

PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE ANALYSE CURRENT EVENTS

Singapore | 28 September 2021

Thai PM Remains Vulnerable Without a Party of His Own

*Termsak Chalermphanupap**



The mastermind behind this revolt on 4 September 2021 was Thammanat Prompao, secretary-general of the PPP, the largest party in the 17-party ruling coalition and Thailand's Deputy Agriculture Minister. In this picture, Thammanat Prompao gestures at Government House before the swearing-in ceremony of the new Thai cabinet in Bangkok on 16 July 2019. Photo: Lillian SUWANRUMPHA, AFP.

* *Termsak Chalermphanupap is Visiting Fellow in the Thailand Studies Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Thai Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-ocha has narrowly escaped “political assassination” in the House of Representatives.
- A formidable faction in the Phalang Pracharat Party (PPP), the largest in the 17-party ruling coalition, was scheming to join the opposition to vote out the prime minister at the conclusion of a four-day censure debate held in early September. The mastermind behind the attempted “political assassination” was PPP secretary-general Captain Thammanat Prompao.
- Fortuitously for Prayut, one of the prime movers in the anti-Prayut faction of the PPP defected, and alerted the prime minister. PPP leader Deputy Prime Minister General Prawit Wongsuwan pleaded ignorance of this move for his failure to alert General Prayut of this plot.
- General Prayut counter-attacked vigorously and prevailed. He survived a no confidence vote on 4 September and sacked Captain Thammanat from the post of deputy agriculture minister – without consulting General Prawit, who had tried to protect Captain Thammanat.
- Distrust between General Prayut and General Prawit – two leaders of the 2014 coup – may have already emerged, and this will have significant implications for Thai politics.
- Prayut’s position now looks vulnerable.

INTRODUCTION

Thai Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-ocha recently narrowly survived a “political assassination attempt” by an influential faction of the largest government party. Although he emerged victorious, his premiership now looks vulnerable.

In what General Prayut considered an “ambush”, a group of government MPs, mostly from the Phalang Pracharat Party (PPP) but including several MPs from micro-parties in the ruling coalition, prepared to join the opposition in voting against the prime minister at the conclusion of the recent no-confidence debate. Should this have happened, General Prayut would have been the first premier in 89 years of Thai parliamentary democracy ever to be voted out in a censure.

Unconvincingly, PPP leader Deputy Prime Minister General Prawit Wongsuwan claimed he was unaware of the developing revolt, and could therefore not alert his “beloved younger brother” General Prayut to the plot.

DARING REVOLT

The plan was rather straightforward. Plotters aimed to recruit 40-50 government MPs to join opposition MPs in voting against General Prayut in the no-confidence showdown in the House of Representatives on 4 September. General Prayut’s premiership would immediately have ended, and ministers in his cabinet would have had to leave office *en masse*.

The mastermind behind this revolt was Captain Thammanat Prompao, secretary-general of the PPP, the largest party in the 17-party ruling coalition. The 56-year-old former Army officer was Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture. When elected party secretary-general on 18 June, he pledged to transform the PPP into a strong “political institution”, and erase its image of being an “*ad hoc* party” set up just to serve one person or one group.¹

Captain Thammanat had previously described himself as the “main artery of the government”, and even claimed that, without him, the Prayut administration would collapse.² He headed a powerful PPP faction known as the “Four Deputies”, which included Deputy Finance Minister Santi Promphat, Deputy Labour Minister Dr Narumon Pinyosinwat, and Deputy Transport Minister Athirat Rattanaset. Also included in the faction was Athirat’s father Virat, the ruling coalition’s chief whip and a deputy PPP leader.

All of these figures have close ties to party leader General Prawit, and their faction controlled about 40 MPs, including at least half of the 26 members of the PPP’s executive committee.³

Captain Thammanat also has close links with government MPs from the ruling coalition’s 10 micro-parties, nine with just one MP each and the tenth with two. The plotters had approached these MPs to urge them to vote against General Prayut; some of them had agreed.⁴ When the four-day no-confidence debate against General Prayut and his five ministers⁵ started on 31 August, Captain Thammanat thought that he had enough votes to oust the premier. The only hint that a political upheaval might be coming was Captain

Thammanat's insistence that all PPP MPs could freely decide on how to vote at the end of the no-confidence debate.⁶

Captain Thammanat's objectives were simple but ambitious.

- After unseating General Prayut, the PPP would nominate General Prawit — the principal deputy prime minister, with responsibility for national security — for the premiership.⁷
- In the new Prawit administration, Captain Thammanat would become interior minister, with control over provincial governors and the second largest budget allocation of any government agency.⁸ Controlling the Interior Ministry is crucial to fulfilling Captain Thammat's mission of making the PPP the top party in Thailand's next general election.
- Having enticed the PPP's coalition partners to support a Prawit premiership, the new government would allocate more cabinet posts to each of those partners. General Prayut's departure would free up several cabinet seats, including interior, defence, finance and energy.⁹

VIGOROUS COUNTER-ATTACK

This plot was the most serious challenge to General Prayut's premiership in the seven years since he, as Army chief, led the coup that toppled the Phuea Thai-led government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra on 22 May 2014.

It so alarmed General Prayut that he sought urgent clarification from his "big brother" General Prawit. The response from General Prawit must have been quite reassuring to the premier: There would be no change! General Prawit did not want to be prime minister.

More importantly, General Prayut also received even more important reassurance – word from the palace that the King continued to have confidence in his premiership. These assurances emboldened General Prayut to strike back vigorously. He made three points in an unusual long impromptu talk to the media at the parliament on 1 September: no plan to reshuffle his cabinet, no plan to dissolve the House and call for an early general election, and no truth to reports that he had lost the confidence of the King.¹⁰

On the crucial third point, he added, "To claim that someone higher up wants to replace the prime minister is a serious offense. I was the only one who most recently had an audience [with the King] to report on government matters. No one else did that. Isn't this clear?"¹¹

Following the premier's remarks, Captain Thammanat's revolt began to fizzle out. Santi was the first in the Four Deputies faction to defect. On 2 September, he was seen inside a reception room at the parliament where General Prayut received groups of MPs from the PPP, including several MPs from Santi's group.

One opposition MP complained to the House Speaker during the censure debate that General Prayut was bribing each government MP with 5 million baht in cash to vote for

him.¹² But, when it was his turn to respond in the House, General Prayut denied bribing any MPs. He clarified that he merely received groups of government MPs, whom he had rarely met in the past, and that they just called on him to show support for his premiership.

UNFORGIVEABLE DAMAGE DONE

As it turned out, General Prayut and the five ministers facing censure all passed the no-confidence voting. But political damage from what Captain Thammanat attempted to do was serious and seemingly unforgiveable.

Outcome of the No-Confidence Vote on 4 September 2021

	PM General Prayut	DPM/Health Minister Anutin	Transport Minister Saksiam	Agriculture Minister Chalermchai	Labour Minister Suchart	Digital Economy Minister Chaivudh
For	264	269	269	270	263	267
Against	208	196	195	199	201	202
Abstaining	3	11	10	8	10	9
Not voting*	-	-	1	1	1	-

**All 119 MPs of the Phalang Pracharat Party, including revolt leader Captain Thammanat Prompao, voted for the prime minister. Likewise, all 61 MPs of Bhumjaithai, the second largest government party, also voted for him. At last count on the voting day, the 17 parties in the ruling coalition had 272 MPs. But House Speaker Chuan Leekpai (Democrat Party) and Deputy House Speaker Suchart Tancharoen (Phalang Pracharat Party) abstained. Another Democrat who abstained was party-list MP Panit Vikitset, who had strongly disagreed with General Prayut's strategy in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Even though only four government MPs¹³ voted against him, General Prayut received the second lowest number of votes, only 264; the lowest went to Labour Minister Suchart Chomklin, 263.

Worse still, the prime minister received the highest number of votes of no confidence, 208. Such a double embarrassment is the worst outcome of the three censure votes that he has faced,¹⁴ and Prayut quickly retaliated by seeing to the dismissal of Captain Thammanat and Dr Narumon from the cabinet before they could submit their resignations.¹⁵

Captain Thammanat calmly accepted defeat and retreated to his hometown in the Northern province of Phayao. He did not stay on in Bangkok to support the proposed amendments to Thailand's 2017 Constitution. The parliament passed those amendments on 10 September,¹⁶ despite rumours that General Prayut might mobilise his supporters in the Senate to block them in order to undercut the PPP as well as the opposition Phuea Thai Party.¹⁷

Captain Thammanat has not resigned from the PPP. General Prawit has asked him to stay on to assist in strengthen the party. He attended the PPP's leadership meeting on 15

September. Dr Narumon, who is the party's treasurer, also attended. General Prawit called the meeting to introduce the PPP's new chief strategist, General Wich Thephassadin, who is a retired former assistant Army chief; he was edged out for the top Army post by General Prayut in 2010.

For the time being, Captain Thammanat is keeping a low profile, and keeping his options open. He may set up his own party, or he could join the Phuea Thai Party.¹⁸ He has been a successful political "fixer" in spite of his checkered past, including imprisonment for four years in Australia on a heroin smuggling conviction in the 1990s.¹⁹

VICTORIOUS BUT VULNERABLE

General Prayut's political victory may be short-lived, and the attempted revolt has clearly exposed his vulnerability. While saved by the decisive assurance from the palace, he has also been relying quite precariously on General Prawit and the PPP, over which he has no control.

Although General Prayut continues to praise General Prawit in public, their decades-long personal ties can only have been seriously strained by recent events. Given the plot, it is hard to believe that General Prawit was unaware of Captain Thammanat's scheming. In any case, he neither tried to stop Captain Thammanat nor alerted General Prayut.

Distrust may now have developed between these two retired generals and former Army chiefs. General Prayut – without consulting General Prawit – secretly recommended that the King command the dismissals of Captain Thammanat and Dr Narumon.²⁰

This can only have offended General Prawit, who tried to protect Captain Thammanat by making him apologise to General Prayut on 3 September. On the same day, General Prawit also instructed PPP MPs to vote for General Prayut. But despite all the PPP's MPs voting for him on 4 September, General Prayut proved unwilling to forgive Captain Thammanat.

General Prayut can now assert his primacy instead of living in the shadow of General Prawit. But in distancing himself from the latter man, who held the post of defence minister for 12 years,²¹ the prime minister will pay the huge price of losing the support of General Prawit's power base in the armed forces.

One indication that this is already happening is the delay in this year's annual promotion and reshuffling of top military posts. The Defence Council, which General Prayut chairs in his capacity as defence minister,²² has been slow in preparing the final promotion lists. The lists were finally announced on 14 September. Bones of contention included nominees for the posts of Navy commander, Air Force commander, and permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defence. Normally, the annual promotion and reshuffling are announced in early September, with the retirement of military personnel reaching 60 years old taking place at the end of September, and new appointees taking office on 1 October each year.

THE “THREE Ps” IN DISARRAY

Generals Prayut, Prawit and Anupong (whose nickname is “Pok”) are known as the “Three Ps” of the Eastern Tigers faction of the Thai Army.²³ The influence of this faction has been eroding since the rise of General Apirat Kongsompong to lead the Army in October 2018. General Apirat headed a new “Red Rim” faction²⁴ closely linked with the palace, and he was succeeded as Army chief in October 2020 by another prominent member of this “Red Rim” faction, General Narongpan Jitkaewtae. After leaving the Army, General Apirat was appointed both a deputy to the chamberlain of the Royal Household and deputy director of the Crown Property Bureau.

In a recent public opinion survey, slightly less than 40 per cent of those interviewed believe that the “Three Ps” would be able to set up a new government after the next general election.²⁵ This suggests that the political influence of the “Three Ps” is no longer as overwhelming as it had been for most of the period since the 2014 coup.

Another weakness that General Prayut has is the fact that he has no party of his own. This left him exposed in the no confidence debate and vote. Only 34 more votes against him would have ousted him from the premiership, with the minimum majority of 242 votes in the 482-member House. With General Prayut on shaky ground, there is every possibility that others in the troubled ruling coalition will attempt to overthrow him in yet another censure in the House next year.²⁶

WHAT CAN GENERAL PRAYUT DO?

To ensure his political survival, General Prayut’s first option is to adjust his leadership style and try to stay on until the end of his four-year term in March 2023. By then, the COVID-19 pandemic may have ended and the Thai economy has begun to recover. He would have by then also set a record of serving nine years in the premiership. Mission accomplished. Prayut can then proudly step down and leave national politics for good.

Meanwhile, General Prayut has promised to make time to listen to MPs. Undoubtedly, many government MPs will request him to reshuffle the cabinet sooner rather than later, and to re-allocate ministerial posts more equitably. In the current cabinet, PPP leader General Prawit does not head any significant ministry, whereas the Bhumjaithai Party’s leader is Minister of Public Health, and the Democrats’ leader is Minister of Commerce. Further, the PPP’s group of 14 Southern MPs is demanding a cabinet post. Also waiting anxiously for their turn are the Thai Local Power Party, which has five MPs, and the seven micro-parties that firmly supported General Prayut in the censure vote.

General Prayut’s second option is to become a full-fledged politician by setting up a party of his own, assuming that General Prawit stays put and tries to strengthen the PPP. General Prayut can team up with his other “elder brother”, Interior Minister General Anupong, who was often seen alongside him during the crisis week in early September.

Both General Anupong and General Prayut share a common disdain for notionally unscrupulous politicians, and General Anupong in particular has avoided associating with MPs, for fear of being asked for favours. Captain Thammanat wanted for this reason to

wrestle from General Anupong the interior minister's post, one that brings immense patronage and largesse for handing out to MPs.

Under this second option, General Prayut can avoid directly offending General Prawit, for whom he has professed deep respect as his “first boss” and “mentor”. The question is whether he can acquire “ammunition” for his party's candidates to use in the next general election. And who will play the role of “fixer” and “monkey keeper” for him, now that Captain Thammanat, who used to play those roles in the PPP, is gone?

The third option will arise if General Prawit, who is now 76 and in poor health, calls it quits. General Prayut can then simply take over the PPP and, when ready, dissolve the House and lead the party into an early general election in 2022.

One exclusive advantage that General Prayut has over all other politicians is the existing strong support for him in the Senate. If he vies for the premiership again after the next general election, he can count on votes from most of the 250 senators, empowered under the Constitution to join MPs in selecting the prime minister until the end of their five-year term in May 2024.²⁷

CONCLUSION

The days of the political domination of the “Three Ps” in Thai politics are now clearly numbered. General Prayut will now need to move fast and decisively to show better results, since the public feeling is that his promise of “returning happiness to Thailand” is long overdue.²⁸

Before he passed away in May 2019, General Prem warned General Prayut that his “reserves are depleting”. General Prayut's falling out with his “big brother” General Prawit will be a damaging blow to his premiership.

For this reason, General Prayut will need to strengthen his political power base, by either heading a party of his own or taking over the PPP. Without such a move, his premiership will continue to weaken, and he may not be able to survive the next censure vote in the House.

¹ “ตามคาด ‘ธรรมนัส’ ผงาดนั่งเลขาฯ พลั้งประชารัฐ ‘อนุชา’ หลุดเก้าอี้” [As expected, ‘Thammanat’ rises to be the secretary-general of the Phalang Pracharat Party, ‘Anucha’ lost the seat], *Matichon Online*, 18 June 2021 (www.matichon.co.th/politics/news_2782626, accessed 9 September 2021). In the party leadership election held in Khon Kaen, the second largest province in the populous Northeast, General Prawit was re-elected unopposed as party leader. Captain Thammanat edged out a more senior rival, Deputy Finance Minister Santi, to become the new party secretary-general.

² “ผู้กองธรรมนัส ‘ผงาด’ เส้นเลือดใหญ่รัฐบาล” [Captain Thammanat soars: the main artery of the government], *Than Setthakit Online*, 18 June 2021 (www.thansettakit.com/politics/484532, accessed 11

September 2021). Captain Thammanat first compared himself to the “main artery” of the government in an interview with “The Nation Weekend Talk with Three Editors” television programme on 14 September 2019.

³ *Ibid.* The party treasurer Dr Narumon and the party registrar Bousing Warinrak, previously the chairman of the Phayao Provincial Administrative Organization, are close allies of Captain Thammanat, who is an MP from his home province of Phayao.

⁴ “ดำรง แจก มีขบวนการ ล็อบบี้ โหวตไม่ไว้วางใจ ชันจุดขึ้นไม่รับกล้วย” [Damrong discloses there is a movement to lobby for no-confidence votes, but he affirms his stand against accepting any bananas], *Krungthep Thurakit Online*, 7 September 2021 [www.bangkokbiznews.com/news/958641], accessed 10 September 2021]. MP Damrong Pidej is leader of the Thai Forest Conservation Party, which has two MPs. He voted against the prime minister, but his colleague MP Yanyong Thanompichai-thamrong voted for the prime minister. “Banana” is Thai political slang for cash bribery. MPs from micro-parties in the ruling coalition have been compared to “monkeys”. And Captain Thammanat did once identify himself as the “monkey keeper” in charge of finding “bananas” to feed these “monkeys” so that they would continue to support the Prayut premiership in the House.

⁵ Also facing censure were Deputy Prime Minister and Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, Transport Minister Saksiam Chidchob, Agriculture Minister Chalermchai Sri-on, Labour Minister Suchart Chomklin, and Digital Economy Minister Chaivudh Thanakasmanusorn.

⁶ All MPs as well as all senators are, according to Section 114 of the 2017 Constitution, “representatives of the Thai people and [they are] free from any mandate, commitment, or control. They shall perform duties honestly for the common interest of the Nation and the happiness of Thai people as a whole, without conflict of interest”. However, during the censure debate, leaders of other government parties — notably Bhumjaithai (61 MPs), the Democrats (48 MPs), Chat Thai Pattana (12), the Action Coalition for Thailand (5 MPs), and Thai Local Power (5 MPs) — all pledged their support for General Prayut.

⁷ In the March 2019 general election, the PPP nominated General Prayut for the premiership. If, after losing a no-confidence of the House, General Prayut called it quits, then the PPP together with its current coalition partners could have teamed up with a majority of senators to consider appointing an “outsider” — that is, someone not nominated for the premiership in the last general election — as the new prime minister. At least two-thirds of the combined memberships of the House (482 MPs) and the Senate (250 senators), or 488 votes, would be needed to install an “outsider” premier.

⁸ The Interior Ministry’s budget is second only to that of the Ministry of Education, but more than that of the Ministry of Defence budget. In the 2022 budget, the Interior Ministry will have 315 billion baht, while the Education Ministry will have 330 billion baht. The Finance Ministry will have 273 billion baht, and the Defence Ministry 199.9 billion baht. See details on the budget allocation at the website of the Senate Secretariat,

www.senate.go.th/document/Lawdraft/Ext5/5129_0003.PDF (accessed 8 September 2021). The House passed the draft budget bill on 22 August with 257 votes for and 189 votes against the bill; the Senate unanimously endorsed the draft budget bill on 30 August. The Thai Government budget year starts every 1 October.

⁹ In the current government General Prayut – who does not belong to any party – is concurrently the prime minister and the defence minister. His chosen men have been holding the following posts: deputy prime minister (for legal affairs), deputy prime minister (for economic affairs), deputy prime minister (for international affairs), minister of interior, minister of finance, minister of energy, minister of foreign affairs, and deputy minister of defence.

¹⁰ “อ่านเต็มๆ ‘บิ๊กตู’ เปิดใจราชชวา ไม่มีความคิดยุบสภาหรือปรับคณะรัฐมนตรี” [Read in full: ‘Big Tu’ opens his heart in a long talk, not thinking about dissolving the House or reshuffling the cabinet], *Thai Post Online*, 1 September 2021 (www.thaipost.net/main/detail/115256), accessed 11 September 2021). “Big Tu” is General Prayut’s nickname.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “‘วิสาร’ ปลูก ‘นายกฯ’ แจกเงิน ส.ส. คนละ 5 ล้านบาท” [‘Visarn’ alleges that ‘Prime Minister’ hands out 5 million baht to each MP in the parliament building], *Krungthep Thurakit Online*, 2 September 2021 (www.bangkokbiznews.com/news/detail/957994, accessed 11 September 2021). Visarn Taychathirawat, a Phuea Thai Party MP from Chiang Rai Province, was on the House floor attacking General Prayut when he suddenly blurted out his accusation of the ongoing cash bribery in the reception room on the third floor of the parliament building, where General Prayut was receiving MPs from the PPP. Virakorn Kamprakob, a veteran PPP MP from Nakhon Sawan Province, stood up to clarify that he had just come down from the room in question after joining several other PPP MPs to call on General Prayut to show their support. But he denied there was any cash bribery involved, and demanded Visarn’s retraction. The House Speaker has promised to investigate.

¹³ The four government MPs who voted against General Prayut were Anwar Saleh (Democrat, Pattani), Peerawit Ruengluedollapak (Thai Raktham, party-list), Suratin Pijarn (New Democrat, party-list), and Damrong Pidej (Thai Forest Conservation, party-list).

¹⁴ In the first censure vote on his premiership, General Prayut received 272 votes of confidence on 28 February 2020, the same number as Deputy Prime Minister Dr Wissanu Krea-ngarm, Interior Minister General Anupong Phaochinda, and Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai. Deputy Prime Minister General Prawit received the highest votes of confidence, 277. And the lowest number of votes went to Captain Thammanat, 269. In the second censure vote, on 20 February 2021, General Prayut again received 272 votes of confidence, the same as General Anupong. Both General Prawit and Captain Thammanat received more votes, 274. The highest number of votes of confidence went to Anutin, 275. Labour Minister Suchart received the least number of votes of confidence on that occasion, 263.

¹⁵ The royal command on their dismissals was published in the Royal Gazette on 8 September, with immediate effect. Captain Thammanat was too late when he told a press conference on 9 September that he was submitting his resignation, dated 8 September 2021. Deputy Prime Minister Dr Vissanu Krea-ngarm, the government’s chief legal expert, confirmed that the two deputy ministers were dismissed. At first, Dr Narumon did not seem to be aware that she had been dismissed; she attended a meeting on labour skills development at Government House on the morning of 9 September. General Prawit, who chaired the meeting, was also apparently unaware of Dr Narumon’s dismissal. During the meeting, the latter presented a report in her capacity as the deputy labour minister in charge of the Labour Ministry’s Department of Skills Development.

¹⁶ One of the proposed amendments seeks to increase the number of elected members of parliament from 350 to 400, and to reduce the number of party-list MPs from 150 to 100. The other proposed amendment seeks a return to the two-ballot voting system, in which each voter casts two ballots — one for a constituency MP and the other for a party. The votes that each party receives from all constituencies would go toward calculating the allocation of party-list seats. The two proposed amendments were passed with 472 votes (181 votes from government MPs and 142 votes from opposition MPs, the latter mostly from the Phuea Thai Party), and 149 votes from senators. The amendments will benefit large and well-funded parties capable of fielding candidates in all 400 constituencies.

¹⁷ The proposed amendments came from the Democrat Party. The PPP and the Phuea Thai Party — the two largest winners in the 2019 general election — supported the proposals. Bhumjaithai, the second largest party in the ruling coalition, and Move Forward, the second largest opposition party, both opposed the proposed amendments; MPs from these two medium-sized parties mostly abstained in the vote at the final reading of the amendments on 10 September.

¹⁸ Thammanat belonged to the Thai Rak Thai Party led by Thaksin Shinawatra in the early 2000s. He is known to have close ties to several key senior Phuea Thai figures. This led to speculation

that he wanted the PPP to team up with the Phuea Thai Party to form a two-party ruling coalition government after the next general election, and to edge out General Prayut for good.

¹⁹ “ธรรมนูญ รอด ศาลรัฐธรรมนูญ ไม่ขาดคุณสมบัติรัฐมนตรี” [Thammanat survives, the Constitutional Court rules that he does not lack qualifications to be a minister], *Prachachat Online*, 5 May 2021 (www.prachachat.net/politics/news-662489, accessed 12 September 2021). The Constitution Court on 5 May 2021 ruled that Captain Thammanat’s drug-smuggling conviction in Australia had not disqualified him from holding public office in Thailand, because the conviction did not happen in a Thai court. Captain Thammanat would only admit that he was at the wrong place at the wrong time when police raided his hotel room in Sydney in 1993, where about 3.2 kilogrammes of heroin were seized. He served four years in prison and was released on 14 April 1997 and deported.

²⁰ “ให้ไปดู ‘ม. 171’ นายกษ บัดดอปปลด ร.อ. ธรรมนูญ - นฤมล พันตำแหน่ง รมต.” [Go read “Section 171”, Prime Minister brushes aside questions about dismissing Captain Thammanat and Narumon from their ministerial posts], *Khom Chat Luek Online*, 10 September 2021 (www.komchadluek.net/news/482997, accessed 10 September 2021). Section 171 of the 2017 Constitution stipulates that “The King has the Royal Prerogative to remove a Minister from his or her office upon the advice of the Prime Minister.”

²¹ General Prawit was the defence minister in the Abhisit administration, December 2008-August 2011, and during the Prayut-led military regime in power after the 2014 coup, August 2014-July 2019.

²² General Prayut chairs the Defence Council in his capacity as defence minister. Other members of the council are Deputy Defence Minister General Chaicharn Changmongkol, Defence Ministry Permanent Secretary General Nat Incharoen, Army Commander General Narongpan Jitkaewthae, Navy Commander Admiral Chatchai Sriworakan, and Air Force Commander Air Chief Marshal Airbull Sutthipan. General Prayut replaced General Prawit as defence minister and as supervisor of the national police force at the start of his premiership at the head of an elected government in July 2019.

²³ General Prawit was Army chief in 2004-2005, General Anupong in 2007-2010, and General Prayut in 2010-2014.

²⁴ Senior military and police officers belonging to this “Red Rim” clique often wear a white t-shirt with a red-rimmed neck underneath their uniforms, and keep a short crew cut.

²⁵ “ความเป็นไปได้ทางการเมืองของ 3 ป.” [Political possibilities of the “Three Ps”] *Thai Post Online*, 12 September 2021 (www.thaipost.net/main/detail/116406, accessed 12 September 2021) The survey was conducted by the NIDA Poll service of the National Institute for Development Administration (NIDA), in 6-9 September 2021.

²⁶ Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chomanan resigned during a censure on 28 February 1980 to avoid imminent defeat, after ruling without any political party of his own for two years. His successor, General Prem Tinsulanonda, lasted much longer, eight and half years, largely because of strong support from the palace and the military. General Prem relinquished the premiership in order to avoid the threat of censure following the general election in July 1988, and he was soon appointed to the Privy Council by King Bhumibol.

²⁷ In the process of selecting the prime minister on 5 June 2019, 249 senators voted for General Prayut, the PPP’s nominee for the premiership. Only one senator, Senate President Dr Pornpetch Wichitcholchai, abstained. General Prayut won the premiership with 500 votes, 251 votes from government MPs in 19 parties and 249 votes from senators. His rival from the opposition, Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, leader of the Future Forward Party, received only 244 votes, all from MPs belonging to seven opposition parties. The number of parties in the ruling coalition has dropped to 17 after the Thai Civilised Party of MP Mongkolkit Suksin-tharanon left the coalition to join the opposition, and the People’s Reform Party closed down and its leader MP Paiboon Nititawan became a deputy leader of the PPP.

²⁸ Soon after staging the coup on 22 May 2014, General Prayut promised to “return happiness to Thailand”. He even composed a song “คืนความสุขให้ประเทศไทย” [Returning happiness to Thailand], available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wT6qWjrCYhI>.

<p><i>ISEAS Perspective</i> is published electronically by: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute</p> <p>30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace Singapore 119614 Main Tel: (65) 6778 0955 Main Fax: (65) 6778 1735</p> <p>Get Involved with ISEAS. Please click here: https://www.iseas.edu.sg/support</p>	<p>ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute accepts no responsibility for facts presented and views expressed.</p> <p>Responsibility rests exclusively with the individual author or authors. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission.</p> <p>© Copyright is held by the author or authors of each article.</p>	<p>Editorial Chairman: Choi Shing Kwok</p> <p>Editorial Advisor: Tan Chin Tiong</p> <p>Managing Editor: Ooi Kee Beng</p> <p>Editors: William Choong, Lee Poh Onn, Lee Sue-Ann, and Ng Kah Meng</p> <p>Comments are welcome and may be sent to the author(s).</p>
--	---	--