



28<sup>th</sup>

# ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE

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PLENARY SESSION TEN  
4 JUNE 2014

## THE FUTURE OF THAI POLITICS

*Thailand's Political Future*

by

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# THAILAND'S POLITICAL FUTURE

28TH ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE

## Article 7 (Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand):

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“Whenever no provision of this Constitution is applicable to any case, it shall be decided in accordance with the Constitutional practice in the democratic regime of government with the King as Head of the State.”



## Possible reading of Article 7:

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Where the Constitution fails to apply (e.g. when suspended by a coup), subsequent action may also be deemed constitutional given the King's (ultimate military authority's) prerogative



## Some common fallacies of the Thai polity:

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- All coups have an anti-democratic or anti-civil(ian) intent, and are staged for the coup leaders (military forces) to seize power as an end in itself.
- Thais who favour democracy, social peace and the rule of law oppose all coups.
- Thai parliamentary democracy is mortally wounded or terminally incapacitated by a coup.
- Thai democracy functions exclusively through democratic devices and mechanisms.
- Democratic Thailand has democratic means to extricate itself from the logjams of September 2006 and May 2014.
- Thai society post-1932 is obliged to use only democratic means to affirm (or return to, post-coup) parliamentary democracy.
- Pro- and anti-Thaksin forces are class-defined.
- The colour-coded street battles are disputes over competing ideologies.



## Stages of decline in Pheu Thai's elected government authority:

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Government Under Pressure (legitimacy crisis)	→	Besieged State
Caretaker Government (Parliament dissolved)	→	Dysfunctional State
Acting Caretaker Government (election delayed)	→	Dysfunctional Nominal State
Pro tem Acting Caretaker Government (dismissal)	→	Figment of Dysfunctional Nominal State



## Accumulation and Convergence of forces, up to 22 May 2014:

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- PDRC (People's Democratic Reform Committee), Bangkok
- Red Shirts, northern provinces to Bangkok
- UDD (United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship), to Bangkok
- Disaffected rice farmers, northern provinces to Bangkok
- Random violence at protest sites, Bangkok
- Professional assassins, Bangkok



## Groups reacting to the 2014 coup, for and against:

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### Pro-coup

Businesses

Royalists

Tacticians

PDRC

Thaksin rivals

Pragmatists

Unwitting beneficiaries

### Anti-coup

Anti-militarists

Classic democrats

Constitutionalists

Deposed government

Thaksin loyalists, cronies

Idealists

Inconvenienced bystanders





# Measures By National Council for Peace and Order

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## **Coup actions:**

- Curfew
- Detention of key figures in politics
- Closure of broadcast news agencies
- Suspension of Constitution
- Suspension of Parliament
- Suspension of the Senate

## **Post-coup actions:**

- Pledge to introduce political reforms before the election
  - Pledge to pay rice farmers for funds the Yingluck government owed
  - Pledge to return to parliamentary democracy (by end 2015)
  - Freeing of detainees after questioning
  - Easing other restrictions
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# Post-coup developments:

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## At the end of Week 1:

- Curfew relaxed (10pm – 5am to 12midnight – 4am)
- National reconciliation centres established

## At the beginning of Week 2:

- 3-stage road map for return to democracy, with elections
- Curfew fully lifted in Koh Samui, Pattaya, Phuket

## By the end of Week 2:

- More than 80% of the 700-plus TV channels return to operations
- 70% of rice farmers who were owed money fully paid
- All-party policy advisory panel established

## Current or Pending:

- Amendments to the Constitution
  - Revival of Political Parties Act to reactivate suspended parties
  - Return of suspended laws (anti-corruption law, Elections Commission law, Ombudsman Act, State Audit Act, on crimes committed by political leaders)
  - Professional legal consultants sought for state documents
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# Thailand's political future?

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## Near-term future:

Barring unforeseen major disruptions, a return to parliamentary democracy before end 2015



## Thailand's political future? (cont.)

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### Medium-term future:

Politics and business as usual, i.e. the following will remain and continue –

The military's (army's) informal but pivotal political role

Coups as intermittent interludes between democratic parliamentary rule

Parliamentary (Thai-style) democracy as default political position

Constitutional provisions to be amended occasionally, e.g. post-coup

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**THANK YOU**

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