

Observation no: 139

Country-year: 1969

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

Yes.

The military took power in a 1958 coup and the subsequent leaders of Thailand were members of the ruling military elite.

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.

In 1932, the Thai military led a coup against the existing Thai monarchy, but there were additional coups in 1947 and 1958.

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

Yes.

Thanom Kittikachorn was a Field Marshall in the Thai military.

4. Is the military officer corps largely closed to those who do not share the leader's ethnic or sectarian background?

Yes.

Membership in the military was largely restricted to ethnic Chinese and therefore was dominated by Buddhist Thai personnel.¹

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

¹ Moshe Lissak, *Military Roles in Modernization: Civil-Military Relations in Thailand and Burma*, (London: Sage Publications, 1976), pg. 93.

However, the senior officer corps were remarkably homogenous and came from a very small group of the population that represented very similar beliefs about the role of the military and governance in Thailand.²

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

The military was seen as separate from traditional party politics and therefore was not associated with a particular political party.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

No.

While the Thai military was firmly anti-communist, in general training was not ideologically based.³

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

The military was used to put down a series of Marxist rebellions during the mid to late 1960s.⁴

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

Yes.

The military was in charge of Thai governance throughout the five years leading up to 1969, with military members serving as head of state, cabinet ministers, and other governance positions.⁵

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

² Ibid, 107.

³ Ibid, 103.

⁴ John L.S. Girling, *Thailand Society and Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 265.

⁵ Ibid.

Yes.

With the help of the U.S., the Thai government and military trained paramilitary forces within Communist bases of support to fight against the Communist Party.⁶ An organization called the ISOC (Internal Security Command) was created to conduct these operations and also to coordinate domestic response to internal unrest.⁷

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

No.

I could find no evidence of an internal intelligence organization tasked with watching the regular military.

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

I could find no evidence of a purge of the officer corps from 1964-1969.

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

Yes

During this time period in Thai history, there was no real distinction between civilian and military. In fact, the military was largely in charge of the Cabinet of Ministers and therefore there was no institution that facilitated true civilian-military exchange. However, a National Security Council and Defense Council did exist and did meet to discuss military/security issues.⁸

⁶ James Ockey, "Thailand: the Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in Muthiah Alagappa, Ed. *Coercion and Governance: the Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pg. 194.

⁷ Chai-Anan Samudavanija and Suchit Bunbongkarn, "Thailand," in Zakara Haji Ahmad and Harold Crouch, Eds. *Military-Civilian Relations in South-East Asia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pg. 113.

⁸ Lissak, *Military Roles in Modernization: Civil-Military Relations in Thailand and Burma*.