TRT and People's Power parties, and the tricky replacement of the Samak and Somchai governments by the military-backed Abhisit government. Never before had Thailand experienced a similarly intensive and sustained period of political events and processes that captivated broad sectors of the population countrywide. Never before, too, had fundamental political divisions—between "yellow" and "red"—reached so deep down into all areas of society.

Moreover, since the failed protests in 2009, far from being discouraged by their defeat, the UDD had conducted increasingly systematic political mobilization. They had a TV channel, many local radio stations, three journals, and a school for political training.¹² A great number of towns and villages, especially in the North and the Northeast, featured UDD cells, the members of which were registered in the hundreds of thousands in computerized data bases with photos, and received ID cards. All this pointed to a very broad and dense network of political communications, which were supported by the organization of numerous political and social activities.

Again, this broad politicization of previously rather demure masses was an important element of the increased democratization of the traditionally establishment-oriented Thai polity. It remained to be seen what individual and collective impact the experience of political strength and joint protests against the established center of power, which caused them scores of dead and injured, would have on these newly-politicized and organized sectors of the lower-strata population.

10 This outline systematizes ideas on "Thai-style democracy" by Thai authors. Some see it in a positive light (Anek Laothamatas, Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, Chai-anan Samudavanija), others are critical (Thitinan Pongsudhirak, Kasian Tejapira, Thongchai Winichakul).

11 On the PAD's political worldview, see Michael H. Nelson, "Thailand's People's Alliance for Democracy: From 'New Politics' to a 'Real' Political Party?" In *Legitimacy Crisis and Political Conflict in Thailand*, ed. by Marc Askew (Silkworm Books: Chiang Mai, 2010).

12 The Abhisit government closed the UDD's mass media, including innumerable web sites.

Certainly, there had been a “redrawing [of] the Thai political space” that had “entered into forbidden territory hitherto reserved solely for urban Thai elites.”¹³

3.5 The Protests

When the protests began in the government sector, they were an impressively peaceful mass action. In fact, the UDD had always emphasized that theirs was to be a strictly “non-violent,” though prolonged, demonstration.¹⁴ When their leaders moved part of the masses to the inner-city Rajaprasong intersection, however, this necessarily meant that their original approach was abandoned in favor of potential violence. No government can accept such a degree of provocation and must finally disperse the protesters, while the latter—especially with the UDD’s all-or-nothing approach—might feel the need to prepare a defense for the anticipated crackdown.¹⁵ After the violent clashes on 10 April (26 dead, 800 wounded), the UDD willfully escalated the situation by concentrating all their forces at the Rajaprasong intersection. A UDD leader, former national human rights commissioner Jaran Ditapichai, told the *Washington Post* (1 May 2010), “We are fighting a war”—a war that was mainly about the question of whether the House should be dissolved a few months earlier rather than later, in order to pave the way for fresh elections.

It really looked like “war” in the protest area. Massive barricades with sharpened bamboo sticks, which turned the site into a sealed-off and guarded encampment, and many small piles of paving stones signaled that any attempt to dissolve the “peaceful” protest would be countered by the UDD’s “guards.” This highly risky tactic against the well-armed Thai army included the use of probable casualties as future political capital. Moreover, the events of 10 April, and dozens of grenade attacks accompanying the protests, had left no doubt that concealed groups of trained fighters existed that were prepared to help the UDD by force of arms if the government moved to disperse the protesters. The UDD leaders were ambivalent about this issue, while many ordinary protesters welcomed this armed help.

This threat of massive violence temporarily prevented the use of harsh measures. It also led to the announcement of a “road map” by the prime minister that included elections to be held on 14 November 2010. In addition, neither the military nor the police seemed to be inclined to follow their political superiors in case they ordered a crackdown. It is nothing new that neither force feels that they are strictly bound by the constitutional order. Ironically, this attitude temporarily prevented a bigger bloodbath than that of 10 April from happening. Unfortunately, the hard-line UDD leaders prevailed

over their moderate colleagues. Abhisit’s road map was rejected. He finally lost his patience, while the Army was deprived of any reason not to adopt decisive actions. Military forces sealed off the protest area. The unavoidable crackdown meant that the UDD leaders sacrificed about 50 lives merely to delay their inevitable surrender by a few days. During the crackdown, red shirts burned more than 30 commercial buildings in Bangkok and four provincial seats of the central government.

4. Outlook

Bangkok’s dominant public opinion did not see the crackdown as “soldiers killed innocent demonstrators” (as in 1973 and 1992), but rather as “rabble burned Bangkok.” In retrospect, the vandalism resulting from the frustration of defeat seemed to justify the government’s view that it had been dealing with armed terrorists who wanted to overthrow the monarchy. The red shirts, on the other hand, could feel confirmed in their alienation from the central Thai state, and in their conviction that they could not expect anything good from the Bangkok-based establishment. Premier Abhisit established a number of commissions aimed at “reconciliation.” Strangely, however, they excluded red shirts, while including many PAD supporters.

For the near future, Thai politics will be fraught with considerable uncertainty, and perhaps volatility. Many expect that Abhisit will call for elections before his term ends in late 2011. Their result and its consequences cannot be predicted. Importantly, “In the four years since the 2006 coup, the military has regained its role as a state within the state.”¹⁶ Hawkish General Prayuth Chanocha was appointed to succeed the more moderate Anupong Paojinda as the army commander. Under Prayuth, the army might well become “a real pillar of the throne,” because he is “very protective of the monarchy.”¹⁷ This strengthened link between monarchy and army gains particular significance by the looming issue of succession, and all the uncertainties that this event may bring with it.

As for the UDD, its leaders may be in prison, but the red shirts continue to make their presence publicly felt in many provinces (besides reportedly having some violently inclined underground operatives who recruit trainees). On 19 September 2010, around 10,000 red shirts (most of who turned up spontaneously and defied the wishes of the original organizer of the event) violated the emergency decree still in force in Bangkok by staging a protest that included a repetition of the blockage of the Rajaprasong intersection for many hours. To the red shirts, “Rajaprasong” has become the key symbol for illegitimately violent state action. They counter the hegemonic “They burned Central World Department Store” by insisting on “People have died here!” The political forces and actors are in place. The ideologies, strategies, and tactics used in their interactions will shape Thai democracy in the coming years.

13 Chairat Charoensin-o-larn, ‘Redrawing the Thai Political Space: The Red Shirted Movement’, paper, Rural-Urban Networks and Transitions in Asia: Re-spatializing Cultural and Political Imaginaries (National University of Singapore, 2010, p. 2).

14 For comparative context of the red-shirt protests, see *Civil Resistance and Power Politics*, eds. Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2009).

15 There is no space here to discuss issues of what protest actions are justified under which political conditions, whether the government had contributed to creating the conditions for the provocation, what means of dispersal are justified under which conditions, whether other means of solving the situation were available, etc.

16 Chang Noi [pseudonym], ‘The bad grammar of repression’, *The Nation* 20 Sep. 2010. Thitinan Pongsudhirak put the current situation as “solidifying ‘soft’ civil-military authoritarianism” (‘Thailand and its hybrid authoritarianism’, *Bangkok Post* 27 Sept. 2010).

17 Wassana Nanuam, ‘Fortune comes knocking on Class 12 door’, *Bangkok Post* 12 Aug. 2010.