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THE RED SHIRTS AND THEIR DEMOCRATIC
STRUGGLE IN NORTHERN THAILAND,
APRIL 2010 TO MAY 2015

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ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK
INSTITUTE

Trends in Southeast Asia

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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The Red Shirts and Their Democratic Struggle in Northern Thailand, April 2010 to May 2015

By Tanet Charoenmuang

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The political education of members of Thailand's Red Shirt movement took place through the electoral process, and through learning how political institutions and the judiciary could be systematically used to topple the elected government. The main sources of instruction were the Red Shirt TV programmes followed by Bangkok rallies.
- In Chiang Mai Province, for example, Red Shirt activities centred around a radio station and participation in political gatherings. The former involved dissemination of information, the latter connected activists with those from other parts of Northern Thailand.
- The relationship between the United Alliance for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) and satellite Red Shirt groups was rather distant. The UDD leadership showed little interest in strengthening Red Shirt forces outside Bangkok and in turn, there was little participation by Red Shirt leaders from other provinces in Bangkok activities.
- Yingluck's elected government focussed on maintaining Party popularity among voters rather than on structural democratic reforms. At the same time, the UDD, the Red Shirt movement, the Party, and other parts of society did not actively pressure the government to enact such reforms. This contributed to the political deadlock that emerged before the military coup.
- In the wake of the military ban on all political gatherings, only a few Red Shirt radio stations remained open, but their programming changed drastically from political broadcasts to social broadcasts. Red Shirt groups have transformed into social clubs and now organize social events that do not include political activities.

The Red Shirts and Their Democratic Struggle in Northern Thailand, April 2010 to May 2015

By Tanet Charoenmuang¹

The deaths of people (at Ratchadumnern Avenue and Ratchaprasong Intersection) during April and May 2010 brought about “Eye-opening” (Enlightenment) among villagers. They have now understood how the state is ready to use violence and suppress its people...that the state sees a people’s demonstration not just as a call for democracy, but war. The state sees people as its enemy and intends to destroy them. The killings in Bangkok have transformed those villagers to be fighters who are ready to die for democracy.

Pinkaew Luang-aramsri, 2013²

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the year 2013 and in the early stages of the following year, Thailand was filled with political excitement generated by Red Shirt demonstrations both in Bangkok and outside, in support of the elected Yingluck Government. This led many to believe that the Red Shirt

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² Pinkaew Luang-aramsri, ed., *Becoming Red: Origin and Development of the Red Shirts in Chiang Mai*. (In Thai) (Chiang Mai: Center of Research and Academic Services, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, September 2006), p. 55.

movement was a strong democratic force, particularly in the northeast and northern regions. It appeared ready to oppose the return of an authoritarian regime at all costs, and if a military coup were to be staged, the Red Shirts seemed prepared to establish a government in exile, or even carve out a Federation of Isan-Lanna States from Thailand's existing territory.

Andrew Walker's 2012 study of peasants in rural Chiang Mai presented a vivid picture of the extent to which villager-farmers and rural politics have been transformed since Thaksin's Pheu Thai Party came to power in 2001 and created a strong impact there after the coup in 2006.³ There are two frequently-quoted studies on the Red Shirts in Northeast and Northern Thailand. The first was written in November 2013 and published in 2014, and the second was published in September 2014.⁴ Both confirm the findings in Walker's study, describing strong political activism among Red Shirt villagers in these two regions. They tell a developing story of villagers growing into politically-active and brave fighters, ready to protect and sacrifice their lives for the sake of democracy. The second work is particularly important because its field research was conducted on Red Shirts in the conflict zones of the four districts of Chiang Mai Province. These are the districts of Mueang, Sankampaeng, Doisaket, and Fang-Mae Ai (considered the capital of the Red Shirts in the North).

Crucially, these data were gathered in 2010 and 2011, and the Yingluck Government was elected to power in July of that second year. Since then, a military regime has returned to rule the country since May 2014.

Observers have yet to address the struggle of these Red Shirts in the two regions between 2011 and now. This paper tries to correct that, and

³ Andrew Walker, *Thailand's Political Peasants: Power in the Modern Rural Economy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

⁴ Charles Keyes, *Finding Their Voice: Northeastern Villagers and the Thai State* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2014), and P. Luang-aramsri, *Becoming Red*, pp. 55–56.

is based on a study of four districts in Chiang Mai Province — Mueang, Sankampaeng, Doisaket, and Fang-Mae Ai.

Whereas Pinkaew and her team studied these districts in a spirited democratic atmosphere and under an elected pro-Red Shirt government, this present study was conducted in a totally different milieu. Between December 2014 and May 2015, hastily arranged interviews were conducted in coffee shops, hotel lobbies, restaurants, temples, and on commutes. The conversations did not take place in the context of any political gatherings because these had been banned since May 2014.

Several interviews took place in downtown urban areas where on-guard military units were in plain sight. Apart from the study in the four districts, I also conducted interviews in the neighbouring provinces of Lumphun, Chiang Rai, Payao, and Phrae. This was done with the hope of learning more about how geography contributed to the dynamics of the Red Shirt movement, especially in terms of their regional arrangements.

The number of people interviewed each time tended to be between two and three, and occasionally four. I avoided situations of five or more Red Shirt members because this would have been perceived as a political gathering.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: How has the coup on 22 May 2014 affected the Red Shirts? Why have the Red Shirts put up so little resistance to the coup, and reduced their political activities since? What measures have the military regime used against the Red Shirts and other democratic forces? Can the ongoing political developments in Northern Thailand (after the military coup in September 2006) be explained in terms of democratization? What are the prospects for democracy in the Northern region of Thailand?

This is by no means an exhaustive list, as there are certainly many other questions that remain unanswered. For example, ten days after the May 2014 coup, an official of the Consul in Chiang Mai asked reporters the following questions: Why was there no armed uprising or a strong and peaceful demonstration against the coup? Why did the Red Shirts not block all major roads and surround all military camps in the North? Why was there no declaration of an exile government in Chiang Mai or of a Federation of Isan-Lanna States in defence of the elected Yingluck government and democracy?

By collecting and analysing scattered interviews, I hope that this paper will lay the foundation for future studies that may attempt to answer the questions of the Chiang Mai consulate official.

THE “ENLIGHTENMENT”

Unlike the student movement that led to the toppling of the military Thanom government in October 1973, and the middle-class uprising against the Suchinda government in May 1992, the Red Shirt movement for democracy in the 2000s has been a “rainbow” coalition. It comprises people of different classes and professions: farmers and workers, teachers, students, journalists, monks, government officials, policemen and housewives, and people from the lower, middle, and higher classes are all represented.⁵

Former movements have comprised mostly urban dwellers. Departing from this trend, the Red Shirts have not only attracted many urbanites, but also many villagers who are known to have benefitted from the policies of Thaksin’s Pheu Thai and Palang Prachachon Parties, which include projects such as the development of village funds for business and community-building tasks, the 30-baht for each medical treatment programme, the One-Tambon-One-Product (OTOP) Project, the Farmers’ Debt Postponement Project, and the suppression of serious drug trafficking activities.

The political education — now termed as the “eye-opening” or “enlightenment” — of most Red Shirt members is better understood as a process that did not take place instantaneously, but in a staggered

⁵ Apichat Satitniramai, “Who are the Red Shirts?”, in *Red Why?* (in Thai), edited by Pinyo Traisuriyadhamma (Bangkok: Open Books, 2010), pp. 14–35; Nithi Aeowsriwong, *Reading Thai Politics 3*. (in Thai) (Bangkok: Open Books, 2010); Pasuk Phongpaichit, Speech: “Reviewing the Social Movement — Yellow Shirts — Red Shirts” <<http://www.prachatai.com/journal/2010/2010/09/31130>>; and Prapas Pintoptaeng, “Rise of the Grassroots: A political dimension”, in *Red Why?*, pp. 36–55.

fashion. In the first phase, they learnt that an electoral contest was a viable political option. Evidence of this can be observed in the Pheu Thai Party's convincing victory in the general elections of 8 February 2005. Thaksin's political party achieved four important political milestones: (1) The first Prime Minister to complete a four-year term in 80 years, since the abolition of the Absolute Monarchy in 1932; (2) The first Prime Minister to be re-elected; (3) Winning a landslide victory in general elections; (4) Forming a one-party government for the first time.

The second phase of the Red Shirts' political education involved learning how political institutions and the judiciary could be systematically used to topple the elected government. Notable events in this phase include the dismissal of Prime Ministers Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat by the Constitutional Court in May and December 2008; the unopposed seizure of Government House and two major airports in October and November 2008; the dissolution of Thaksin's Palang Prachachon Party and the appointment of Abhisit Vejjajiva as Prime Minister; the Abhisit government's suppression of Red Shirts' peaceful demonstrations in April 2009; the no-reply for a petition with 30,000 Red Shirts' signatures made to the King for Thaksin's amnesty in August 2009; and the brutal suppression of Red Shirt demonstrations in March and May 2010, in which around 100 Red Shirts were killed in the area between Ratchadamnoen Avenue and the Ratchaprasong Intersection in Bangkok.

Nearly all interviewees said that they learned from these incidents. They felt that they clearly understood why governments led by Thaksin were toppled time and again. They also felt that they knew who was behind the dismissal of the elected prime ministers, and why law enforcement agencies such as the police and the military did not stop the anti-government demonstrators from seizing the two major airports. They said they knew who had authorized the killings of Red Shirts by U.S.-trained snipers.

Furthermore, they demonstrated a realization of how the comments by members of the elite class were in favour of undemocratic practices, and also how most press agencies have endorsed anti-government forces. Because Red Shirt demonstrators were gathering and settling in at the Ratchaprasong Intersection from late-March to mid-May 2010, they

were able to see how and from where food and other supplies were transported and sent to soldiers stationed atop tall buildings in the area, including Chulalongkorn University Hospital. These snipers had been there observing the situation for a period of time before they began shooting on 13 May 2010.

Through shared information and discussion, the Red Shirt protestors returned home after their defeat on 19 May 2010 politically wiser. Even though many of their thoughts could not be made public, they have been able to discuss these sensitive issues among themselves. They have ascertained who the enemies of democracy are, who ordered the coup, and why Thailand's democracy has collapsed many times in the past 60 years.

THE ELECTED GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

Thaksin Shinawatra's sister, Yingluck adopted campaign themes in the general elections of 3 July 2011 such as "To solve problems, not to wreak revenge", and "Thaksin's Ideas, Pheu Thai's Implementations". With these, she received a comfortable win, mainly through support from the lower and middle classes, to set up another Thaksin government. In fact, she was the fourth Prime Minister to represent Thaksin's Party.

However, Yingluck was unable to solve the country's major problems. Instead, she continued implementation of earlier policies and initiated some new ones aimed at satisfying voters: Support of First-Car Purchase Project and the Raised Rice Price Guarantee for Farmers Project.

In Thailand, it is understandable if a newly elected civilian government chooses not to intervene in the work of the military, given that the latter is an organization that has staged many coups and ruled over not only the bureaucracy, but also the whole country. Granted, another important factor that we must acknowledge is that the coup in September 2006 passed a law which made it more difficult for the Defence Minister of an elected Parliament to authorize major changes within the military.

Yingluck's newly elected government was therefore concerned with maintaining good relations with police forces, the court, and the military. With regard to the killings at Red Shirt demonstrations in May 2010,

there were no arrests and investigations moved slowly.⁶ Thailand has for a long time been a strongly centralized state where education, the monasteries, natural resource management, city planning, administrative systems, local government, and police have all been under the strong control of the central government.⁷ These centralising forces contribute to the frequent returns to military rule.

The Yingluck administration also failed to implement a proposal to distribute the budget to schools in local areas and provincial levels. Currently, the budget is administered centrally at the Ministry of Education. Her administration also discarded a proposal to set up a committee to revise national school curricula to reflect democratic tendencies in the country. This was also the fate of the proposal to set up “Colleges of Democracy” or “Colleges of People’s Empowerment” in four regions of the country to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the 1932 revolution in 2012. Her government did not pay attention to a proposal by non-governmental organizations to elect governors in some provinces, and it also did not formulate any policy to strengthen civil society through people’s organizations, community radio stations, and village militia groups.

The lacklustre democratization effort put up by Yingluck’s government can be explained in six ways. First, leading members of the Pheu Thai Party felt that structural reforms should be postponed because they could arouse objections from people who desired the status quo. Second, leaders of the Pheu Thai Party did not see these reforms as urgent or important. Third, these progressive proposals were submitted by low-ranking committees, not Pheu Thai leaders or Thaksin (who lives abroad

⁶ Duncan McCargo, “Competing Notions of Judicialization in Thailand”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 36, no. 3 (December 2014): 417–41.

⁷ Tanet Charoenmuang, *Thailand: A Late Decentralizing Country* (Chiang Mai: Urban Development Institute Foundation (UDIF), 2006) and Achakorn Wongpreedee, “Decentralization in Thailand, 1992–2006: Its Effects on Local Politics and Administration”, Ph.D. diss., University of Kyoto, 2006.

and reportedly has made all important decisions affecting the Party). Fourth, the United Alliance for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), the Red Shirt movement, the Party, and other parts of society did not actively pressure the government to enact these reforms. Fifth, the Pheu Thai Party lacked a clear line of leadership. Their leader, Thaksin, was after all in exile. Yingluck, acting as caretaker leader, only implemented policies that maintained Party popularity among voters. She discarded policies relating to structural reforms. Sixth, without a strong leader, the Party's elected officials jostled for power and ministerial positions. Whereas Thaksin received numerous official calls and guests, Yingluck was faced with resolving the Party's internal problems. In the 34 months between July 2011 and May 2014 that Yingluck was in power, there were four ministers and five deputy ministers of education, which indicate average tenures of around 8 and 9 months.⁸

REDSHIRT ACTIVITIES AND THE UDD LEADERSHIP

In general, most Red Shirt activities in Chiang Mai Province centred on the work at a radio station and participation in political gatherings. Political education programmes and intelligence-gathering activities were kept minimal.

The organizational structure of each Red Shirt group in the region is similar, with a president, vice presidents, a secretary, a treasurer, and political activists. There are no written regulations or explicit job descriptions. Official meetings were infrequent. Instead, committee members met unofficially and conducted discussions in an ad hoc manner. This informality could have been due to the absence of complex activities. Committee members were not involved in much else beyond conducting and attending political rallies in various places. Red Shirt

⁸ The information came from the advisors to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, of Education, and of Social Development and Human Resource Development and two leading committee members of the Pheu Thai Party, 19–22 March 2015.

groups had either registered or unregistered memberships, but there were almost no differences between these two types, because they shared the responsibility of organizing political rallies.

Some classes were held to educate the public about Thai politics. However, these tended to appear more like political rallies than classes, because attendance could range from filling a room to filling a football field. Financial backers in Bangkok would bear the costs for food and drink. These Red Shirt groups only had to find volunteers to do the cooking. The committee would solicit donations from politicians or businesspeople in the province to engage speakers based in Bangkok.

It is difficult to estimate the effectiveness of one-day political education programmes with a mass attendance of 1,000 people. Some Red Shirts interviewed in Sankampaeng and Doisaket felt that the programme fared better in the morning than in the afternoon. They noted that the afternoon session was more of an opportunity to have photographs taken with famous speakers from Bangkok.

Interviewed attendees treated these programmes as social gatherings and opportunities to meet with old friends from other districts and provinces. Many of those interviewed also expressed that they have already learned a lot from their primary source of political education prior to these mass gatherings, the daily Red Shirt television programmes from Bangkok.

The 2006 coup and the suppression of the Red Shirts in 2009 and 2010 led members of the Red Shirt movement to seek ways to fight back. According to Red Shirts in all districts of Chiang Mai except Fang and Mae-Ai, the effort to fight back involved two major activities: (1) set up a community radio station, and (2) attend as many Red Shirt rallies as possible.

The Community Radio 92.5 MHz in downtown Chiang Mai behind Wat Phrasingh, run by Petchawat Watanapongsirikul, an outspoken Red Shirt businessman and leader of the Chiang Mai 51 Group, was the most important radio station because of three factors: (1) Its downtown location, which makes it convenient for people from within and outside the city to visit and participate in meetings and rallies broadcast live from the station; (2) The station's powerful 1,000-kilowatt transmission band allows it to reach many districts outside Chiang Mai's downtown area;

and (3) The radio station's militant posture has earned the Chiang Mai 51 Group the reputation of being the most radical Red Shirt Group in the Northern Region. Nevertheless, this was also the first group of Red Shirts in action, and led fellow Red Shirts to stage a protest in Chiang Mai airport when Prime Minister Abhisit visited the city. Abhisit was Prime Minister when more than a hundred Red Shirt protestors were killed by soldiers and snipers on the streets of Bangkok in 2009 and 2010.⁹

Other community radio stations have tried to emulate the successes of Community Radio 92.5 MHz, especially its ability to garner daily donations and propagate political news and viewpoints to a predominantly Red Shirt audience. Between 2009 and 2014, there were four other community radio stations in Chiang Mai Province apart from Community Radio 92.5 MHz; in the eastern part of downtown Chiang Mai, Sankampaeng District, in Saraphi, and in Fang and Mae-Ai Districts.

These other radio stations were set up when Red Shirt groups in other areas felt that they would be better served with a radio station dedicated to their district. Interviewees also expressed that the Chiang Mai 51 Group was a closed group, not open to Red Shirt members elsewhere, and that donations to the Chiang Mai 51 Group were not transparent and did not hold up to public scrutiny.¹⁰

The second major form of activities involved public gatherings in which prominent Bangkok-based Red Shirt leaders would be invited to speak on the political situation or on various concepts about democracy. In most cases, Red Shirt members would make it a point to participate in political rallies in other districts and provinces, and in Bangkok.

The Red Shirt Group of Fang and Mae-Ai districts also conduct other activities. For example, they set up a financial cooperative that lends money to small businesses and pays for its members' funeral and cremation costs. These are innovations not found in other Red Shirt

⁹ Interview with two Red Shirt leaders of the Chiang Mai 51 Group, 2 Red Shirts of Sankampaeng, and 1 Red Shirt of Chiang Mai eastern downtown part, 21–22 December 2014.

¹⁰ Interviews with Red Shirt leaders in eastern part of Chiang Mai downtown, Doisaket, Sansai, and Sankampaeng Districts during 22–25 December 2014.

groups. Three strengths can be found in the Fang and Mae-Ai Red Shirt Group that contribute to its successes: First, they have a strong leader who is politically-experienced, having participated in political activities in the liberated zone of the Communist Party of Thailand in the late 1970s and the early 1980s; second, Fang and Mae-Ai Districts are far from downtown Chiang Mai (around 250 km). This distance prevented the Fang and Mae-Ai Red Shirts from coming into frequent contact with Red Shirt groups in downtown Chiang Mai; and third, farmers in Fang and Mae-Ai Districts had previously persisted in a long struggle against the use of chemicals on the orange orchards that are situated on their hill-lands. These orchards are owned by wealthy businesspeople from Bangkok and these farmers complain that the owners have encroached on the hilly forests and transformed them into orange orchards. District-level government officials have no say on this matter, and the owners are able to do as they wish because of their close association with the central authorities, and their ability to capitalize on the highly centralized bureaucratic processes involved in the administration of natural resources.¹¹

Interviews reveal that even before the Red Shirt movement began, Members of Parliament (MP) and aspiring candidates had begun to establish networks of canvassers and politically-active villagers to support their campaign and political party, and mobilize mass support. These villagers were paid between 200 and 400 baht each to attend a political meeting. Canvassers received even more money for mobilizing local villagers to vote. These Red Shirt members knew how to organize themselves because they had followed the leaders of the movement in Bangkok, and were committed to setting up satellite groups in other areas. There were Red Shirts I interviewed who had become politically aware without any prior political relationship with the MP of their area.

Since the emergence of the Red Shirt movement, there have been two groups that gather for political activity: one is mobilized by local

¹¹ Interviews with Red Shirt teachers in Fang and Mae-Ai Districts, 28–29 December 2014.

Red Shirt groups, and the other by people closely linked to the electoral campaigns of MPs. It has been common practice for individuals in close relations to the MP's party to receive money for attending their rallies; they would also leave early. On the other hand, Red Shirt members received no money and only returned home when gatherings ended.¹²

It is close to impossible for most Red Shirt supporters outside Bangkok to bear the travel and subsistence costs of attending a demonstration in far-away Bangkok. Most cannot afford the luxury of taking leave from work either since their families depend on their daily income for survival.

Realizing this constraint, Red Shirt leaders sought several sources of funding: First, donations from constituency MPs and aspirants. Second, each group also had a small pool of money that could be used to cover the costs for some members' travel. For example, the Fang and Mae-Ai Group raised enough donations from fund-raising activities to provide full financial support for its members' travel to Bangkok. Third, organizers of the UDD in Bangkok also made donations to fund travel expenses. Money would be transferred from them to local Red Shirt leaders. It is also known that an undisclosed amount was sent to the Chiang Mai 51 Group.

Concurrently, the Chiang Mai 51 Group would also use Radio 92.5 MHz to call for donations and urge Red Shirts in Chiang Mai to participate in demonstrations in Bangkok. Red Shirts driving to Bangkok would invite others lacking transport to join them on their journey in their pick-up truck or hired van.

Red Shirts from Chiang Mai often took turns to participate in Bangkok demonstrations, with each batch going for four to five days at a time. According to the Red Shirts in Mueang, Doisaket, and Saraphi districts, some of these demonstrators have relatives or friends based in Bangkok. These Red Shirts would stay with friends or relatives for a day, before going on to camp at demonstration sites.

¹² Interviews with Red Shirt members in the Districts of San Sai, Mae Rim, Doisaket, Saraphi, and Mueang, Chiang Mai, December 2014 and with Chiang Rai and Payao Provinces, January 2015.

These demonstrators would bring with them bare essentials such as spare clothing and dried foods. Those interviewed also shared that the UDD would prepare and distribute food at demonstration sites, and that this was usually sufficient for most people. As demonstrators began to realize that they could rely on UDD provisions, they discouraged future batches of demonstrators from bringing along their own food. Furthermore, MPs and political aspirants were also visiting protest camps, promising financial support.

Red Shirt leaders said that the Pheu Thai Party provided financial support for food, sound systems, and other equipment for the demonstrations in Bangkok. They also received donations from rich Red Shirt supporters, and personal donations from leading members of the Party. These interviewees believed that Thaksin contributed significantly to the funding.

A Red Shirt member from Sankampaeng observed that Northeastern Red Shirt members tended to prepare their own meals at the protest camps. This was because they preferred Isan cuisine to the food commonly found in Central Thailand that was distributed by the UDD. The UDD distributed paper boxes containing meat curry on top of rice, fried rice, chicken rice or fried noodles. This was served three times daily at the protest site. There were some Red Shirt members from northern Thailand who, like northeasterners, preferred sticky rice. However, most of the Red Shirts from the North were satisfied with the food distributed by the UDD. Interview respondents cited 'too lazy to cook' and the inconvenience of cooking Northern food as reasons for not cooking their own food at the protest site.¹³

This story of transportation and food sponsorships can help us distinguish a few features about the dynamics between Bangkok and satellite Red Shirt groups. First, these sponsorships give us clues about the financial game played by UDD leaders organizing the protests in Bangkok. The longer the duration of each protest in or outside Bangkok,

¹³ Interview with two Red Shirt leaders from Sankampaeng and Saraphi, Chiang Mai, 25–26 December 2014.

the more Red Shirt groups — at national and local levels — had to depend on donors or sponsors. Consequently, this also raised the risk of people capitalizing on sponsorships and donations for personal profit. This could be achieved by reporting an inflated number of protestors making the trip to Bangkok. Some protestors would even overstay the time allotted to them by their local leaders to stay in protest camps, free-loading on food and accommodations. These problems were exacerbated by the failure of protest leaders to create an effective system of checks.

Second, local Red Shirt groups gradually reduced their activities as they became increasingly dependent on donations. This was probably because they grew increasingly confident that financial support would continue to pour in. This also increased the likelihood of some leaders pocketing donations. Financial administrative systems would not have been robust enough to audit these transactions.

Third, the more donations received by the UDD leadership, the more likely it was that the central leadership ran the street protests and the national movement without the participation of Red Shirt leaders based outside of Bangkok. This problem was further deepened when leaders from satellite groups did not call for full participation at gatherings.

Red Shirts interviewed have concurred with these observations. They disclosed that UDD leaders repeatedly stressed the importance of big protest rallies in Bangkok and elsewhere, and that the management of these rallies had to be firmly under their control. In the past six years since the first big wave of protests in Bangkok in 2009, there have been very few occasions where Red Shirt leaders from each province and region were invited to decision-making meetings. All important strategies and decisions of the Red Shirts were under the near-absolute control of the UDD leadership.

UDD-led protest rallies featured the same speakers every night during the prime-time hours of 7.00 to 12.00 p.m. Very few people outside the UDD leadership were invited to speak during this timeslot. This was the UDD leadership's way of controlling the political narrative broadcasted to Red Shirt followers nationwide.

The political activities of UDD can be summed up in seven observations: (1) Close-knit leadership — the same group of people had controlled UDD for the past 5 years (2009–2014); (2) Very

weak participation by Red Shirt leaders from other provinces outside Bangkok; (3) Instead of growing from a Red Shirt movement to a “rainbow” movement consisting of leaders from other groups, the UDD remained homogenous; (4) Strong and effective political messages for the masses but led by the same leadership; (5) No open forum was ever held to discuss the direction of the movement, its expenditure and how it was financed; (6) The UDD leadership showed little interest in expanding and strengthening Red Shirt and democratic forces outside Bangkok, especially in terms of improving organizational structure; and (7) Yingluck’s elected government missed the opportunity to establish electoral democracy as a permanent regime, and an open political culture. She could have broadened the discussion on the steps the country could take to cultivate knowledge on democratic principles and measures to defend democracy from the threats of authoritarianism. Her tenure had been a glimmer of hope after 17 military coups and the exile of Thaksin, and two bad defeats in Bangkok in 2009 and 2010.¹⁴

Interviewees in different districts of Chiang Mai noted that leaders from Bangkok frequently came over to manage the travel arrangements for buses down to join the Bangkok protests. In these situations, Chiang Mai Red Shirts did not need to bear any costs. All they needed to do was to submit to the Bangkok organizers the names of those who would be travelling down to protest in Bangkok before each trip. Leaders in Chiang Mai were unhappy that they were not authorized or empowered to manage these travel arrangements, given their local knowledge and capacity to encourage their members to make the trip to Bangkok to participate in protests. Even if problems were to emerge, they could directly contact the UDD leadership in Bangkok then. It was unnecessary for UDD representatives to make the trip up to the North from Bangkok.¹⁵

¹⁴ Interviews with some Red Shirt leaders in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Payao, Lumphun, and Phrae in December 2014 and March 2015.

¹⁵ Interviews with three Red Shirt leaders who organized a number of rallies at the Chiang Mai Railway Station and at the front of the Chiang Mai Provincial Hall, 23 March 2015.

Red Shirt leaders in the North felt the need to organize demonstrations in their own locality, especially since many members were not able to travel to Bangkok. This was also perceived as an opportunity for Red Shirts to speak to local contexts. However, for fear that a coup might take place in Bangkok, the central leadership in Bangkok advised against these plans and insisted that the priority and decisive battle be in Bangkok.

Nevertheless, Northern Red Shirts went ahead and organized rallies in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Payao. Crowds at these rallies were small, never exceeding 100 people. This was due to three reasons. First, the perception that gatherings in Bangkok were more important and that local rallies were neither significant nor necessary. Second, the preference to watch the Bangkok rally from the comfort of home on TV. Finally, local rallies did not feature any headlining speaker, unlike the Bangkok rallies.¹⁶

Chiang Mai Red Shirt leaders who organized the rallies in front of the Railway Station and at the plaza of the Provincial Hall emphasized in interviews the importance of political rallies outside Bangkok. They insisted that it was important to have at least one rally per province outside Bangkok.

Bangkok rallies were useful in equipping non-Bangkok Red Shirts with skills in event management, they revealed. This would be especially crucial in the event that the military decided to close off the capital from protestors flooding in, and shut down protests held within. In such a scenario, non-Bangkok Red Shirts would serve as a countrywide counter-force participating in provincial protest rallies.

Skills that interviewees cited as fundamental for organizing rallies include learning how to raise donations, delegating work, speech-writing and delivery, the setting up of light and sound systems, security enforcement, and intelligence-gathering. On-the-job training in Bangkok rallies was perceived to be the best way to improve the quality of activism. Those returning from such training sessions in Bangkok were

¹⁶ Interviews with Red Shirt leaders and members in Sankampaeng, Saraphi, Doisaket, and Mueang Districts in March 2015.

to focus on starting local rallies and sending out other people to receive training in Bangkok.¹⁷

DECENTRALIZATION, LOCALISM, AND SEPARATISM

Since the early modern period, the once-independent Lanna Kingdom had been coveted by Siam for its strategic proximity to Burma, and so, the Thai government, ever since the reign of King Rama V (1867–1910), made sure of the complete annexation and domination of Lanna.

The Thai government has held a thorough policy of over-centralization since the beginning of the twentieth century: Lanna's local written language was prohibited; its spoken language discouraged; monks and other elites were stripped of their local autonomy; education was completely run by the central government; institutions of higher learning modelled themselves after Bangkok institutions; and local princes lost their lands and became government servants. Bangkok directed the administration of Lanna at every level, and local government agencies had limited power and calls for an elected governor were repeatedly subdued. Because of these factors, localist revival movements in Lanna since the 1950s have not been effective.¹⁸

Lanna's previous governments had always benefitted from Thailand's centralized bureaucracy. The central government supported Lanna's localist campaigns only when they were perceived to help promote tourism. In the past two decades, local costumes, handicrafts, and dialects were promoted at government-run ceremonies and festivals, and at fairs for tourists. However, the Thai government has either neglected or suppressed the development of Lanna's capacity to address political, academic, cultural, and financial issues.

¹⁷ Interviews with two female Red Shirt leaders in Chiang Mai downtown and one female Red Shirt leader in Lumphun in April 2015.

¹⁸ Tej Bunnag, *The Municipal Administration of Siam, 1892–1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Tanet Charoenmuang, ed. *The Direct Election of Governor* (Chiang Mai: Local Government Studies Project, Chiang Mai University, 1997).

Upset with Suthep Thaugsuban's rally to oust the Yingluck administration, Red Shirts in Northern Thailand were spurred to discuss the strengths of local democracy, and the potential boost that localism would contribute to the efforts to defend national democracy and foster local economic development. They believed that these features would pave the way for a federation of Isan-Lanna States, led by Yingluck and the Pheu Thai Party.

According to Red Shirt leaders in Chiang Mai, Lumphun, Payao, Chiang Rai, and Phrae, these sentiments resonated with the masses, but never became translated into concrete action. Local Red Shirt leaders were too preoccupied with the ongoing responsibilities of mobilizing people to participate in Bangkok rallies, planning and executing radio programmes, and organizing weekly political discussions.¹⁹

PREPARING FOR A COUP

There were two types of leaders in the Red Shirt movement in Chiang Mai and neighbouring provinces. The first busied themselves with work at the radio station and the management of sending people to rallies in Bangkok. A distinctive feature of this first type of leader was their optimism that Thailand was unlikely to experience another coup, at least in the near future. They trusted that the Yingluck government and the UDD leadership in Bangkok had a good grasp of the situation, and would be the ones proactively instructing them on coping strategies.

The second type of leader was active in organizing rallies at the local level. They were also more cynical than the first group, believing that the military would jump at the opportunity to stage another coup. To them, the killing of unarmed protestors in Bangkok in April 2009 and April–May 2010 served as a constant reminder that the military would never cease to be a looming threat.²⁰

¹⁹ Interviews with 4 Red Shirt leaders in Chiang Mai, 3 in Lumphun, 3 in Chiang Rai, 2 in Payao, and 2 in Phrae during March and April 2015.

²⁰ Interviews with 2 Red Shirt leaders of the eastern part of Chiang Mai downtown in March 2015.

This divergence of opinion about the likelihood of an imminent military coup was also present among leaders of the Pheu Thai Party in Bangkok. According to one of Yingluck's deputy prime ministers, there was no consensus within the Party on the likelihood of another coup. In any case, because Party leaders in government were already so swamped with comprehensive responsibilities, coordinated preparations for the scenario of another coup were never made. Perhaps, such preparations may have gone on among small circles of people convinced that the threat of another coup was imminent, but these would have been quite removed from policy discussions.²¹

In contrast, there were five or six groups in the provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Payao that were preparing responses to coup scenarios. Interviewees said they knew the identity of those involved in these preparations, but that these planning groups did not openly share their work with other Red Shirt groups.

The interviewees also expressed dissatisfaction over the lack of finance to purchase guns to protect themselves in a coup. They had sought financial support from Pheu Thai MPs, who politely suggested that the Red Shirts should help themselves. A gun cost at least 20,000 baht, and the biggest obstacle to obtaining guns was the budget.²²

According to a Red Shirt leader in Sansai District, Chiang Mai, and another in Mueang District, Chiang Rai, a high-level meeting was held in Chiang Mai in mid-October 2013. This secret meeting involved a leading police chief of the Fifth Northern Region, two Red Shirt leaders, two leading members of the Pheu Thai in the North, and a leading Pheu Thai member based in Bangkok.

At the meeting, the idea was discussed that a coup was indeed planned and an opposition was therefore necessary. The tasks for police, military and MPs were discussed so that Red Shirt members could

²¹ Interview with a Deputy Prime Minister from Pheu Thai Party, Bangkok, March 2015.

²² Interviews with Red Shirt leaders from Sarapi, Chiang Mai, from Sansai, Chiang Mai, and Mueang, Payao Province, December 2014 and January 2015.

begin preparations to oppose the impending coup; and secret telephone numbers were given to each participant for emergency use.

A Red Shirt informant said that he tried to call those numbers when martial law was imposed by the military on 20 May 2015, but these were not in service. He tried to contact people for several days but failed to reach anyone. Either the plan had been discontinued, or he was no longer trusted.²³

As the anti-Yingluck activities of the People's Committee for Democratic Reform (PCDR) led by Suthep Thuagsuban increased, the new elections called for by the Yingluck Government were boycotted by the Democrat Party at the end of 2013. It became clear for several groups of Red Shirt members in the North that there would be a military coup or the deadlocked situation could drag on. Furthermore, Army Chief General Prayut Chan-Ocha repeatedly remarked that the military would not intervene. At this point, Red Shirts in at least four Northern provinces had already predicted that it was only a matter of time before the military would oust the Yingluck government by force.

The situation became even more complicated when some members of an academic group in Bangkok, the Assembly for Defense of Democracy (AFDD), went to speak at Chiang Mai University in December. In support of the AFDD, the Red Shirts in Chiang Mai and Lumphun set up the Lanna Assembly for the Defense of Democracy (LAFDD). This acronym was written as สปปฉ in Thai, which is the same as the initials of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. *Manager*, a newspaper publication, took this opportunity to accuse the Northern Red Shirt movement of being communist. This newspaper had consistently criticized the UDD, the Red Shirt movement, and the Yingluck-Thaksin governments.²⁴

The situation intensified and became even more confrontational when the Democrat Party announced its intention to boycott the general elections. Several red banners were put on display for the first time in

²³ Interview with a Red Shirt leader, Mueang District, Chiang Mai, 22 December 2014.

²⁴ <<http://www.fb.com/Assemblyforthedefenseofdemocracy>>.

downtown Payao on 28 January 2014. These called for a separate state of Lanna for as long Thailand continued to treat the Red Shirts unjustly.²⁵

In January, red banners of similar content were put on display in Lumphun, Phrae, Nakorn Sawan, and Pitsanulok. When anti-government newspapers published as headlines calls for a coup from military leaders, Red Shirts used the banners to feature slogans to oppose the military.

The conflict intensified in February. On 19 February, more than 8,000 village police volunteers marched in protest with red flags and red banners in Chiang Kham District, Payao Province. As a sign of solidarity, they were accompanied by several leading MPs of Pheu Thai, as well as Red Shirt leaders of North and Northeast Thailand. On 25 March, 3,000 village police volunteers and the leaders of Pheu Thai, UDD and Red Shirts marched in protest in Mueang District, Payao.²⁶

The contents of the speeches and banners in these protest marches by Pheu Thai, UDD, and Red Shirts were not separatist in nature; but merely stressed the need to defend democracy, rule of law, and justice, through any form of political struggle imaginable.

Two Red Shirt leaders from different provinces shared that meetings were held to discuss how the military coup could be opposed. The meetings evaluated possible scenarios. If Yingluck was removed by military force, she could be invited to set up a government in either Chiang Mai or Udorn Thani, the Red Shirt stronghold of Isan. Alternatively, two headquarters could be set up, one for each of these regions. A more comprehensive meeting to discuss concrete measures on opposing an authoritarian regime was planned for April, involving Red Shirt leaders of the regions.

In late March, Suporn Attawong, a UDD leader who originally came from the Northeastern Region, set up the Group of National Democracy–Safeguarding Volunteers (GDSV). The GDSV started out with 1,000 pro-democracy fighters from Northeastern Thailand. Twice in April

²⁵ <www.pantip.com/topic/31580435; www.youtube.com/wetil?V=gejS-R6t3gY>; <www.manager.co.th/Politics/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9570000024587>.

²⁶ *Daily Matichon*, 20 February 2014, and *Daily Manager*, 26 March 2014.

(5 and 21), nearly 20,000 men clad in village militia uniforms marched in the name of GDSV in Khorat Province, a stronghold of the Red Shirt Northeast. At these marches, Suporn said that the Red Shirts would oppose any attempt to depose Yingluck. He clarified that the GDSV was neither an armed opposition nor a separatist struggle, but a peaceful defence of democracy.²⁷

Meanwhile, uninvited journalists began to descend on the North and Isan, leading Red Shirt leaders to call off their planned secret meeting in mid-April. In spite of this, it was clear that there were a number of Red Shirt groups that tried to meet and discuss the possibility of a common strategy.²⁸

Two other Red Shirt leaders confirmed that there was a high-level meeting comprising three groups on 16 May 2014: a representative from a “higher institution”, the military, and Pheu Thai Party. This was six days before martial law was announced in Chiang Saen District, in Chiang Rai province, and near the Mae Khong River. The meeting agenda and invitation list were not disclosed.

Some Red Shirt leaders fled to the border when martial law was enacted on 20 May. When the coup d’état was declared at 4.00 p.m. on 22 May, Pheu Thai leaders held an emergency meeting at Party headquarters. Those who were caught in Bangkok’s rush-hour traffic promptly alighted from their taxis and evacuated to residences or other safe locations.²⁹

THE 18TH MILITARY COUP IN 82 YEARS

A four-sided meeting (Pheu Thai, UDD, Democrats, and Suthep’s PCDR) was held. This was considered a failure by the Army Chief, who

²⁷ <www.thairath.co.th/content/417865; www.innnews.co.th/shownews?newscode=521869>.

²⁸ Interviews with an MP and a Red Shirt leader in Payao Province, 4 January 2015.

²⁹ Interviews with 3 MPs; 2 from Chiang Mai and 1 from Lumphun Provinces, December 2014.

then staged a coup. Yingluck, her government, and UDD leaders, were detained at the Army Convention Hall in Bangkok while soldiers went in trucks to detain Red Shirts; between 30 and 50 people in each province were rounded up.

Phumjai Chaiya, a Red Shirt leader in Sanpatong District, which is 90 km south of downtown Chiang Mai, recounted how he was detained. Three big trucks of armed soldiers picked him up at his home in a remote village, and brought him to a military camp in Mae Rim District.³⁰

Chiang Mai's Red Shirt leaders were detained for seven days in two camps one in Mae Rim and the other in Chiang Dao near the Thai–Burmese border. Those who were not at home when visited were issued notices to report for seven days of detention at the provincial military unit.

A leader in Doisaket District said that at least 48 Red Shirt leaders in the central and southern parts of the province were detained at Mae Rim unit. Meanwhile, a leader of the Fang and Mae-Ai group reported that 22 Red Shirt leaders were detained in Chiang Dao military camp. An MP's son was detained for four days because soldiers went to his house and found him absent, so they took his son as a substitute. Four days later, this MP surrendered himself for detention in place of his son.³¹

Across Thailand, groups of four to five soldiers provided all-day surveillance in major downtown areas and in Red Shirt-dominant districts. In Chiang Mai, for three nights following the coup, groups of anti-coup demonstrators gathered at downtown plazas. They lit candles, sang songs, and marched to different plazas. There were only a few

³⁰ Phumjai Chaiya, a prominent Red Shirt leader of Chiang Mai 51 Group who later left the group to lead the Red Shirt Group in Sanpatong District, died of a motorbike accident in Phrae in December 2014. Some people have dismissed this as an accident, but others have noted that he was followed and that his motorbike was hit from the back by a truck. These people claim that his death was politically motivated. The deaths of four other Red Shirt members in the North in the past several years were caused by gunmen.

³¹ Interviews with 4 Red Shirt leaders in Chiang Mai, December 2014.

demonstrators clad in red clothing. After several arrests on successive nights, these demonstrations ceased. This has not stopped the military from continuing to station soldiers in downtown areas.

An army general clarified that the Army has a number of intelligence and strategic planning units. Weekly, staff in these units produce a report on the political situation and an analysis of all aspects of the government, Pheu Thai and other parties, and the Red Shirt movement in each region. These reports have tried to analyse all angles of the situation from a military perspective.

These reports sought to answer questions about the strength of the government and the Red Shirts movement, and the likelihood that the military would be successfully stopped from staging a coup. The army general also shared that it was clear from these reports that a coup was being seriously considered.³² Beyond looking at situation trends, these reports also studied the future role of the military, and the strategies and measures of the military to control the government and the Red Shirt movement for the sake of national security.

AFTER THE COUP

The military soon banned all political gatherings, regardless of whether they were pitched at supporting democracy or opposing the government. Only a few Red Shirt radio stations were not closed. Even then, radio programmes were only allowed to read news from approved newspapers; the military prohibited political discussions and commentaries.

Surprisingly, Radio 92.5 MHz, which previously had a reputation for being the most militant broadcast station around, now featured all-day broadcasts on Buddhist dharma teachings. Chiang Mai Red Shirts admitted that they missed listening to the daily political programmes. They said they preferred Yingluck's government to the military

³² Interview with an army general, 24 March 2015.

government and the protests in Bangkok and Chiang Mai to those in other provinces.

Red Shirt groups also transformed into bike riding clubs that took joyrides every morning. They also organized traditional evening dance parties, and set up a thrift shop cooperative to meet and exchange ideas. They did these while waiting for assignments from Red Shirt leaders in Bangkok and Chiang Mai.

A leader of Fang and Mae-Ai Districts said, “The business of survival is going fine. We must learn how to stay away from trouble now. Merit-making activities are our main task now. We must face reality.” Meanwhile, a leader of the Sankampaeng Red Shirts said, “Everybody has to struggle to make ends meet. It may take several years, as claimed by the UDD radio station in Bangkok, and so we must adhere to a peaceful way of struggle.”³³

All Red Shirts interviewed said they were shocked by the coup, and did not expect that government and UDD leaders, and active Red Shirts in the different districts, would be detained. Without clear leadership, coupled with the presence of soldiers in every *tambon*, they would have to wait and see how the situation would unfold.

When the same subjects were interviewed again exactly one year after the coup, they said that their only source of information about the political situation in the past year had been close friends. As there had not been any call to action from their leaders, they would continue to wait.

A leader of the Fang and Mae-Ai Red Shirts put it succinctly when asked about the trajectory of the Red Shirts’ struggle. He said that the group had continuously carried out political activities in line with parliamentary democracy. He thought that he and his fellow villagers were getting old and had never thought of opposing a coup through armed struggle. He guessed that there were possibly other groups that adopted such a stance, but that he did not know of any specific examples.

³³ Interview with Red Shirt leaders one in Fang and the other in Sankampaeng, 24–25 December 2014.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Since the coup, Isan Red Shirts, known to be more politically aggressive than those in the North, have been fairly quiet. Most Pheu Thai MPs in the Northeast have steered away from the political scene, only engaging with Red Shirt villagers through religious activities. In contrast, Red Shirts in the Northeast have been learning about the military units that have infiltrated each *tambon* and *kamnan*; and have come to realize that village heads and government officials in local areas have been monitoring their movement and sending reports to military units at the provincial level.

In sum, the Red Shirts have been paralysed since the coup because of the lack of a prepared response to a coup, and the insufficiency of political work by Red Shirt organizations at provincial and district levels throughout Yingluck's rule. Over-reliance on the UDD leadership in Bangkok had kept Red Shirt groups in each province inactive. This problem was worsened by the political inactivity of the UDD leadership in Bangkok, and their weak management of the movement in other places in the country. In hindsight, the marches by village police volunteers in the North and Northeast, and the secret meetings to discuss the proposed Federation of Isan-Lanna States in February and April, were both too little too late.

The Yingluck administration performed well in its first two years, especially in its management of the flood crisis and its guarantee of higher rice prices for farmers. It also initiated the first car project to satisfy the middle class and stimulate the economy.

It is worth discussing why the UDD failed to democratize their movement, and why the Red Shirt movement has been quiet since the May 2014 coup. At one point, the Abhisit government dissolved Parliament and called for fresh elections. This led the Pheu Thai Party, UDD, and Red Shirts to form a joint campaign. When the election ended and the administrative work of the country began, the UDD leadership chose to focus its resources on rallies and TV programmes. This was done in the hope of improving public political literacy, but in fact cost the movement a much needed restructuring.

Thus, the Red Shirt movement had been caught flat-footed by the coup. Giles Ungpakorn has stated that there had been “a deathly silence” among Red Shirts because Thaksin “has decided to capitulate to the military”.³⁴

At the same time, left-wing progressive Red Shirts who have rejected Thaksin and the UDD leadership have nevertheless “refused to organize a coherent alternative political organization to challenge the UDD leaders.” Ungpakorn found that the UDD leadership had slowed down the Red Shirt movement, and “once a movement is de-mobilized it is very difficult to re-mobilize it in its original state”.

³⁴ Giles Ji Ungpakorn, “The Demise of the Red Shirts?”, 5 July 2015 <<http://uglytruththailand.wordpress.com/2015/07/05/the-demise-of-the-red-shirts/>>.

APPENDIX

Major Political Developments Concerning Thaksin's Parties and the Red Shirts

1997	People's Constitution passed, endorsed a strong government.
January 6, 2001	General elections; Thai Rak Thai Party victorious.
February 6, 2005	General elections; Thai Rak Thai Party won by a bigger margin (377/500 seats).
November 2005	Sondhi Limthongkul led an anti-government demonstration.
19 September 2006	Military coup ousted the elected Thaksin Government.
27 December 2007	General elections won by Thaksin's People's Force Party; Samak Sundaravej became PM.
May 2008	Constitutional Court ousted Samak. Somchai Wongsawat became PM.
Nov–December 2008	Demonstrators seized government house and airport. Constitutional court ousted Somchai.
2 December 2008	Palang Prachachon Party (PPP) and 4 other parties dissolved by Constitutional Court. Somchai ousted from premiership. Parliament chose Abhisit to be PM.
11 July 2009	Concert organized in Mae Ai District for the Radio Project Fund.
11 August 2009	Radio Fang Lovers Club on air covering 7 near-border districts.
17 August 2009	Nationwide Red Shirts with 30,000 signatures petitioned to the King for Thaksin's amnesty received no reply.
March–19 May 2010	Demonstrations by the Red Shirts at Ratcha Dumnern and Ratcha Prasong areas demanding House dissolution and general

	elections, crushed by military forces, over 100 killed. All community radios banned.
19 June 2010	Small demonstration at Ratcha Prasong intersection.
July 2011	General elections. Thaksin's Pheu Thai Party won. Yingluck became PM.
Mid-October 2013	News about a secret meeting held in Chiang Mai to plan a coup was revealed.
31 October 2013	Blanket amnesty bill passed. Anti-government demonstrations began.
29 November 2013	Led by Suthep Thuagsuban, the People's Democratic Reform Committee was set up to oust the Yingluck government.
9 December 2013	Yingluck announced the dissolution of Parliament.
28 January 2014	A big red banner in Payao downtown area says "if injustice remains in our country, we want a separate state, the country of Lanna," followed by many in other provinces, both for and against.
2 February 2014	Abhisit's Democrat Party boycotted the elections, members of PDRC surrounded many election stations to block people from going to vote.
19 February and 25 March 2014	8,910 and 3,000 village police volunteers in many districts of Payao Province marched holding red flags and red banners in front of Pheu Thai, UDD, and Red Shirt leaders in Payao announcing a strong defence of democracy.
5 and 21 April	Nearly 20,000 villager volunteers led by Suporn Attawong, UDD leader, marched in Khorat Province, Northeast, carrying red banners and declared to defend the elected government and democracy in a peaceful way.

- 17 April 2014 A planned secret meeting between Northern and Northeastern leaders on the Federation of Isan and Lanna States was cancelled due to arrival of many reporters.
- 16 May 2014 Top-secret meeting held at Chiang Saen District, Chiang Rai.
- 20 May 2014 The Army announced the nationwide enactment of Martial Law, forbidding all political gatherings.
- 22 May 2014 The military junta led by Army Chief General Prayut Chan-ocha staged a coup. 500 elected government and Red Shirt leaders nationwide were rounded up and detained in military camps for seven days, all community radios banned, and military on-guard units were stationed in almost every district.

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