

-Unofficial Notes-

**Roundtable with Representatives of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand
(FCCT) on the Current Situation in Thailand
by Mr. Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn,
Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs,
and General Winai Phattiyakul,
Secretary-General of the Council for Democratic Reform,
Friday, 29 September 2006 between 10.00-11.45 hrs.
at the ICT Conference Room, Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

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PS Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn

- Thank you for co-organizing this Roundtable with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We are glad of this chance to put our case to you. We are also delighted to have the Secretary-General of the Council for Democratic Reform (CDR) with us. He is already well known to all of you from his previous role as Secretary-General of the National Security Council and his fine achievements in E.Timor.

Overall context of the political change

- What is the mood? It is rather a mixed one. It is one of optimism and relief as work is proceeding in **clockwork precision** on the timeline and promises given by the CDR.
- One has to note right from the beginning a prevailing sense of optimism. But for those involved in the actual functioning of the process, there is some kind of concern, bordering on apprehension, of the implications of what the military intervention or the political change on 19 September has meant for the democratic paradigm. How does the case of Thailand fit in with the model of democracy as people wish it to be?
- Most of you have noted the remarkable facts on the ground that the political change in Thailand which took place on 19 September was without any violence or resistance, and caused minimal disruption of normal life and economic figures. On our part, we nevertheless note the concern reflected in articles and wire reports from friends of Thailand of the directions that we are taking. This is why we appreciate your presence here today.
- General Winai and I held a similar kind of session as this for the Diplomatic Corps on 25 September. It was very frank. We spoke as friends, and there were no secrets. You can look at the Ministry's website under the icon "Update on Political Situation" for the transcript of the session.
- At that meeting we stressed that from the point of view of Thailand for the past 15 years, the situation appears to be black and white. We had a democracy, a thriving and working democracy, and extra-constitutional means to put an end to that is not a good thing. But in the aftermath of 19 September, things are not so clear. Is it black or white, or are there **shades of grey**?

- One of the recent press articles had the headline “Dangerous Coup”. This did not mean that the action was dangerous in itself, but posed a danger on the national mindset, regional mindset or even beyond. At the same time, many were speaking of the action as what might be billed as a “**pro-democracy coup**”.
- We are witnessing something peculiar to the Thai context. The grey area is the fact that the populace as a whole seemed to have welcomed the political change. This is a spontaneous and unplanned response from the populace, not only in Bangkok but in the rural areas also.
- The grey area is also the result of the actions of the military – putting in a swift timeline for the return to democracy which has been adhered to in a manner, as I said, which resembles clockwork precision. This indicates the determination of the armed forces to undertake only a **brief intervention in order to restore peace, unity, and justice in the country**.
- What are the concrete indications? General Winai will go into more detail regarding the future role of the CDR, and provide more details on the **timeline**. But as you know, a draft **Interim Constitution** has been finalized for some days. One can therefore well anticipate that the promulgation of the Interim Constitution would take place in a day or two. As for the submission of the name of the Prime Minister to His Majesty, I guess that this will follow that in a matter of hours. A **new civilian government** under a respected Prime Minister will be put in place over the next week or so.
- The question one is asked to pose rhetorically is whether the international community or you will allow us to succeed. This is reflected in the second aspect of the sense of mixed feelings - whether this phenomenon with its swift timetable will be allowed to succeed in its stated goal, keeping to its clockwork precision.
- We are finding the irony of the situation. Everyone wishes us well to have a speedy return to democracy. But a “one size fits all” approach would be an inhibitor to that kind of process. If there was only one model, with no possible specific characteristics, and I hesitate to use the word “deviation”, particular cases such as ours may be denied a fair chance of due and speedy recovery and the resumption of democracy.
- We discern in your writings the concern about the effects on national or regional mindsets. As for myself, I have come to a firm conclusion that the change has had minimal impact on the collective consciousness or psyche of the people of Thailand. The popular will was driving the phenomenon but also circumscribing it. Thus the CDR has been setting the limits on what they should do or should not do, and on the timing and pacing of democracy.
- We maintain that there has been **minimal impact on the collective mindset regarding democracy**. There has been no substantive U-turn to democracy, no turning back to “square one” after decades of democracy. We have experienced a stumble, and will pick ourselves up, and we hope that our friends would give us a hand. But the feeling is that friends are inhibited by their world view.

- The majority of the Thai people were relieved that there was no power struggle. We were relieved that the stalemate was unlocked and that imminent violence or bloodshed was averted.
- Over the past months, every avenue under the democratic system had been tried, every available means exhausted, including public demonstrations, the role of wise men and the intervention of the judiciary. But the divisions within the body politic and society were such that neither these attempts and initiatives nor the impending elections in November could resolve the crisis.
- So, we appeal to those who have formed views – we hope that you would keep these views under review. We hope that you would judge us by the timeline, which will be clearer with the promulgation of the Interim Constitution. **We hope that you would judge us not only by the intentions but also by the actions and the context**, to look at what has been reinstated, what has been done and will be done over the next 2 weeks, and whether they fit and conform to the democratic paradigm.

General Winai Phattiyakul

- We hope that with the Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs' presentation, you would have a better understanding of what has transpired in Thailand. We wish to reaffirm the intention of the Army Commander-in-Chief when the action took place that he sincerely did not want to retain administrative power for more than a few weeks, 2-3 weeks at the most.

Timeline

- This is only day 10 since 19 September. Since then, we have been working days and nights making sure that the commitments to the public are carried out.
- We will have an **Interim Constitution** in 1-2 days, and the name of the next Prime Minister within the next few days. By next week we will have a **new Prime Minister** and he will form a Cabinet comprising 35 Ministers and himself.
- The CDR will transform itself into the **Council for National Security**, a high level body with a role limited to specific security issues.
- The next step will be the convening of the **National Legislative Assembly** and the **National Assembly** of 2,000 persons from all over the country and from all sectors of society. The National Assembly will select from among its members a **Constitutional Drafting Council** of 100 persons, while the actual drafting of the new Constitution will be carried out by the **Constitution Drafting Committee** of 35 persons.
- Within the next 6 months, the new Constitution will therefore be drafted. After revision the draft Constitution will be presented for approval through a **National Referendum**. The whole process of completing the new Constitution is therefore expected to take 8 and a half to 9 months, no more. Then we will have free and fair elections.

- For the Interim Constitution, this has been drafted by a group of law experts. We have been conducting a hearing involving academia, namely deans of the faculty of law of famous universities of Thailand, to take another look at the text. Yesterday was the second day of such a hearing, and arrangements were made for them to meet with the drafting team. The deans provided useful inputs, and we are very happy that these persons are happy with the draft, which is now ready for promulgation.
- Hopefully, we can run within the timeframe. I would like to echo the Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs regarding the timeframe that it is a question of whether the media will allow us to succeed with the timeframe or not.
- It is accepted that there are some concerns with the perception of the international community. I wish to cite US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's critique that Thailand has made a U-turn in democracy. On this, I would urge everyone to look into the difficult situation that Thailand had been facing over the past several months. If one was riding a train and was looking at the train about to derail or have a collision, with the loss of lives, one would either stop or make a sharp turn to avoid the tragedy that would happen. It is the same with this political change.
- So let me stress that we are now looking ahead, and looking forward to free and fair elections within 1 year.

PS Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn

- Regarding the role of the Monarchy, a clarification from the CDR is being circulated for your information. The clarification explains the background of the political change, the nature of the audience granted to the Armed Forces Chiefs on 19 September, and the appointment of General Sonthi Boonyaratglin as Leader of the CDR.
- Let me point out that the role of the Monarchy has been, up to the moment the audience was granted, a constitutional one. Indeed, over the past year one has seen so many attempts from various factions or parties to draw His Majesty the King into the fray. But His Majesty has always been conscious of the role of a constitutional monarch, who is above politics. One can see His Majesty's position reflected in the debate on Article 7 of the 1997 Constitution, specifically that His Majesty viewed that he lacked authority to appoint a Prime Minister to replace Dr. Thaksin. So there has been proper observance by the Monarchy of the constitutional constraints.
- On 19 September, an audience was sought by the Armed Forces Chiefs to report on the situation and action. It is clear that the part played by His Majesty was limited to taking cognisance of the situation and action by the Armed Forces Chiefs. The photographs that have been published of the audience show how the whole event was unanticipated. So, one has to look at how the whole thing was being received.

- This is also the case with the Royal Command recognizing General Sonthi Boonyaratglin as Leader of the CDR. One shouldn't be reading too much into the Royal Command. This is in fact not the first time that such a Command has been issued. His Majesty's role as constitutional monarch was to take note and give authority to an accomplished fact. For an illustration, one can also look on the Thai government website and search for the Royal Gazette of 1991 for a previous instance of His Majesty issuing a Royal Command. Such action does not mean endorsement.

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