

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE OF MILITARY INVOLVEMENT INTO POLITIC BETWEEN THAILAND AND MYANMAR

*“Intervention only works when the people concerned seem to be keen for peace “*

*Nelson Mandela*

From the quotes by Nelson Mandela, we could see that intervention is people's interest and people idea to create a peace. Therefore, Thailand and Myanmar as a country in the South East Asia have the same experience in term of political condition, like the military involvement in politics and the important role of military in politic and directness of life of people in both countries (Wyat, 1984). Indeed, those conditions within the two countries have their similarities like in the system, structure and function of the political system. Moreover, in comparing Thailand and Myanmar I would like to use the political structure as the object of comparison. Therefore we could see and analyze the similarities between Thailand and Myanmar about military involvement into politics. Indeed, the involvement is happening because of the people in Thailand and Myanmar particularly military regimes are willing to create peace.

In this phenomenon, we could see and analyze those aspect within Thailand and Myanmar. According to Gabriel A Almond about theory of Comparative Politics, in the chapter of structure and political institutions, there are several

aspect that could become the comparison within a state such as interest group, political parties, executives body and economic (business) (Masoed, Mohtar, 1989)

#### **A. The Similarities of Thailand and Myanmar Military Involvement in Democratization Process**

According to the concept of military by Moris J. Janowitz and Hasnan Habib, the nature of military is an organization that consists of people who are able to use the war staff and has perfect physical condition to fight in the battle field, and the main job of the military is to protect the state from external and internal threat. Therefore, military is also called as the "*Emergency Organization*" that has a responsibility to secure the nation and attack another country if necessary (Cholisin, 2002).

Meanwhile, in some countries military has been involved into political business and interfering any kind of political activities indirectly or directly, either by becoming member of political party or by creating some political party in order to gain legitimacy from the society to become a ruling party. In Thailand and Myanmar, the involvement of military into politics and democratic process becomes a common issue in both countries, because military has intervened in politics since ancient times. Generally, the main reason of military involvement in

politics is a mission in order to defend and protect the state (Royal Thai Army, 2009).

In both countries, military has stated themselves as the professional institutions by playing into politics and tends to focus on the economic and political affairs. Referring to the idea of praetorianism by Amos Perlmutter, in Thailand and Myanmar military has actively entered to the political system and act as a dominant institution in controlling a country in politic and business issue (Gimbel, 1978).

In Thailand, since 1932 when shifted from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy, military has started to expand their power to political arena. The authority of military junta has started entering interest group, political party, executive body and creating their own bussines. It is all about the power of military junta that always struggles to claim themselves as the powerful institution in Thailand. Meanwhile, if we corelate this issue with the idea of Samuel P. Huntington about professionalism, it iss clear that military is backlash with the idea of their professionalism. Basically, as the explanation in previous paragraph, the main focus of the military is how to secure a country either from external or internal threatfrom anywhere (APEGGA, 2004).

In Myanmar military has a significant influence since 1936-1940's and until now, the junta military becomes the ruling party. The military power and their authority is like the heritage, because their unity makes them always in the top of throne. On the other word, the other party as an opposition tries to defeat military

existence but it always failed. We can see in 1988, that the military has challenged by the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Su Kyi. At that time, military was defeated by NLD in the election by only gaining the minority vote. Meanwhile, NLD gained the majority vote and took all the vote from the societies. But then, military seems like ignoring the result of the election and they continue to claim themselves as the powerful institution to lead Myanmar/Burma (Katsamaporn, 2010).

Furthermore, there are so many military elites that become the Prime Minister and President. It means that, for decades military as a force always has power in Myanmar until today. See, the president is from military background Thein Sein. He starts his power since 2007 until now. The Previous presidents also come from military such as Than Swe, Saw Maung, Khin Nyunt and other military elite in the past eras. Indeed, military also have their own business like Union of Myanmar Economic Holding Limited (UMHEL) and the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC). Hence, Thailand and Myanmar military control every element that make them always in power and have strong authority.

**B. The Differences of Military Involvement into Democratic Process  
between Thailand and Myanmar**

The existence of civil society can be as a measurement of a country to be categorized as democratic or not. Definitely, the people are the main actors in the democratic system. Based on the liberal scholar David Held, civil society must be a requirement for the democratic development (Pietryzk, 2001). In Thailand and Myanmar are two countries that implement democratic system, but there are some the difference between both countries, even though Thailand and Myanmar have been along time implementing a democratic system. Thailand is since 1932 while Myanmar is since 1936.

In Thailand, civil society remains active to join the political arena. In 2010, Thai civil society was actively involved in the demonstration with the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD). It is a phenomenon, where the civil society takes an action to promote their interest by joining the demonstration regarding their dissatisfaction toward the system. Thai society that is against the military is using the Red shirt as a symbol. On the other side, Thai society who are pro to the government wear the yellow shirt (KEPA, 2011). Meanwhile in Myanmar, the civil society is weak compared with Thai civil society. The limitation of people action in Myanmar makes the people cannot do a lot toward the democratization process, because under the military control they have had little space to be developed. Moreover, military has created a strict regulation regarding

civil action. While individuals are possible to complain about any condition, they still cannot criticize the military directly by using the media, because the military extremely control over the media and communication technologies like internet and mobile phone. By those condition, certain student and educated people have chosen to leave the country than struggle (Evans, 2001).

### **1. Civil-Military Relation in Thailand Since 1932 - 2011**

Basically, civil-military relation becomes an interesting issue in Asian countries, such as in Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia and so on. In Thailand, the relation of civil and military is categorized as an active relation, in which the civil society is strong and acts actively to join into political arena particularly in democratization process. On the other words, the role of Thai civil society is considered as the player in political issue and has given significant influence toward democratization and the political decision (Chambers, 2010). In Thailand, civil society has an important role to play in strengtening democracy. Indeed, they are as a strong and reliable civil society that can represent the people's interest and the other community within a state. The existence of Thai civil society will be meaningfulfor democracy process in the future. One of the major challenges faced by the country is how to consolidate democracy.

Fortunately, Thai civil society has succeeded in democratizing the political system and force the program of reforms, including the enactment of legislation in

1997. During the Chuan government (1998-2000), some civil groups, especially the Assembly of the Poor, organized farmers and held demonstrations against the power of the state to achieve social justice. Therefore, the existence of civil society is very active and has a strong commitment to promote the democratization in Thailand. That is why, we can assume that the relation between civil and military in Thailand is not in harmony. Since 1932, after the shift from absolute monarchy to monarchy constitutional, civil and military have been competing about the power and authority in politics and government system. In every period, the civilian and military always act as the player that want to be a winner, because they think that they are the most appropriate and have the ability to lead the government and political dominance. After the 1932, military influence on civil society was growing up dramatically, but in 1944 was falling into the lowest levels of power. On the contrary, in 1947 with support from royalist actors like bussines men and other elites military returned and got the power back and civilians were under military control until 1973 (Corben, 2010).

The civilians struggle to balance the power with military by using their skill and idea of freedom. Finally, from 1973 until 1976 military and civilian were in medium levels or remain balanced, even though military still led the politics. Again, in 1976 military staged a coup and took full control over the civil society until 1979. After that, a power sharing between civil society and military happened in 1979, in which the representative of military side was not elected to be the prime

minister. Then, in 1988 power sharing was created and it allowed the civilian prime minister to be elected. He is Chatchai Chunhavan. At the moment, civil and military was in power sharing, when the civilian prime minister were elected along side military authority.

In 1991, military again staged a coup toward civilian prime minister, because the military was not satisfied with civilian government (Chambers, 2010). In 2001, Thaksin as civilian Prime minister was elected and civil had high authority over the government system. Thaksin Sinawatra was the civilian that ever become the prime minister of Thailand. He succeeded to give freedom for the society. He is democratically elected to become the prime minister from 2001 and won again in 2005. The state has become stronger again. His government has launched a populist policies, for example, providing a practically free health care for all people, giving money to every village to set up village funds, and declaring a debt moratorium for farmers. Policies should, in principle, strengthen civil society and the consolidation of democracy.

Unfortunately, Thaksin should surrender in 2006 by bloody military coup d'état. Military junta was knowing the great mistake of Thaksin era, because Thaksin was accused of corruption cases. On the other hands, in 2011 general election, Yingluck the sister of Thaksin was elected to become the Prime Minister. She is from Puea Thai (People party) party and won the absolute majority point



after winning 265 of the 500 seats, defeating the Abhisit Vejjajiva from democratic party (military side), only getting 159 from the rest of seats (Davi, 2011).

In the era of Yingluck, the civilian led power sharing with the military. At that time, military was along side with civilian government in a political system, in which the military was an actor and kept watching Yingluck government. In Thailand, as a form of the existence of civil society in Thai politics, there is a group of people called Red-Shirt which begin on 14 March 2010. They became an active group which staged a protest movement in Bangkok, (United front for Democracy against Dictatorship) UDD which is also known as the red shirts, supporting former prime minister of Thailand. In 2006, Thaksin Shinawatra was overthrown in a coup and forced to flee abroad. Thaksin was accused of being disloyal to the king, because he attempted to create a propaganda by controlling the media. He was also accused of doing corruption and the most serious one is Thaksin has made powerful enemy in some parts of the Thai elite, by being disloyal to the king (Davi, 2011) .

Nevertheless, UDD leaders wanted to fight for Thaksin and hoped to topple the government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and rejected the governments offer of early elections. On the other hands, as a response of UDD or Red-Shirt, The People Alliance for Democracy (PAD) or known as Yellow-Shirt fought for the king and promoted the justice idea to be against Thaksin from what he has done (Corben, 2010). Therefore, those all phenomena show the fact that in Thailand the role of civil society takes part in political arena and considered as the actor who

give some significant influence in politics. Hence, it is clear that the civil and military relation is not in harmony. It is the interesting issue we have seen within ASIAN countries, in which the democratization process was going to be uneasy ways. In this issue, all people think that they have the right to promote their idea and give any contribution. This is the idea of democracy that makes Thai civil society confident to act in order to fight for their rights (Buchanan, 2010).

## **2. Civil-Military Relation in Myanmar**

The situation of civil-military relation in Myanmar has been influenced by the history such as civil war, independence struggle, the parliamentary crisis in 1950s and the demonstration of pro-democracy in 1988. The domination of military over the politics was ongoing until 2010 and ahead of the recent era. In 1947, the era of colonialism before Burma's independence, Aung San and civil politician Thakin U Nu as the fighter of Burma/Myanmar created the political parties named Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPEL). Since the creation of AFPEL, based on 1947 constitution civilian had a control over the military, security policy promotions including political issue (Chambers, 2010).

In 1948, Burma/Myanmar gained the independence from British, led by Thakin AFPEL who succeeded to consolidate their power over control the government. On the other hand, a conflict named rebellion/civil war and ethnic background cannot be avoided, because some ethnic like Karen was considered to

secede from Myanmar. Meanwhile, without any legal recognition from the government they still fought for independence. The result, many people become victims of that war.

Therefore, it makes the military thinking about their role in politics. Then, the military saw that civilian government had less ability and couldn't create a peaceful condition within a country and military. When a political means were unsuccessful to resolve the problem, then it is time for military to take an action on it. Since then, military rapidly seeks the way to expand their role into politics and extend their power in the country. Furthermore, military also seized their power into administration and business field. Thus, they are very strong and solid. That is why, it's easy to get interconnected in social, economic and political skills in order to lead military's politizations and the expansion into other areas such as politics and economics as the ideology of military such as nationalism and socialism and start to monitor civil society activities. (Chambers, 2010).

In 1958, civilian government was Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League as well as experiencing internal conflict. It made them divided into two factions, and they lead a crisis within parliamentary which decreased the legitimacy of civilian governance in the eyes of military regime. Hence, military strongly announced the idea of military to protect the country and to save a country by staging a coup to U Nu in 1962. Military led by Ne Win took all over political power and government system. Since the coup, military officers remained dominating the committees in the government and only the lowest level like local sector was handled by civilian

government. Seeing that condition, the military took a control toward civilians, because the civilians in Myanmar were categorized as weak actors. There is no serious response from the civilians to the military. Military was powerful to promote that only military force was capable of ensuring national unity and stability and in here civilian remain weak. Hence, even though the condition is like unbalanced, it looks like that every civilian accepts that condition (Group I. C., *The Role of Civil Society*, 2001).

As a measurement of the military step to promote their idea, military announced Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) 1972-74. After the establishment of BSPP, military proved that they have strong motivation to save and to create unity by using their ideology and automatically it will marginalize the existence of civilians inside the politics and government. At that time, Ne Win became the Chairman of BSPP, while he was also the president of Myanmar and there was 75% of BSPP members who were active as military officers. In the early 1980, the members of BSPP executive consisted of active military and one of them was the civilian. BSPP government was relatively cohesive compared to AFPEL. It is also different from other contemporary military regimes in Southeast Asia to be relatively stable in maintaining extensive control over the nationalized economy. Hence it is preventing the emergence of an independent business. This power is imbalanced between military and civil society. It is one of the main factors which allows the regime to survive for so long. However, due to the tight control over the economy, BSPP was not able to stimulate economic development, so that the

United Nations in 1987 declared Burma / Myanmar as a less developed country (Bundongkarn, 2014).

*a) Civil-Military in 1988*

Under military regime, independent groups have a little space to emerge and develop. Although there are some religious, cultural and social organizations to be active and involved over government control particularly in local level, it seems that military creates an organization in order to promote loyalty and automatically eliminate the civil organizations. In 1988, the civil society initiated the formation to be against the government. So, a demonstration occurred and it was done by the civilians. The initial protestors in 1988 were the first students to take an action toward military regime. The actors of the demonstration include doctors, lawyers, housewives, civil servants and wage labourers. Meanwhile, the union of student particularly high school and university was established to respond and to be against military dictatorship (Stiftung, 2014).

The main reason of the students is to promote freedom and democratic idea, so they expand to the city and some other regional networks. The military regime takes a step using the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Hence, in 1988 particularly on 18 September a bloody day happened because the SLORC shot any student who joined the demonstration over the streets and around 10,000 people had been killed.

campaign. But then, her party easily won the election by gaining the majority point more than 80 % of the parliamentary seats. It has defeated the military party, supported by students, monks, and other minority societies within the country. After seeing the result, the military seemed to refuse the results of the election and continued to control the country for more than 20 years. This phenomenon extremely created a big issue in political history and democratization process in

civil-military relation in Myanmar became an interesting issue and gained a lot of domestic and international attention. No matter how often the civil society took action that is democracy and tries to promote an idea that military has always been the strongest actor in the world of politics and government in Myanmar. Indeed, it looks that civil in Myanmar is weaker than the civil in Thailand that has already made any change and strong competition in the world of politics and government system (Chambers, 2010).

In addition, military domination continued until the recent era. In 2011, Thein Sein was elected to become the president of Myanmar. He is a politician and a former military commander and gained the first term in 1988 as the major of infantry division. Then, he ever became the prime minister from 2007 until 2011. After taking office in March 2011, Thein Sein created a new reform initiative and eventually had a good relationship with the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. In the era of Thein Sein, the rating of authoritarian seems decreased and it tends to be more liberal. It makes the restriction for social media like internet and print media have been relaxed and also prepublication has stopped. Hence, it has allowed a free and active media access than before. Furthermore, the new laws related with public demonstration and social movement have been introduced and allowed for the social assembly. On the other hand, those all freedoms are really strict under very specific condition, so there is a requirement for every policy that has been made. Moreover, although liberalization was seen, the military still takes a control and becomes the dominant political actors who use their veto right (Stiftung, 2014).

Military has fully controlled the civil society in Myanmar. The election of Then Shein as the president proves that military always becomes a powerful party in Myanmar. Military has succeeded to continue their authority since the era of 1988 until now. Hence, from the explanations above we can see and understand about the difference of civil-military relations in Thailand and Myanmar in a democratization process. In Thailand, the civil-military relations has a balance of power although, military is the powerful institution in Thailand and seems to dominate the political arena including civil society. However, civil society cannot see out of one eye, because in civil Thailand is strong and has a very important role and influence in politics and in the process of democratization. (Hamish, 2013). Military in Thailand is like firefighters. It is because they are only into politics when chaos happens. They tried to improve, and then handed back to the civil power. Comparing with Thailand, Myanmar civil society is very fragile and seems nothing as the opposition. It is because in Myanmar, military always becomes a major actor in the political arena and absolutely controls the government system.

At that time, military seems to reduce their power in order to calm down the situation. This proves that, since 1962 military coup, the military in Myanmar always dominates in politics and control the government. The main reason is to protect the people and the state of foreign countries to implement an authoritarian system and does not provide the opportunity for people to get involved in politics. In 1988, there was a demonstration by the people, especially students. They aimed to end the military era, but the military shot almost all demonstrators. It is the

proves that the military character is very hard and it's hereditary until now in the era  
Than Swe. the military will continue to be the dominant force who make policy in  
government, politics, and business. (Firmas, 2015).