

# Thailand: Thaksin's Mad Dash to Sham Elections

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Global Research, January 22, 2014

[Land Destroyer](#)

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

With little else to point to for legitimacy, elections are all Thaksin has left but it may be a trick he has used one too many times.

To put into perspective upcoming elections scheduled for February 2, 2014, a little over a week away, it must be remembered that Thaksin Shinawatra is a convicted criminal, living as a fugitive abroad, evading multiple arrest warrants, a 2 year jail sentence, and a long list of pending court cases. He is also an accused mass murderer with by far the worst human rights record in Thai history.

Despite this, he - by his and his party's own admission - openly runs the current regime, with his sister Yingluck Shinawatra serving merely as his nepotist placeholder. The election campaign slogan for the last general election in 2011 was literally, "Thaksin Thinks, Puea Thai Does," Puea Thai being his political party.

Forbes would report in their article, "[Thaksin in Exile: Advising Sister, Digging for Gold](#)," that:

Regarding his behind-the-scenes role in the party and policy, he is not shy: "I am the one who thinks. Like our slogan during the campaign, Thaksin thinks, Pheu Thai acts."

The New York Times admitted in an early 2013 article titled, "[In Thailand, Power Comes With Help From Skype](#)," that:

For the past year and a half, by the party's own admission, the most important political decisions in this country of 65 million people have been made from abroad, by a former prime minister who has been in self-imposed exile since 2008 to escape corruption charges.

The country's most famous fugitive, Thaksin Shinawatra, circles the globe in his private jet, chatting with ministers over his dozen cellphones, texting over various social media platforms and reading government documents e-mailed to him from civil servants, party officials say.

# Out of his country, but not out of power

BANGKOK

## Exiled former premier helps run Thailand using Skype and social media

BY THOMAS FULLER

Millions of people across the globe have cut the tethers to their offices and enjoy working from wherever they want. But the political party governing Thailand has taken the idea of telecommuting in to an altogether different realm.

For the past year and a half, by the party's own admission, the most important political decisions in this country of 65 million people have been made from abroad, by a former prime minister who has not set foot in the country since 2008.

Thaksin Shinawatra circles the globe in his private jet, chatting with ministers over his dozen cellphones, texting over various social media platforms and reading documents e-mailed to him from bureaucrats, party officials say.

It might be described as rule by Skype. Or governance by instant messenger.

Mr. Thaksin was removed from power in a military coup six and a half years ago and remains in exile because of a conviction for abuse of power, a highly politicized case initiated by the

coup makers. But that has not stopped him from helping run Thailand — by remote control.

Officially, his sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, is prime minister (he nominated her for the job in 2011). But from his homes in Dubai and London, from the gold mines he owns in Africa and during regular visits to nearby Asian countries, Mr. Thaksin, 63, has harnessed the Internet and mobile technol-

ogy to create one of the most unusual and innovative ways of governing a country.

"We can contact him at all hours," said Charupong Ruangsuwan, the interior minister and secretary general of Mr. Thaksin's Pheu Thai Party. "The world has changed. It's a boundless world. It's not like a hundred years ago when you had to use a telegraph."

To illustrate the point during an inter-

view, Mr. Charupong took out his iPhone and scrolled through the list of Mr. Thaksin's phone numbers (Mr. Thaksin gives different numbers to different people, often depending on seniority).

"If we've got any problem, we give him a call," Mr. Charupong said.

The day-to-day governance of the country is carried out by Ms. Yingluck, who is genial, photogenic and 18 years younger than Mr. Thaksin. She cuts the ribbons and makes the speeches.

Ms. Yingluck has on occasion sought to play down her brother's role. Soon after taking office, when Mr. Thaksin joined the weekly cabinet meeting via Skype, reporters asked who was really the head of the government. Ms. Yingluck insisted that she was in charge and said that Mr. Thaksin had joined the discussion to offer "moral support."

But if there is one thing that allies and enemies of Mr. Thaksin agree on, it is that he is the one making the big decisions.

"He's the one who formulates the Pheu Thai policies," said Noppadon Pattama, a senior party official who also serves as Mr. Thaksin's personal lawyer. "Almost all the policies put forward during the last election came from him."

Sondhi Limthongkul, a leader of the "yellow shirt" movement that has taken to the streets many times to



Thaksin Shinawatra, the exiled Thai leader, checking one of his cellphones in Dubai.

JUMANA EL HELLOO/REUTERS

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Image: [The New York Times openly admits](#) that Thailand is currently run by unelected convicted criminal/fugitive Thaksin Shinawatra. Clearly any proxy government or elections in which it participates in are illegitimate by both Thai and international standards. [Thaksin's foreign ties](#) are what have afforded him impunity regarding an otherwise cartoonish, 3rd world dictatorship.

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There is no question then that Thaksin Shianwatra is illegally running Thailand by proxy. Being unelected, Thaksin Shinawatra is by all accounts a dictator, and his "government" a regime, [however cleverly they try to dress it up](#).

This would be unimaginable in many of the countries lending support to the upcoming sham elections, including the United States. Still, editorial boards of papers like [the Washington Post](#), and even [US Congressmen](#) have been weighing in on the side of Thaksin - calling those standing up to this poorly disguised dictatorship "anti-democratic militants."

Indeed, standing between Thaksin and his renewed "mandate," are hundreds of thousands of protesters that have taken to the streets in [four unprecedented mass mobilizations](#), and are now camping in the streets in an extended "[Occupy Bangkok](#)" campaign. The only "militants" however, are those associated with the regime, who just one day before [a deadly grenade attack targeted the protest's main leader, Suthep Thaugsuban](#), announced that they had staged weapons in Bangkok and were preparing to attack protesters.

In TIME's "[Bangkok Shutdown: Yingluck Supporters Prepare to Fight for Democracy](#)," it's reported that:

As Thailand's anti-government protests enter their fourth day, observers say prospects for violent confrontation are increasing, with reports of government supporters stockpiling weapons in case of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's ouster.

According to the Bangkok Post, radical members of the Red Shirts — diehard

champions of Yingluck and her notorious brother Thaksin Shinawatra — are readying a cache of arms in case the 46-year-old premier is forced from office by either military or judicial intervention.

The paper quoted a Red Shirt source as saying “There are strong anti-coup and anti-court sentiments among the red-shirt mavericks who are familiar and experienced with weapon use.”

And despite this brazen admission, with attacks carried out precisely as were promised by Thaksin’s red shirts, the regime would today [declare a “state of emergency” over the capital](#) and surrounding provinces, claiming it was the protesters who were being violent.

A state of emergency “allows” the regime to outlaw public gatherings (i.e. the protests), censor the media, arbitrarily arrest anyone, and institute curfews. The dictatorial state of emergency will initially last 60 days, easily overlapping upcoming elections.

Elections on February 2nd could not be any more cartoonishly 3rd world, corrupt, and illegitimate. The opposition is boycotting them, the only major party contending them is openly run by a convicted criminal and his own sister, and now they have outlawed protests, opposition media, and suspended the rule of law.

Of course, it still remains to be seen if the regime can actually enforce this state of emergency. Either way it doesn’t seem they can come out on top. If they do begin censoring the media, arresting the opposition, and dispersing protesters – (media, opposition, and protesters all being parts of democracy, not just elections) their “victory” on February 2nd will look no different than Saddam’s or Kim Jong III’s. If they fail to disrupt protests which are set to expand [as rice farmers cheated by the regime begin joining in](#), it will be the final nail in their coffin. The regime will not survive if elections are postponed.

This helps answer the question of “cui bono?” during the recent terrorist attacks this week – as if the red shirt’s own admissions weren’t enough. The only way to impose a state of emergency was if there was sufficient violence. Since the protesters have been peaceful for months, the only way to create violence was to attack them through [long-planned covert violence](#).

It is difficult to understand how there are people still claiming terrorism, plus draconian emergency decrees, plus nepotist criminal party leaders running in one-party elections, all somehow equal “democracy.” It is much easier to see how they all add up to a dictatorship desperately trying to disguise itself as “democratic.” With such brazen, dangerous, and quite deadly criminality infecting the highest levels of governmental power in Thailand, it is no wonder unprecedented protests have taken to the streets, and will continue to do so until Thaksin Shinawatra and his corrosive effect on the nation has been uprooted completely and permanently.

Whatever the outcome over the next few weeks and months, resistance and awareness will only grow. If Thaksin manages to cling to power this time, he will only be all the weaker the next time around. The disadvantage of being deceitful and exploitative, is that eventually people will uncover the truth. Once these people wake up, they will not go back to sleep. Those with the truth on their side, also have time on their side – all they need is the patience to use it to their advantage.

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