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KINGDOM AT A CROSSROADS:
THAILAND'S UNCERTAIN POLITICAL TRAJECTORY

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BUSH: It's a great pleasure to welcome you all here today. I'm not Joseph Liow, who was the one who put this together, did all the hard work, and I just get to enjoy it. He's in Southeast Asia at a conference.

My name is Richard Bush. I'm the Director of the Center for East Asian Policy Studies, and a Senior Fellow here at Brookings. And it's my great pleasure to welcome you in the audience, and those of you who are watching by webcast. I also have to convey my apologies for Josh Kurlantzick who, for personal reasons, could not join us today.

But the title of the program is, Kingdom at a crossroads: Thailand's uncertain political trajectory; and we have two outstanding speakers here today to educate us on that subject. Don Pathan is a Freelance Security Analyst and Consultant based in Yala, Thailand, and he has regular publications coming out in The Nation and various other places. Duncan McCargo is a scholar, now at Princeton and Columbia University, and he is also well published and a recognized expert on Thailand; which I know, from my own experience, is a really interesting country for a lot of historical and other reasons.

I think, for me, it's an interesting case of whether a stable and effective democratic system, an effective democratic system, can be consolidated and sustained in a country with deep geographic, political and economic cleavages. There are other cases of course, one that comes to mind is the United States of America in the 1850s, but we'll leave that aside. Thailand is the subject today.

So, in recognition of the fact that Don has come, half-way around the world, from Thailand, which is a very long trip, and we are grateful that he's done so. We will start with him, and then turn to Duncan.

MR. PATHAN: Thank you, Mr. Bush. Duncan. I left journalism about three years ago, and part of the reason is because a lot of stuff I was getting on the conflict inside of Thailand, I was not permitted to write, this off-the-record stuff. And so I decided to become a consultant, and working in, I guess, what people call, it's a loaded word but, inside mediation, going back and forth between Thai security forces, government and the separatist movement.

I've been covering the conflict in the South since about 2001. I first visited the area in '97, and back then I was convinced that it was a matter of time before a new generation of Malay Muslim insurgent will surface. People wanted to punch me in the mouth, because the violence had stopped for about seven, eight years, and people did want to believe that it was over.

But the reason I was convinced that it was a matter of time, was because I was the region which, where I live now, about 2 million people, 80-85 percent are Malay Muslim who embraced a different narrative. They don't identify themselves as Thai; they have their own heroes, history, and all that, but didn't want to separate from Thailand. I always argued that the Malay of Pattani; Pattani is the three province in the four Malay-speaking district in the province of Songkhla, and historically it includes the northern state of Kelantan and Terengganu.

But when the border as drawn in 1909 with the British, the Malay did not challenge the Thai legitimacy, army insurgency did not surface until the mid-'60s. So the question is; what went wrong to that comfort level between the two sides, between the Thai State and the Malay Muslim.

I would argue that it's the Thai nation state construct, the Thai narrative that does not permit the Malay cultural, historical space consciousness. And the last straw was in, I think early -- mid-'60s, when the Thai government decided to dissolve

what you call pondok or madrasa in the deep south, where 85 percent of the Malay Muslim -- 85 percent of the people there are Malay Muslim.

And that was the last straw. That's when this group called the BRN, and you probably hear of them in the news quite a bit; Barisan Revolusi Nasional, was created. There were other groups like Pulau, but back then, you know, there were competition among countries in the Middle East, Libya, Eritrea, among other countries, Saudi Arabia and Iran as well to, you know, be the big brothers of some freedom fighters all over the world, so about 3,000 people were trained in Libya from Southern Thailand.

Late '80s early '90s, that generation of armed insurgent went under, and about nine years later, eight or nine years later, it resurfaced, embracing the same narrative. And the group that had advantage, that created this network of insurgence is of course the BRN, that's an advantage because they were grassroots, they were Madrasa base. But when they surfaced, you know, it was at the time of -- just shortly after September 11, people mistakenly tried to label this as the new front of the global war on terrorism, the flood of expression coming out of the Deep South, and that kind of misled people.

A lot scary analysts, you know. For example, of the dead insurgent anyway, they are buried as martyr, that's what you call shahid, and you had a lot of analysts who, kind of, wrongly assume that this is a fight about Islam. But it's nothing new really, what happened was there's some misunderstanding when they first came out, there was a tendency to blame Thaksin, Thaksin Shinawatra, then Prime Minister, because of his heavy-handed handling of the situation. There's another misunderstanding it's that, this is a Buddhist versus Muslim conflict and there's some -- Another misunderstanding is that the Royal Thai Army keep the insurgency alive for the financial benefits.

So I disagree with all those analysis, I would argue that the Malays, they wanted to be part of Thailand, but on their terms, and I always encourage the international community to help Thailand define these terms.

But the problem with Thailand is that, especially with this government, the Junta are very nervous about internationalizing this issue, because it's very difficult for them, and they are not very savvy in public speaking and all that, about defending the legitimacy of the Thai State in the Malay Homeland, when in fact, you know, the first 50 years after the area came under direct control of Bangkok, the Malay did not challenge Thai sovereignty.

And it's a tough nut to crack, you know, there's this argument that Malaysia is backing a lot of separatists because they want part of this land to join -- to become part of Malaysia, I would disagree. I mean, if this became part of Malaysia, UMNO would never see the light of day. You know, it would be the past, so that's that.

Thaksin kind of took this job in the past, back in the '70s and the '80s it was militaries, they monopolized the discussion, dialogue process with the separatists, and they would meet in Cairo, Libya, wherever, a lot of Middle East countries. But when Thaksin came in he took that job away and gave it to a civilian, and that didn't really work, because what happened, when he finally acknowledged that we have a new generation of Malay Muslim insurgent on hand, he started talking to the old guards, people who were active in the '70s and '80s, the BRN would not come to the table, and they still refuse to come to the table.

His sister came into power. She gave Malaysia the mandate to facilitate or mediate this conflict or this discussion. Still, the BRN refuse to come to the table. I know you probably read that there are people who call themselves BRN at the negotiating table, but my sources in the movement, underground and abroad, insist that

the ruling council, the real BRN, or the BRN who have command and control of the insurgent underground, are not ready, are not prepared.

Do they want to talk? Yes, they do. And what are their demands? Well, a couple demands. Then look around, let's look at the GAM, Free Aceh Movement, they look at the MILF in Mindanao, and they saw what they liked, which is legitimacy, acceptance from the international community, they want their political wing to be able to fly here and there without worry about being arrested.

The Thai won't give them that for fear of -- The Thai's, Bangkok's position has always been that, the fact that we are talking to you already is enough legitimacy. It's all the legitimacy you are going to get. So they got some young guy to come to the table, that jumped ship from BRN, but they still call themselves BRN, and they start a peace process that's kind of like this movie here -- It reminds me of this movie, you know, Field Of Dreams, build it and they will come, you know, to build this process, and hopefully that BRN will come.

But they haven't. And until these conditions are met, until they get properly trained, and they do want training from western countries, and many of the previous -- the old guards live in Europe, given asylum in Europe, Sweden mainly; they want western countries to help them.

They saw what the Swiss did to the Free Aceh Movement, and just about everybody worked on the Mindanao process, and that's what they want. And so that's where we are at right now. It's kind of a limbo. The last couple of years the violence in the south, and a little background, about the violence, 6,500 people have been killed already since January 2004, and about 60 percent of them are Malay Muslim.

I, in my work, it's focused on right now, going back and forth to try and encourage the sort of the rules of engagement between the two sides. And it's not easy,

it's a tough nut to crack, because the movement is very, very bottom-heavy, and with, you know, the younger generation, the radical ideas. And when I say radical, I'm not suggesting suicide bombing or anything like that. In fact, the local brand of Islam, which is the jurisprudence, which is Shâfi'i, is one of the four school of thoughts in Sunni Islam.

In fact, I would argue that this brand of Islam help prevent outside influence from al-Qaeda, Jamaat-e-Islami, and possibly ISIS. They have tried, groups like al-Qaeda, at least one guy, Hambali, was arrested in North Bangkok, and Jamaat-e-Islami, the guy had tried to exploit the conflict for their own gain, but they return empty-handed, mainly because this is not about Islam, this is about (inaudible) Malay, ethno-nationalism.

And culture impunity is still a problem, no one single Thai official has been convicted for, you know, human rights violation. Even in some obvious case, like the beating to death of Imam Yapa Kaseng, who was beat to death in front of his son. You know, finally, seven years later, the Attorney General finally suggested that this Lieutenant should be tried. You know, so it took them seven years to come to that conclusion.

Anyway, the problem right now is I think it's Bangkok, serious of the (inaudible) mentality. They believe that this process that they have with Malaysia, facilitating will eventually bring in the real BRN. My suggestion to the Thai has always been -- you need some deliverables, you need to show that the process can deliver, and they haven't. One of the things that Thai is going to push is a ceasefire, what they call the safety zone, which basically is a ceasefire, but the group, the network, or the umbrella group that call themselves MARA Patani, which is made up of previous, long-standing separatist group, except the BRN.

And commit to that, because they know that they cannot control the

insurgent on the ground. The first few years they got some -- '05, '06, '07, there was a lot of grotesque activities. There would be beheading by the insurgent, and castration, burning the bodies, but that stopped, that stopped because the religious community came out quietly though in their own way, and spoke against that. In Islam you have rules of engagement, and that you have the right to kill your enemy, but you don't have the right to mutilate his body.

So, in that respect, Islam kind of helps bring some degree of civility in this conflict. And I heard that the USAID and Pakistani government, some years ago, was comparing notes on the Islamic rules of engagement with the Geneva Convention on this matter. So, maybe something like that, and in Southern Thailand, you know, could be, say, a foreseeable project for the Malay inside of Thailand.

Does Malay want to engage into that community? Yes, they do. But Thai, it's very difficult when you talk to the diplomats who are based in Bangkok, who wants to make a trip down there, the biggest obstacle is obviously the foreign ministry. But people do make trips down there, and engage with the community, and the message, I often accompany this -- this diplomat to meetings, and the message from the community is always that, please, please help us, work with us, you know, you don't know what the Thais are doing to us.

So, it's not the kind of conflict that you see in other places, in the Muslim community being American, and Duncan -- being Westerners, basically, and it's very safe down there, and Duncan spends a lot of time down there, so he could probably talk about his experience down there. So, I'll leave it at that. And Richard?

MR. BUSH: Thank you very much.

MR. McCARGO: Thanks very much. I could talk about the Southern Thai conflict as well, but perhaps I'd better move on to the national-level situation to

provide a little bit of a contrast. I wish I could tell you it was going to be a happier story, but I'm afraid it really isn't.

I was here, I think it was in April last year, speaking about the political situation, almost a year after the coup that took place on the 22nd of May, 2014, and what I talked about then, was primarily, the very intense repression of freedom of expression, the rounding up of anybody who might seem to be at all out of line with the thinking of the military, the themes of returning national happiness, and a desire for reconciliation, but reconciliation achieved, apparently, at the barrel of a gun.

I was hoping when I spoke to you last time, that if I had a chance to come here again, a year later or so, I'd be able to say, we've moved beyond that phase, that was an initial period of repression and denial. Thailand is moving forward in a more positive direction. Unfortunately I can't really tell you that, and I've been studying Thailand one way or another for the best part of 30 years. A terrifying confession; and I've never really been more pessimistic than I am at the moment.

So, it's a difficult time to be talking about what's going on in Thailand. The main focus of what I talked about the last time was what seemed to be the grounds for optimism in so far as they were there. The idea of moving forward with a constitution drafting process, and I talked about the 2015 Draft Constitution, and we then had a Thailand Update Conference on the 1st of May, at Columbia, where I elaborated on the note, since published an article.

If anybody wants it, my wonderful article about 2015 Draft Constitution is in print. Unfortunately the 2015 Draft Constitution was torn up, as many other constitutions and draft constitutions have been in the past. So, I think we can learn a lot from the very interesting debates about the nature of the people that were invoked in that constitution.

What was revealed as a result of the voting down the constitution was that, one of the things I've been saying was quite right, which was that there was a lot of contestation going on. That some people have tried to say the military, and the people in the legislative assembly and the legal community, elite people who have been roped into drafting a new constitution, they are all part of the same monolithic, hegemonic organization.

And I'm afraid not. It's really nothing like that. What we need when we talk about this nuance and what we got a lot of time, is very, very simplistic labelings of people whose positions are messy, complicated, confused, internally contradictory. So that's something that I think we have to keep thinking about at the moment.

What we saw in that last-draft constitution was the contestation between different ideas, I didn't agree with a lot of the ideas, but at least the people who were behind that constitution had some liberal elements, they were trying to push ideas of morality, and they were still committed to notions of human rights, and not to removing all those notions from the draft.

Unfortunately what we now have is a new draft constitution, as of the other week, which has been prepared by a much more conservative, prominent constitutional lawyer than the one we were criticizing last year. He turns out to look a lot better by comparison with the person who took over the job from him. So we've ended up now with a draft constitution that really does look rather dark, much more to the liking of the military, and there a number of elements in there that are quite problematic.

In terms of a real way forward; and interestingly enough Khun Meechai is the guy who did lead the drafting process, admitted when he got to the press conference, that actually we haven't come up with the solutions to Thailand's political problems. It's beyond us. This is sort of the best that we can do to keep the military happy and produce

some sort of document, but we are not even going to try to pretend to give us the previous constitution drafting, the group did, that this is something you should get excited about, because we are not really excited about it either.

So nobody is wildly enthusiastic about this constitution, we have a draft constitution. What seems to be on the cards is a referendum on the constitution, so the idea that a constitution needs to be validated by a referendum was an idea that gained currency after the previous coups in 2006, and because there as a constitutional referendum in 2007, there sort of needs to be a new constitutional referendum, now, to validate one.

We were supposed to have had that referendum already, it would have nice to have been talking to you about the January 2016, constitutional referendum, which I planned to go back to Thailand for, but I save myself the price of an air ticket, didn't go back to Thailand because that referendum was postponed.

So, we are now looking at 31st of July, potentially, and when I say potentially, everything that I'm going to say is rather, you know, framed with these awful scare quotes. We think there's going to be a referendum on the 31st of July that may or may not be. We think there may be an election in the latter part of 2017 that may or may not be.

Nothing at this point is very clear. So, I'm in the position where people ask me lots of questions, and most of them are really questions about the future. Please tell us what's going to happen next. Well, I'm really struggling to understand what's happened already. I have very little idea of what's happening now, and you would like me to tell you what's going to happen next, I would be extremely unwise to humor you in that. But of course that's what you want to know. And that's what I want to know, I want to ask myself the very same thing that you want to ask me what's going to happen next.

So, if we look at the elements of the scenarios going forward, we can see a number of different things that could start to unfold, and here I'm going to commend to you some articles that I don't necessarily agree with, but I think if you haven't read them, you should look at. One of them is Shawn Crispin's 10th of February Essay in The Diplomat, called The Staying Power of Thailand's Military.

I don't agree with everything that Shawn says, but he always has some very interesting ideas. The basic argument he advances in that article is that the military intends to stay in power; they don't really intend to hand everything back to electoral democracy at all. It's really just a question of what mechanisms they are going to use to perpetuate their power. Whether they are actually going to have an election and then trying to perpetuate their power in the post-election scenario, or whether they will find various mechanisms for delaying the election.

So, he talks about faux election, as being one scenario. A fake election, something that looks election, it walks election, it talks like an election, but it doesn't result in actually institutionalizing the power of elected politicians, because the military remain behind the scenes, using mechanisms that are embedded in the Constitution, and of course we all know, those of us who've been studying Thailand for a while will be well aware that it doesn't have to be embedded in the Constitution for that to be hidden mechanisms. There's lots of shadow play possible in these scenarios.

So, we could have an election, one of the things that Crispin talks about, which I've mentioned in previous talks is the setting up of a pro-military party, which is a long-standing aspiration of some people involved in the coup, but of course we've had pro-military parties before, and they don't tend to win many votes because, funnily enough, people are not that stupid, and they spot this party for just being a front for the military.

And even the people who quite like the military tend not to particularly want to vote for a military party, because the military parties don't really go together except sometimes in the military's own imagination. So that didn't really work out when they tried it in '92, they set up this Samakkhi Tham Party, lasted in power for precisely 48 days.

So, the last time the military had a serious attempt to form a government fronted by a military -created party, it was a disaster, and it was the worst calamity in the history of the Thai military.

So if they are listening to this, please remember, last time you got yourselves into such a horrendous mess by creating this fake party, that it took you years and years to recover your credibility. So, I just advise you, in your own interest, not on behalf of any kind of Western liberal ideas, but just in your own corporate interest, please don't set up a military party, because it's not going to work. That's what I suggest. I don't suppose anyone is listening to me, but that is a scenario that could be out there.

The second set of questions, really relates to what would happen in this faux election, because one of the assumptions behind the faux Election idea is that you can manipulate the election results. Clearly an unspoken, but explicitly, implicitly explicit agenda of what's been going on so far, is how can we craft a set of regulations for the next election, which will make sure that the pro-Thaksin Shinawatra parties do not win?

Bearing in mind that they have won every single election since 2001, quite decisively, including the ones that were dissolved afterwards by the constitutional court, as the elections of 2006 and 2014, so pro-Thaksin parties have, essentially, a built-in majority, that's based on their extensive support in the north and northeast which are the two most populous regions of the country where very large numbers of people are extremely unhappy with the political direction.

They are no longer people who see themselves as poor farmers who would like to live quietly just eking out a living from the land. Actually funnily enough they are not even in their home provinces they are all in and around Bangkok, these are the people I call urbanized villagers.

So, the first thing to understand about Thai electoral politics is that there's an enormous disjuncture between two things. Where the voters allegedly are and where they actually are. So if you realize that getting on for a third of the population is now where they are meant to be, then you can begin to understand why there's a colossal disjuncture going on here. So there are huge numbers of people who are registered to vote in the north and northeast who are actually in Bangkok, or just around Bangkok in the five surrounding provinces.

Those people are not living the life of poor farmers; they do not wish to be poor farmers anymore. They are poor farmers, who were not poor enough farmers, as I've described them in one article. So, these people are not going anywhere, they are trying to become middle-class, and they are trying to displace the existing elites and the existing middle-class that are currently occupying most of power and privilege in the society.

The problem is, they are more numerous, so every time they get to vote, they vote against the people who they see as representing existing power and privilege. There are people who represent existing power and privilege, don't see it that way, they think these people are ignorant, uneducated and stupid, but actually the people who are voting against them, are voting in their own economic, social and political interests.

It's not out of ignorance; it's in fact out of a sophisticated understanding of what would advance their interest, even if the pro-Thaksin parties are, in themselves, not very satisfactory, they are not wonderful. Thaksin, himself, has all kinds of problems,

so I'm not trying to make a pro-Thaksin argument here, I'm trying to explain why it is that pro-Thaksin parties have been able to capture the vote.

So, if we look at another short article that you can find online. Bangkok Pundit recent post with Allen Hicken, about the new electoral system, then you start to see how things could shake out in this supposedly, faux election.

So what Allen Hicken and Bangkok Pundit have suggested, is that if you essentially run the 2011 election results, which is the last full election results that we have; through the new political system, as envisaged in the constitution, which they are calling MMA, Mixed Member Apportionment, and don't ask me to explain that, but essentially you just get one ballot paper, you don't have two ballot papers anymore, so you vote for both constituency and party listed on the same ballot paper.

What Hicken and Bangkok Pundit believe is that if you run that system, you end up: ah-ah, with the pro-Thaksin party still winning; a slight problem. So if you run the 2011 election system through this formula, what you get is 225 seats, for Pheu Thai, and the Democrats get 160. So, then it becomes all about the medium-sized parties. What happens to the medium-sized parties? They are the main beneficiary. The Democrats don't a lot bigger but Pheu Thai gets smaller and Pheu Thai loses seats to medium sized parties.

Those of you who follow Thai politics obsessively, may remember, and if you don't, I'll just tell you; that this became a very interesting question in 2008, because what we saw in 2008, was that the Democrat Party, which lost the election in 2007, ended up forming the government for most of that parliamentary term as a result of one faction of the pro-Thaksin party defecting to the other side with these medium-parties. And this was a mechanism that was, a mechanism that was, in fact engineered by the very same people who staged the coup. So they know exactly how to do it.

So they are not trying to preemptively create a December 2008 scenario, where medium-sized parties are able to ally with the Democrat Party and block the largest single party from forming a government, which in most political system will be considered highly irregular, but we can image and envisage scenarios whereby this could happen. Especially given that the provision in this new Constitution is for an unelected prime minister in the event of a crisis, and we can be sure there will be some kind of crisis; so we can end up with an unelected prime minister who is a leader of national unity, fronting a government comprising the Democrat Party, and a series of medium-sized parties, and Pheu Thai, despite being the largest party, ends up being the opposition.

That is a scenario which could come out of this faux election. It's not straightforward, it's very messy and unsatisfactory, but it's the worst -- it's the best unsatisfactory outcome that the military could probably hope for, with all the different things that they are juggling around here.

Those are some scenarios, I have talked about some other scenarios of my own in the past, and let me just revisit those, which you might compare with Crispin's, they are slightly different in certain respects. So, I said that there are actually four scenarios, and political scientists love these quadrant things; and if I have the PowerPoint I can do the quadrants and you can move the dots around. It's great stuff if you want to play around with it, I didn't inflict the PowerPoint presentation on you today, but usually I do.

So the quadrants: there's one quadrant which is status quo ante, we go back to where we were before the coup and before the upheavals that led to the coup, so you have a kind of alternation a very unsatisfactory and highly contentious alternation between two power blocks.

A second scenario is what I call Pax Shinawat, that's the pro-Thaksin forces essentially win this election and are able to consolidate their position and the military just have to admit that they've staged both of these coups, without any success, and they are going to have to throw up their hands, (inaudible), you know, give up struggling and try to do some kind of deal with Thaksin which is, of course, what they did and joined the Yingluck Government.

The Yingluck Government was based on some kind of elite pact between the military, the monarchy and the pro-Thaksin forces, until it started to unravel by around late 2013, at the time of the amnesty bill.

Another scenario is Pax establishment, which is that the establishment finds a way of suppressing all this frustration permanently, and comes up with a way of realigning things such that the old elites, the military, the monarchy, the judiciary and the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, not of course the police, can be very happy with the outcome on a permanent basis.

And this is sort of what Crispin seems to be intimating. The difficulty with this scenario whether you are seeing it as a temporary or a permanent scenario is it disregards the extent to which Thai Society has been transformed. It disregards the aspirations of the urbanized villages, and it ignores the incredible levels of frustration that are experienced by people in large swaths of the country, particularly the north and northeast, from whom we've heard very little because they have no voice in a scenario where freedom of expression has been completely impressed -- repressed.

But I spent a lot of time last summer going around the northeast, talking to people who privately expressed to me their intense frustration, and their absolute determination that the moment they got a chance to start participating electorally again, they would go back to whatever their criticisms of the pro-Thaksin parties, they would go

back to those parties as the only source that they had of rebalancing the scenario.

So, there's another scenario after status quo ante Pax Shinawatra and Pax establishment which is a doomsday scenario, that's the one that Crispin talks about as the rebellion scenario. Rebellion could be either the pro-Thaksin forces, but Thaksin has basically told all the people in the north and northeast, the Red Shirts, to stand down. Or as he put it in an interview that he gave in September, to play dead.

Could he at some point say, okay, we've played along with this, now let's start disrupting things, and really let's see if the military can handle it or not. Could that happen? I'm not convinced it's particularly likely to happen, because another possible rebellion is the rebellion against the authority of the current military and Junta leadership and some sort of split within the armed forces.

But either of those could precipitate the doomsday scenario for a descent into some kind of chaos which would be very disconcerting. Nevertheless, I think behind all these scenarios the theme, the last book I wrote in 2012 is called "Mapping National Anxieties," which was actually in the context of the Southern Thai conflict, but the national anxieties are not just about the south, the south is just one element of the national anxieties.

I think the national anxiety which is not only in Thailand, but where you can see in other countries not so far from here, and you can see national anxieties becoming extremely pronounced into the surface in recent election campaigns, and I'm talking just about my own country, the U.K. Political polarization, southern conflicts, of course the never-ending royal succession question, what happens in the future topped up at the moment by economic woes, Thai economies tanking, real fears about loss of comparative advantage, the demise of Thai dominance in Mainland Southeast Asia, as Burma and Vietnam finally get their act together.

These are all sources of incredible anxiety which form a compound, and I'm not trying to dodge the royal succession question, which I don't desperately want to talk about for hours now, but those people who believe everything can be reduced just to one factor, I think are making it far too simple. There's a compound of all these different factors mixed up that creates this very potent mix, and makes it very difficult for the military to be able to stabilize the situation in the ways that they would like.

Crispin talks about the succession scenario, which he uses a different term for, you can find when you read the article. In other words, that the military would like to hang onto power for a period of time, that's okay, if you think it's a short period of time. I, personally, am not expecting any succession to happen particularly soon, and I think that it's harder and harder to sustain this suspension of normality for a period of years. You can suspend normality for a couple of years, three years, four years, but I don't think you could suspend normality, say, for another 10 years or another 12 years. And that really opens up a new round of possibilities.

So what we have are not answers to what's going to happen in the future, but different scenarios. There's Crispin's scenarios, my scenarios and others that people could suggest. What certainly is not going to go away, I believe, is the intense polarization that results from the incredibly rapid transformation of Thai Society, because most people who were looking at this are very focused on elite-level conflict, but if you look at what's been going on, especially outside Bangkok, especially where the people are, or in fact aren't, which is the north and northeast; where the people are supposedly are the voters -- the votes are, what you can see is this incredible, rapid transformation and the rise of anxiety, frustration and discontent with the system, which is something that can't easily be papered over by any kind of elite pact anymore.

This tends to be the Thai solution to every problem. If we just get the

leaders to -- Take out the leaders and the insurgency will stop; get the leaders to agree on a deal, and everything is going to be all right. This is the scenario that we hear all the time. I don't think it's really that simple anymore, because below the level of the elite, and out in the provinces, things are so much messier, and more complicated than they were. Not that they were straightforward in the past, but they've just become vastly more complicated than perhaps these nice little scenarios that I'd like to advance, really fully taken to account. Thank you.

MR. BUSH: Somebody will help you with the mic. There we go. Thanks to each of you. For those of you who are still standing in the back, there are some seats in the front, plenty of seats in the front, and you are welcome to move up this way.

I'd like to ask just one question and then I'll turn it over to you and the audience. I think this is a question for Duncan, but Don, if you want to answer that's okay, too. And that's the relationship of the economy to politics. And I think I understand why the Thai economy is not doing so well, and I think all of the countries that are somehow connected to the Chinese economy are having their problems.

But is it possible that improving economy, however that happens could ameliorate the sort of political division and tension, or does it matter? Similarly, if the economy remains stagnant, or even gets worse, does it become more than just a source of anxiety and something that sort of deepens the contestation?

MR. McCARGO: Thailand is not the only country in the region that has these similar -- somewhat similar economic problems which are part of a regional downturn. But nevertheless there are these specific elements some of which I've already mentioned the rise of -- The flooding I haven't talked about so much, but of course when, in 2011, there was huge flooding that flooded a lot of industrial estates in the outskirts of Bangkok, those people who invested in this industrial estates naturally, ask themselves,

do we really need to put more investment into Thailand, or would it make more sense, given that labor costs are now going up there, to relocate those investments.

So that's part of the problem. One thing I always love to remind people is that Thailand has the lowest birth rate in Southeast Asia, many people are not really aware of this. Please check the graphs for Thailand's birth rate, it's at the same level as countries like Italy and Japan, but no kids are being born in Thailand.

And if you look at the Japan graph it goes like this, if you look at the Thai graph, it goes like that. So, Thailand is in a terrible problem, because children aren't being born, which means the country is unbelievably dependent on, guess what, migrant labor, most of it supposedly illegal, and there's just colossal denial about the extent of that migrant labor. Now, Thailand is not unique in that problem, but it has a very, very extreme version of it, and isn't dealing with it; isn't talking about the fact that this sort of thing is going on. So there are all these kind of time bombs lurking underneath there.

Now, if we look at previous rounds of political upheaval, street protests and so forth, in Thailand, a few years ago I got all the data from all these World Bank statistics and things, and tried to map the economic growth, and tourist arrivals and so on, against the street protests and the military coups, and stuff, what was very striking is two to three months after every upheaval Thailand was just jumping back in terms of economic performance.

That's not the case anymore. So there's been an incredible resilience, and you would have thought that people would say, hang on a minute, it's not a very good idea to have this polarized politics, because it's going to have some down sides for us economically. And the people I ask that question to, over the past few years, have always said, no, you know, we have to do what we have to do, and if we suffer economically, then that's okay, because ultimately we have to purge Thailand of the bad

people, or whatever it is. We have to get rid of this military regime.

So, those kinds of considerations have never loomed very large, but of course the people who are suffering most, are those lower down, especially these people in the urbanized villager category who have debts and whom were just on the verge of getting out of being farmers, and sending their kids to college, and starting their businesses and so on.

So the people who are the Thaksin's natural supporters are going to be just profoundly alienated by this economic situation even more than those who are doing better. So they are just going to be redoubled in their sense of frustration. And of course this allows the pro-Thaksin parties to paint the first half of the 2000s -- the 2000 to 2005 period as a hay day when everybody was doing really well, and blame the economic dysfunction on the politics of the post-2006 coup period.

MR. BUSH: Thank you. Don't?

MR. PATHAN: It's okay.

MR. BUSH: So we have about 40 minutes left; plenty of time for you, the audience, to raise the issues that you would like to raise. Once I identify you, please wait for the mic, and then tell us who you are, and your affiliation, and then if you want to pose your question to one or the other of our experts, please do so, otherwise, you can ask both. So who would like to ask the first question? So we'll start right here.

MS. WATANAGASE: Thank you. Hi. My name is Madura Watanagase, I'm a first year student from Thailand at SAIS across the street. My first question, it's addressed to all of you, anyone who would want to jump in. So, corruption was one of the main justifications for both the 2006 and 2014 coups, and supposedly the military government has taken steps to show that it's serious about corruption and a lot of it has, perhaps, been done through executive authority of the use of Article 44.

And I just wanted to ask for your comments about how you see this playing out, especially the scandal with the Rajabhakti Park, which seems to link the responsibility directly to the military. Do you see this as, like a system of spoils that the military is enjoying or -- I don't really know -- It's just like, I'm curious to hear your thoughts about whether the situation of corruption is perhaps better or if you are pessimistic or optimistic about the state of corruption?

MR. BUSH: Okay. Why don't we take that question?

MR. PATHAN: Go ahead.

MR. McCARGO: A good question. Yes. I'd say actually corruption didn't loom as large in the discourse to justify the coup as perhaps in previous coups. I mean, it was very, very strong in '91, and somewhat less strong in the coups. It was more about restoring order to my mind, in corruption, but of course corruption was invoked in the anti-Thaksin movement, and the anti-Yingluck movement, that precipitated the coup.

And yes, the military has as always wanted to present itself in this light. The difficulty is that, you know, generals in Thailand are rich, everybody knows that they are rich, and when they came to declare the assets, those members of the cabinet pretty much admitted that they were rich. But they don't have high salaries, and none of them are able to explain how they became rich. So the people who are preaching about corruption, you know, I'm not saying that they are corrupt, but they don't seem to have been able to produce any public explanation for the assets and the income that they have.

So, it's not really possible to take them seriously, and nobody does take them seriously, on that kind of point. So, when we have, you know, very transparent issues of which the park is just the latest one, and the previous ones, you know, come to

mind.

And Don is also very familiar with this one, and you can't get out of this. The bomb detector scandal, where the military had purchased -- I'm afraid, a British guy was behind this particular project, of the non-functional bomb detectors which were extensively purchased by the military, and they were obviously getting some massive commissions and the things were just some kind of plastic box, with the flashing light on the outside, and they detect bombs, and some people actually lost their lives as a result of thinking that there wasn't a bomb when there was, because the light wasn't flashing.

And it was really a terrible episode. But the Thai military has a long and undistinguished history of involvement in extremely dubious projects. And because the parliament has never been able to scrutinize the defense budget, or call the military to account in any way, I mean, the core problem is complete lack of military accountability for how they spend money, so we don't know.

There's still a secret budget nobody knows what go into secret budget at all, but even the non-secret budget, it's not possible to criticize the way that the military spend money without them getting extremely upset and emotional about it, instead of defending themselves in a rational way, they just become, you know, you've challenged my masculinity, by mentioning this, and you've challenged the integrity of the Thai Nation by mentioning this.

So, it's not really possible to take the military seriously, as an anticorruption organization, they may be interested in "selected other people's corruption," but unless they can look at themselves, you know, it's not -- you can't move forward. You have to be able to present yourself as -- not what civilian politicians in Thailand are lacking in money, but they do have to give much more account to the public of where they got that money from.

So I would say a first step would be, how about all Generals in Thailand should do a full assets declaration explaining exactly where this wealth came from, and if they would do that, then we would listen to them. People would take them a lot more seriously.

MR. PATHAN: The explanation for why a secret fund, is that, well, if we reveal it, then it won't be secret anymore. That was the official line of the Bangkok Government -- the military anyway. But those cases, like the Rohingya, for example, the human trafficking when the report was that finding a shallow grave popping up along the Thai-Malaysian border, and they made few arrest.

But then, again, they were hoping that to cash this in with the Muslim in the Deep South, and just, you know, we are helping fellow Muslim, blah-blah-blah, but it didn't register. Like what Duncan said, you know, they don't take it seriously. They failed in that effort.

MR. BUSH: Another question right here, third row?

SPEAKER: Thank you. Both for Professor McCargo, and for Mr. Pathan. Thank you very much for the point on the population, I had no idea.

MR. BUSH: Could you identify yourself, please?

SPEAKER: Yes. My name is Hong-Phong Pho, I'm the relatively new desk officer at the Department of Commerce for Thailand, and Australia and New Zealand. The population issues, now usually when you have a lot of problems, you try to find solutions and one of the potential solutions out there, is plus the new best-kept secret in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN economic community.

What are your most optimistic and most pessimistic view on that? Can that be a solution for Thailand in the longer-run in resolving its issues, on the population issue as well? Is there a split between the general population -- or part of the population,

and those in Southern Thailand, is the growth rate higher there, and the implications?

MR. BUSH: Duncan?

MR. McCARGO: I'm not sure, if I have the number here -- Okay. Yes, I mean in theory, look, this is for having some interesting benches in the European Union these days grappling with similar kinds of issues, and my own country has been having this problem that were it not for immigrants coming from other European countries, you wouldn't have enough people to work, but the difficulty is how to manage this in a way that works for everybody, especially in societies where there's not an open public debate about what's actually going on.

Now the problem with the ASEAN economic community rules, as I understand them, which is not especially well, there's a very limited number of categories of people who are supposed to be allowed to move and work so far, that they are highly educated professionals, but actually the highly-educated professionals are neither here nor there, because most ASEAN countries don't really have a particular shortage of those highly educated professionals.

The shortages are in people to do the basic labor which most of the Thai population no longer wishes to do. So if you walk past any construction site in Bangkok you can't hear a word of Thai being spoken, you can only hear Khmer and Burmese. So what you need to do is have a much more liberal ASEAN-wide policy to say that people from potentially less developed ASEAN countries have the right to and work legally, and fill all that demand for labor without being constantly harassed by the authorities.

And we see no move toward that, because that has the possibility to open up all kinds of problems. So we saw right after the coup, General Prayuth making some critical remarks about Cambodian workers in Thailand, whereupon about 600,000 of them disappeared. And then he had to go back on television and then go to Cambodia

himself, and beg them to come back, because the country can't actually function without all these illegal migrant workers.

But you don't hear any politicians going on television to say, actually, our country is now, you know, I have a Thai host family, 30 years ago, their domestic workers were coming from the northeast, now their domestic workers they go and pick up from the Burmese border. That's a pattern right across the society, but nobody is saying in public, look, we need these migrant workers, without them we are sunk. We have to welcome them, we have to find policies to engage with them, and to use this ASEAN economic community idea constructively, as a framework, but that is to happening.

And there's no political will, and this is not just about the pro-Thaksin or anti-Thaksin positions, and all the other stuff. Nobody across the political spectrum will go on record, or in public as saying we have to essentially -- to legalize all these illegal migrants. But that's the only thing that could possibly solve the problem.

MR. BUSH: Thank you. A question right here, and then I'll go back there.

SPEAKER: Addressed to McCargo. I just want to expand or ask for your opinion more on the establishment that you mentioned has multiple motives and internal conflicts. It's slightly -- a sort of a two-part question, the first part being, to what degree do you see the military as its own independence? And was their interest separate from those of the establishment or those of the palace? As in, do you think the course that they are pursuing right now is really just focused solely on their own benefit as opposed to that of the establishment as a wider thing, insofar as that exists? And my second question is about rumors of a counter coup, whether you think that is a possibility that could happen? Thank you so much.

MR. McCARGO: Yeah. Okay. Where do we start? I got into sort of hot

water more than 10 years ago when I wrote an article about what I call Network Monarchy and I try to get people to understand the monarchy, not as being all about the King or the members of the Royal Family, but to under there's a network of people who, either are linked to the monarchy, or would like to claim that they are linked to the monarchy.

So, at the time when I wrote that article, the monarchy itself, and the core members of the Privy Council, people in the immediate circle of the royal family were, I think, a lot more active. What's happened now is that those people are not in such good health, they are not getting any younger, they are not as active as they were, so increasingly other elements of the monarchical network have had to take over more and more day-to-day functions.

So, that's always been implicit within the model. People always say, you know, did so and so get an order to do X? And my argument is always that, it's not necessary, for any orders to be given. I always tell my students the cup of coffee story, if I've bored you with this before, please excuse me but, you know, I used to teach in Leeds four hours in a row, on Monday afternoons, and I would really need to get a coffee.

So after the third hour, I would cross the road to get the coffee, and I've had the coffee, and then the students asked me about network monarchy and concepts of power in Asia. And I said, well, look, where did this cup of coffee come from? And they said, oh, you went across the road and bought it. And I said, what does that tell you about our power relations? What week of the semester is this? This is now week six, how many times have I don't this? Six times. Actually if we had different power relations the coffee would, by this point, be appearing by itself.

I don't need to exert any agency in order to acquire the coffee to drink, the coffee will appear. So it's not necessary to -- once you have a system like the

hierarchical network system like this set up, it should function on autopilot. Nobody needs to give any instructions to anybody because people know what will please those who are higher up in the order of things.

So, I think what the military is doing now, is doing what it believes is required of it. Whether it's receiving any actual instruction or not, and of course what it believes is required of it, is going to be hopelessly mixed up with what it thinks it would really like to do anyway. And because we are all guilty of that, we would like to claim that we are doing things for ulterior motives and on behalf of wider social goals, but actually there are things that we do, very often correspond with our own immediate interest.

So, it's a very blurred line, trying to work out who is an independent actor in this kind of hierarchical network system where everybody, to some degree, knows their place, but the places are constantly being renegotiated, and all that's coming from the top are some fairly unclear smoke signals, most of the time. So, those who are lower down the order are interpreting those signals, insofar as there are any signals for their own benefit; so both of those things could be true at the same time.

So, what was the second bit? I can't read my own writing without my glasses. Counter coup, I don't know about that. And Crispin talks about it in his article, people are talking about the idea of a counter coup, when I talked to people last summer about a counter coup, nobody believed it was really possible. But, you know, never say never again, right? This is Thailand, I mean; staging a coup against yourself is a very standard procedure which has happened before.

It happened in 1972. There's no reason that we could really exclude the possibility of the military staging a coup against themselves, from the spectrum of possibilities that are open. I don't know whether you wanted to talk about that.

MR. PATHAN: It's okay.

MR. BUSH: The woman in the stripe shirt.

MR. McCARGO: You don't really want --

SPEAKER: I'm Mary Hastings, the Stimson Center. This is for Duncan McCargo. Since you brought up the idea of scenarios, did you have the best-case scenario, or do you think that there is a possibility of a positive outcome at all?

MR. McCARGO: Well, clearly the doomsday scenario is a worst-case scenario. All the others could have some positive elements. You could have, if the establishment was able to reach out to the people who were not onboard with them and find some kind of accommodation with them, the Pax establishment could be a positive scenario. Pax Shinawatra could be a positive scenario, given that there's a huge -- number of people still supporting that political position if there was an accommodation and an understanding between the two sides.

I think to go back to where we were before is very difficult, and that might not appear such a positive scenario because where we were before seem so unstable that, you know, it could just end up with replicating the same thing again. But I think that, to turn either Pax establishment or Pax Shinawatra into a positive scenario, involves some outreach and it involves some conversation, and it can't be conducted on the basis that we are the people who are 100 percent right, because the people, you know, on the pro-Thaksin and anti-Thaksin side, are absolutely convinced that they are 100 percent right about everything, which they can't be.

So what's needed is a scenario that might be based on one of those, but involves an element of reaching out, and actually reconciliation has become such a tarnished word in Thailand, that I hardly bear to utter the word. But certainly, conversation and the creation of some kind of public space in which discussion can take place, could follow from one of these scenarios.

And I think both of those scenarios that the Pax Shinawatra and the Pax establishment have different ends, different -- not making all sense here -- Yes, they have different polarities. So, at each end of those scenarios, is what you might call the revenge scenario. Okay. We've now absolutely and decisively won and we are going to wreak revenge upon you. The other ones are the sort of accommodation is conciliatory versions of those. And those are the optimistic, those are the only really optimistic ways forward.

MR. BUSH: Isn't it possible that all of this over-determined, and that the more likely process is to sub-optimal muddling through?

MR. McCARGO: Oh, yes. And that's exactly what, those scenarios could also form the basis of. So, the establishment seems to win and continues to muddle on. That's a middle-range point in the Pak's establishment scenario. Or Thaksin wins the next election and things muddle on in an unresolved way. Yes.

MR. BUSH: Okay. We'll go here, here, here and here. So we start over here; and sort of zigzag our way back.

MR. WINTERS: Steve Winters, Independent Consultant. I guess, if I'm correct, President Obama made some remarks about trying to encourage return to democratic procedures in Thailand recently. Does anyone have any insight about the timing of those remarks?

I mean, is there some reason why they popped up at the moment, and also just to add to that, at one of the think tanks, nearby, I hope that it's very -- it follows Thailand, I heard the comment, sort of a worried comment that said, well, you know, the U.S., I don't know how much attention they've been paying to Thailand, but the comment was the Chinese are all over the place, and the Chinese are heavily networked with both sides in this major dispute in Thailand.

So from the Mainland Chinese -- no matter who wins, they come out in a very good position, and that this was sort of an admonition to us to do something. So any thoughts on that?

MR. McCARGO: Yes. Obviously the announcement of this latest draft constitution gives the sort of cue for senior figures in the U.S. administration to say, now that you've got this draft constitution, why don't you get on and have your referendum, and to move back to electoral politics as quickly as possible. But those kinds of statements have been made on a fairly routine basis.

The difficulty has become in Thailand, but because you are dealing with what seems to be an increasingly nervous and anxious regime, and leadership, saying things doesn't seem to be construed in a very positive way any longer. And there was a change of ambassador, and we had a new ambassador, which seems like a very reasonable and sensible guy but, you know, within a couple weeks of his arrival he was already in even more hot water than his predecessor. So, there's a sense in which almost anything that the U.S. or the EU, and other people have been saying, say publicly triggers a negative reaction from the Thai side

So there's an unwillingness to listen to any of those messages, it's very difficult when people ask me, you know: What should be saying? What should we be doing? I'm struggling to give any sensible advice on exactly the best way forward, since it's obviously very delicate, there's a danger of making the situation worse. But at the same time, it's not good just to sit on the sidelines and not say anything. I actually think that it's good to say things. Yeah.

MR. BUSH: Right here?

MR. PARAMESWARAN: Thank you, both, for the presentations.

Prashanth with The Diplomat Magazine, and thanks for pointing out Shawn's article on

our website.

MR. McCARGO: Great.

SPEAKER: I wanted to get back to, because of the excellent presentation about scenarios at the national level, whether we can talk about scenarios for the Southern Thailand insurgency, since both of you have written and worked extensively on Southern Thailand. I'm specifically concerned about the relationship between the national level and the insurgency as always, the fact that when you have all these problems in Bangkok, the government can turn a blind eye, to some of these problems in the south.

So I'm wondering what the range of scenarios might be, and what some of the worrying ones, in particular, might be, particularly because that might convince people in Bangkok to say, you know, we need to deal with the situation urgently; rather than saying, we need to press pause on that situation while we deal with the things at the national level. Thanks.

MR. BUSH: Don?

MR. PATHAN: [Inaudible] is suggesting -- I mean, I talked about a narrative but I, you know, the cats are out of the bag, it's been 12 years now, and I don't think expanding, just expanding the narrative is not going to do it, is not going to cut it. Development is not an issue, but it can be a solution, and when I say, development, I'm talking about social mobility of the Malays, (inaudible) 85 percent bureaucrats in the deep south are Buddhists from somewhere else; combine that with nearly 70,000 troops it feels like an occupied territory and the view is an occupied territory.

So I think of the narrative, that Thai will have to do more in terms of social mobility. When I talk to the people on the ground, the villagers, including insurgence, you know, about expanding the narrative, one of the things that I get -- they

like the most, is the fact that the Pentagon named their helicopters after the natives, you know. So that, you know, do you think they would name a tank after us? You know, I said, not anytime soon.

But, you know, let me say something about the race relation. 85 percent Malay Muslim there, but the economy is controlled by the Chinese. There's problem among the younger people, about knowing us, knowing them, but the fabric of society, I think, is still somewhat intact, very much intact, and especially among the older people.

The problem is not between the two races, the problem is between the Malay and the Thai state, and the monarchy, there's plenty of, you know, royal targets, posters, billboards, even there is a community in Sea Sakhon, and for example, a district in Narathiwat, one of the group province. There's 150 families, transmigration families from the Northeast living there, and they got in touch. That's because they went there under the Royal Project. So the problem is not with the Royal Project, or with the monarchy, but with the governments, and the military and the cultural impunity, and so on.

MR. BUSH: Duncan?

MR. McCARGO: Yes. I'm now at Columbia teaching a comparative class on insurgencies in Southeast Asia, and it's actually giving me an excuse to read a lot of things that I was dimly aware of, and pay a bit more attention to them, because I have to talk about them, with some degree of plausibility every week. So we are looking actually -- we are looking at Southern Philippines, and we are looking at various parts of Burma.

And it's fairly clear what the scenarios are. There's only really one question to ask, what kind of autonomy are we going to give them that they will be able to live with? Because the international community after the great successes of places like

East Timor and South Sudan, it's not going to be desperately eager to create an independent Pattani State wedged between Malaysia and Thailand.

And Malaysia doesn't want Pattani anyway. I mean, it was the last thing that they need. So, the only thing that you could do is come up with some kind of, you know, whether you want to use the word autonomy, or you call it a special emergent region, something that would give people sufficient control over their own affairs, that they will be happy to stay within Thailand. That's where the scenarios have to be, and a few outspoken academics and civil society activists, and so on, have talked about.

Several prominent Thai politicians, at different times, have given speeches in which they endorse this idea, once. Almost none of them have ever talked about it twice. I wrote an article about it, and then I went through all the different statements that have made by different people. The article is called, Thinking the Unthinkable, Autonomy for Southern Thailand, and almost everybody said it was a good idea at one time or another, until they were told, you know, don't mention that again. So, including people who then got into power and reversed their position immediately.

MR. PATHAN: Like Yingluck.

MR. McCARGO: Like Yingluck Shinawatra, yeah. Lots of -- But Abhisit said it, Anand Panyarachun said it, all these people have said these things on record at certain points, but then when they had the chance to do more about it, and they realize the vested interest, and the military, and the establishment, for want of a better term, were not exactly happy with that kind of direction, it all had to go quiet.

So, this is the problem. There is -- We don't have an exact solution, but a solution for a conflict like this, is somewhere on what I call the autonomy spectrum, which could range from elected governors to some kind of full-blown autonomous region. Everybody knows it, and people won't talk about it in public, and there is no public space

to have a discussion about developing a set of scenarios, and some people have tried to do it, but it's very, very difficult, and with the military in charge, it's now become, again, a taboo topic.

During the Yingluck Government there was more open discussion about this. So during the Yingluck Government there was discussion about peace talks which would ultimately lead towards a political solution, now the talks are primarily, you know, to find out who the leaders are, so that we can take them out or buy them off, which has been a long-standing tradition of peace talks in the Thai Military context. Am I wrong?

MR. PATHAN: No. Not in that (crosstalk).

MR. BUSH: So the woman, back there?

SPEAKER: My name is Siniton Berham. I'm a student, first-year student at SAIS Johns Hopkins, from Thailand. I have two questions, and my first question is direct to Duncan McCargo -- Professor McCargo. The Network Monarchy work that you wrote 11 years ago, do you see any change or the tensions within the Network Monarchy itself, because it has been 10 years, and it could be some change, attentions, and it could be new groups emerging, I just wanted to know a little bit more about that.

And the second perhaps, any of the panelists could jump in. My question is that, empirically, as Thailand is constitutional monarchy, I mean succession shouldn't be that worrisome, because as a constitutional monarchy, no matter who govern -- I mean who is in that position, it should be that institution.

But then, like, England, right; but then besides the political interventions that you mentioned in the matter of monarchy, I would like -- Is it fair to say that one of the main problems is because how the institutions have been emphasizing on the individual more than the building of the institutions. Because my observation is that the years of lèse-majesté laws, and the purge of many people who are critical of the

institution, has been increasing, of the cases; and that might be a good measurement of how the institution is so sensitive on the issue of succession. And I could have a good reason -- I mean have a very big impact on the Thai political turnstile. Thank you.

MR. PATHAN: I need to go back to Thailand. (Laughter) But what I can say is that there is a zero-tolerant mentality, you know, and when you said monarchy, I'm not really sure if it's a monarchy, the people in the palace or is it the military who is doing this, zero-tolerant, you know. And even there was a guy who, denied bail several times for criticizing His Majesty's pet dog, you know.

MR. BUSH: Duncan?

MR. McCARGO: Yes. Okay. I thought someone would ask me about this sooner or later. We've done pretty well, because we got through several questions without anybody raising the M-word so explicitly.

Yes. And in some ways I should go back to Network Monarchy article, and write Network Monarchy Version 2. But I haven't been in quite the mood to do that. So I've been working on other related issues instead. But I've already hinted at ways in which the article, both the pre-figures, what's happened since, but also doesn't fully take into account those trends.

So I think what's happened with the Network Monarchy is that the network part is getting more and more important, and the monarchy is getting less and less important, because the monarchy isn't doing very much day-to-day, so other components of the network have stepped into the breach, supposedly to take over those functions.

And that, of course, isn't really a description of a constitutional monarchy, so although Thailand is, in theory, a constitutional monarchy, well, you know, people have been sued in Thai courts for saying that Thailand is a constitutional monarchy by

certain royalist activists. So, you know, even the phrase, constitutional monarchy, is not a phrase that's accepted by everybody in the Thai context. So, it's rather problematic to classify this system.

Succession, yeah, in theory everything is completely straightforward, because there's a plan, right? We know what's going to happen because there's a plan that says what's going to happen. Unfortunately, you know, we knew what was going to happen during elections, after elections, and all kinds of different political scenarios in Thailand, but funnily enough, it hasn't really been happening according to the rule book, and rules have been torn up, and constitutions have been shredded.

So even though, yeah, there's a plan, and there's a perfect possibility that things could go relatively smoothly, and some of my -- even my very critical foreign scholar friends believe that everything could actually go very smoothly. We also have every reason to believe that things in Thailand might not go according to the plan, that there might actually be another plan that nobody knows about, or another five plans, or another plan might be made up at the last minute, and we have seen all this before.

And this is the problem, if you have a regular constitutional monarchy, you know, like the British monarchy, which has its own problems which I could talk about, but this is not really the setting for me to do that. Thailand isn't like England, really, I mean, as someone from England who has been going to Thailand, it might seem like England, to a degree. And some people would like it to be more like England than it is. It has a monarchy, it has a parliamentary system, but neither of them functions in the same way, in the two countries.

So, this is the source of the problem. The source of the problem is that in theory there are rules, but because rules and plans have not been adhered to in the past, there's every reason to believe they might not be adhered to again, especially

because it's less and less about the monarchy and more and more about the networks, so that we have these actors coming in who claim to be acting on behalf of the monarchy, some of which can be quite erratic in their behavior.

That means that we don't know what's going to happen, as I've said in my talk. You know, I'd be crazy if I started predicting the future. I'd love to believe that everything is going to be smooth and simple, but when I try to believe that in the past, I normally learnt, you know, a harsh lesson, that I've been getting carried away with my optimism.

MR. BUSH: The gentleman back here, let's keep the question quick please?

MR. LARKIN: Hi. Thank you for your time today. My name is Michael Larkin. I represent Young Professionals in International Affairs. And I was wondering if you could describe what plausible leverage or tools could interested countries, not just the United States, but other countries in the region, or international actors have to influence the political process in the country.

And along with that, could you shed any light on the opinions of the average man and woman on the street in Thailand, how do they feel if other countries and organizations comment on the situation in Thailand?

MR. PATHAN: I don't know, the spin from the state is that, you know, this is our business and they used it for the Deep South as well, that they shouldn't really interfere, but there have been efforts, you know, very quiet, behind the scenes. Some semi open, like HD out of Geneva, the Humanitarian Dialogue, trying to get the Red Shirt, Yellow Shirt together, that kind of relationship, but as long as it doesn't make the headline it's okay.

But once it -- You know, like corruptions on the street, you know, people

don't talk about it, but once you make the headline that they get bent out of shape, you know, I think that's this -- (inaudible).

MR. McCARGO: The question about ordinary people on the street, it is a little difficult for me to answer because I haven't been back to Thailand for a few months, but when I was there I was talking to a lot of people in different parts of the country. And the problem is that there's no agreement. If you talk to people in Bangkok, who are broadly sympathetic to the coup, and the present political scenario, they will tell you that foreigners shouldn't be interfering in things and it's an act of neo-imperialism, but the American Government says that it will be very nice to see Thailand respect human rights, and things like that.

But then, if you go to the Northeast and talk to people in villages there, they'll tell you that, please, go back to the U.K., go to the U.S., if you have a chance to speak to any international audience, please tell them, that we absolutely hate this government, we are deeply unhappy with what's going on, and we are just counting the days until we can get rid of them, and please express any kind of public support that you can.

So, I hear literally these two different kinds of messages from people on the street and they are both legitimate representations of what those people feel. And that is the real difficulty in Thailand now. It's so polarized, polarization is there in every society, but we've reached a point where people can't have conversations with each other. And those people are not talking to each other at all. And there's no social interaction between them, and in many cases, families can't have conversations about politics at home, there are a lot of tensions amongst old groups of friends, and former classmates who used to get together for dinners, and can't get together for dinners anymore.

Some of the Thais in the audience are nodding, as though they are slightly familiar with these kinds of problems. So, whichever side you are on, it's become very, very difficult to talk to people on the other side, and that produces very differential answers to that sort of question. Would we welcome people outside paying attention to us, from an extreme no, to a, please, do everything you can.

MR. BUSH: Questions over here; the gentleman right here?

MR. REGAN: Thank you, sir. I'm Matthew Regan. I'm a PhD student at the University of Maryland, School of Public Policy. So, you've been talking about lots of institutions and crisis, and I want to bring up one more institution in crisis, perhaps; which is Buddhism.

MR. McCARGO: Yes.

MR. REGAN: So, we have the ongoing kind of succession crisis with the Supreme Patriarch, and monks and the prayer session or protest, whatever you want to call it, Buddhamonthon, about a week or two ago. So the one question, how is this -- because presumably these are more kind of different levels of elite interests, right? Because you have the Prime Minister and the Council on the one hand saying very, kind of, stark things about who the successor should be or why a successor is disqualified.

And on the other hand you have various other segments of the population saying, just follow the protocol and put this candidate forward. So that's one. And two, why do you think in the South, we didn't see the catalyst of sort of a 969, Bodu Bala Sena kind of reactionary -- Or, did we, and it was just kind of squashed down quickly?

MR. PATHAN: The people who are trying to make this a religious conflict are the Buddhist nationalists, you know, when they cited the reason for making Buddhism the national religion, in the Constitution, they always make reference to the

Patani, you know, my group, Patani Forum. We'd go around the country and we do, you know, like small workshops, to talk to the Buddhists, get their understanding. We'll listen to them, and what scares me is that they look up to that crazy monk in Burma, you know, and say, we need somebody like Wirathu --

MR. McCARGO: Wirathu, yes.

MR. PATHAN: Wirathu, and we need somebody like that. In fact, there's effort by some Thai Buddhist Nationalist organizations funding this radio station, so they could broadcast the message. You know, so that's scary, and there's effort in towns like Nan, and Shing-Hweii Shing-Li, and I think they call, Sawan, I think, I'm not sure. But anyway, and anti-mosque, the people come out in full force to demand that Muslims cannot go to mosques here, you know. Why? Because we don't want this to be like Patani, when, in fact, it's two different issues, you know, so --

MR. McCARGO: Yes. I've written a couple of articles that might be relevant that I can give you the details to later, one in 2012 that really explicitly compares the two parallel sets of politics, the Sangha politics and the national politics. So, polarization that that we see in Thai politics now is actually a polarization that's been going on in the Buddhist order for an awful long time, and it's been very pronounced at least since the 1960s, with the -- There's supposed to be an alternation, just as there's supposed to be some kind of political alternation between two parties.

An election system that's supposed to be an alternation between the two sides, but in fact, the Maha Nikaya sect is much, much larger, and the Dhammayut sect is actually very small and very weak these days. So their continuing claim, you know, virtually for the whole period over the last 70 years, they have monopolized the office of the Supreme Patriarch, something like 10 years out of the past 70 years have been Maha Nikaya as opposed to Dhammayut, it's very extreme.

And that's a source of incredible resentment, but it also mapped -- This is the problem, you read all these books telling you that the function of the Thai, Sangha is to legitimate the monarchy in the nation, but actually most monks come from very ordinary backgrounds. A lot of them are, if not exactly pro-Thaksin, they are sort of more Red inclined than Yellow inclined, and that's something that the establishment has been trying to manage, which is to suppress the political orientation of the monks, which is moved further and further away from their control. So there's a massive schism that's operating there.

And the rise of Buddhist chauvinism across Southeast Asia is a huge phenomenon, and we've seen it in these debates, than provision in the draft constitution that says that Buddhism needs to be specially protected as a religion. All this kind of stuff is testimony to the very aggressive movement that's been taking place amongst elements of the Buddhist order, but also in the lay population, partly linked but solely linked to the conflict in the South.

So, yes, this is -- When we start to talk about doomsday scenarios and rebellions, and so on, what makes me very, very nervous is a lot of my colleagues who work on Buddhism have, I'm afraid, a very romantic notion about what Buddhism is. Not many people in Thailand are really meditating, it's not Zen, it's not all sitting down calmly, it's about a lot of other stuff, some of which doesn't get the particularly close scrutiny, and much of which gets involved in politics very, very quickly.

MR. BUSH: Okay. One last question.

MS. CAMPOS: Beatrice Campos, of Foreign Service, also I served in Thailand and China. And I'd like to go back to the earlier question about China. We are hearing a lot about Chinese activity, on the political -- on the international level more than domestic, but what role do you see China or the Chinese Embassy playing in Thai

domestic politics?

MR. PATHAN: None, really. It's more submarines, you know. You buy three of our submarine and, you know, get one German. And you don't have strings attached, you know. You could have as many coups as you want, you know. But they did say -- The Chinese did say that they are very grateful that the Thai is considering. I think it's a done deal, but it's the timing of it, you know, sort of postponing coming up with some fancy excuse about inspection, blah-blah-blah, but I --

MR. McCARGO: The trains?

MR. PATHAN: No. The submarines.

MR. McCARGO: Oh submarines, okay.

MR. PATHAN: And the Thai security team said that the Chinese just make us feel like beggars, you know, they, in fact, I think, the Defense Minister told the Thai side that they are very grateful that they are buying, or considering buying from us, because this was allowed for us to get a better understanding of the navigation of the submarines. Does that mean co-sharing, the intelligence sharing, I don't know, if it could lead to that.

MR. BUSH: With that, we bring our program to an end. I think we've all benefited from the insights of two real experts on the way of important issues concerning Thailand. Please join me in thanking them. (Applause)

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