by Chang Kuo Tao

The most obvious thing about Thailand's October 6 coup was the brutality. The second most obvious thing was the involvement of the Thai Monarchy on the side of the Radical Right. The international press has paid considerably more attention to the former than to the latter. In order of importance, however, it is the legitimizing stamp of Royalist upon those who laid siege to Bangkok's Thammasat University more than the hatred with which they wreaked their brown-shirt violence that has, for lack of a better comparison, marked October 6 as the beginning of Southeast Asia's equivalent to the Civil War in Spain.

Mob torture, immolations, lynchings, all aided and abetted by the police and military, obviously make good copy — and even better television. But, journalism's penchant for the sensational aside, foreign correspondents have had good reason not to stress the role of 50-year-old King Bhumibol and his family in the October 6 affair.

Monarchy in Thailand

Absolute monarchy ended in 1932, but in many ways Thailand is still the land of Anna Leonowens' tale of The King and I. Popular belief that the King is a reincarnation of the Buddha and therefore a personage above political comment has been carefully preserved. One of the new regime's first decrees forbids comments considered disrespectful to the Royal Family. It would doubtless be judged an unforgivable act of lèse majeste for a journalist, Thai or foreigner, to suggest that the King has helped launch his country into civil war.

Such are the facts nonetheless. By official count 41 people were killed in the siege of Thammasat. Students who were there claim the figure was at least twice as high. In either case, the number was not large by the standards of the world we live in. But even by those standards the killings were politically significant. Almost all of the dead were unarmed students of one of Thailand's most prestigious universities. shot or grenaded while encircled by police, military and "patriotic groups" acting as a mob in a way that people of a gentle-natured Buddhist nation are not supposed to act. Out to avenge an alleged insult against Thailand's Crown Prince, the Royalists burned alive some of the students who tried to surrender.

be out to death and hung others. A policeman took a stick to one young girl killed by the crowd. A student spokesman who tried to negotiate a ceasefire was shot dead before he could put down his microphone.

Whether it is acceptable to say so or not, King Bhumibol now leads part of his nation only. The Right professes that all Thais love their King; anyone who does not is not Thai. The slogan, if ever it could be true, can be no longer. Monarchism has been made the ideological centerpiece for those who attempt to exercise socialist and democratic tendencies which have begun to threaten traditional divisions of wealth, power and influence. Those who believed that the bespectacled, mild-mannered Bhumibol, a jazz clarinetist born at Cambridge, Massachusetts, and educated in Switzerland, would transform his Palace into a progressive institution have been proved mistaken. By its performance on October 6, the Chakri Dynasty, Southeast Asia's last surviving Monarchy, has put itself to siege, and for the first time in Thailand's contemporary history, the Left, by necessity more than choice, is squaring off to fight the King.

The Path to the Coup

In the tense weeks preceding October 6, police in a nearby factory town where students have actively been involved in organizing workers hung two electricians who had been protesting Thanom's return. A student drama group then staged a skit at Thammasat recreating the hangings with student actors. Rightists ignored justification for the skit; they charged, moreover, that one of the students "hung" in the course of it had resembled Crown Prince Vachiralonkorn, a handsome young military officer who conveniently arrived back in Thailand from schooling in Australia on October 3.

The charge was tantamount to accusing the students of advocating an end to the Chakri line of Kings. The students subsequently denied any intended insult to the Prince, saying that any resemblance was coincidental. (Privately, some felt they may have been tricked by a provocateur from within their own ranks. A young woman art teacher and television personality of aristocratic family and scant political background had apparently volunteered her services to make up the actors, and the troupe had
gratefully agreed.)

Thammasat has historically been a seat of democratic sentiment. Pridi Phanomyong, its founder and first rector, was a leader of the 1932 putsch that ended absolute rule of the King. Pridi was a leader of the anti-Japanese Resistance and Thailand’s first Prime Minister after World War II. Inclined towards socialism, he was, nonetheless, Regent to the underage King Anand, elder brother of the present King. Anand was mysteriously shot and killed in his palace chambers in 1947. His death precipitated a Rightist coup in which General Phibun Songkhram and other leaders of the fascist period, now sanitized by the start of the Cold War, came back to power.

Pridi fled to China and stayed there for many years as a guest of the Chinese government. An old man, he has lived in Paris since 1970. He has always maintained his innocence; proof has never been brought against him. The incident was sufficient to end Pridi’s political career, and, one might argue, to set back Thailand’s political development a quarter of a century. Thammasat’s students are predominantly middle class. Many come from the provinces. In general, those who are politically active follow in the footsteps of Pridi (sometimes even making pilgrimages to his home in Paris, from where he continues to maintain a live interest in the country’s political events). Those who are active, it can be safely said, have little fondness for feudal values. If privately asked, they would be unlikely to have much good to say about young Prince Vichit, who is thought to be arrogant and not very bright.

Still, what happened to Pridi is well impressed on the minds of Leftists all over Thailand, and particularly at Thammasat. Even the Communist Party has been careful to avoid direct attacks on the Royal Family. The students would have been most jealously to have deliberately insulted the Prince; it is doubtful that they did.

Even assuming the allegation has some truth in it, however, the circumstances surrounding the incident were sufficiently ambiguous for the Palace to have diffused the incident and prevented the siege of Thammasat and military takeover of the government merely by issuing a statement to that effect coupled with an appeal from the King for calm and reason. The King played this role in October 1973 and gained considerable prestige for his efforts.

As events turned out, King Bhumibol made no appeals to restrain the violence. The first appearance of any member of the Royal Family was that of Prince Vichit. Dressed in his Army captain’s uniform, he addressed the Rightist groups only after they had moved from Thammasat to Government House. The Prince dissuaded the orchestrated mob from their demands for the lives of three liberal members of the then collapsing Government in disbanding the crowd, however, the Prince praised its members for their bravery. Later, his two younger sisters attended the cremation of the single Rightist killed in the Thammasat attack. No member of the Royal Family attended services for the student dead.

Much remains unclear about October 6, the months and even years preceding it. Nonetheless, the evidence is sufficient to suggest that the Palace has been more than a pawn in these events. Indeed, the King, or those close to him, may have engineered the Thammasat affair in order to consolidate the power of the Palace over national affairs.

The Palace’s Influence

The speed (16 days) with which the leader of the coup, Admiral Sangad Chaloryoo, and his cohorts handed over power to a civilian government headed by a relatively unknown High Court Justice is one indicator of the Palace’s influence. The new Prime Minister, Thanin Kraishien, is close to the Palace, known to some Thais who follow Bangkok politics as “the King’s man.” Close to the Palace, Thanin is also an avid anti-communist ideologue convinced of Thailand’s mystical union with its religion (Buddhism) and with its Monarchy. He is said to be an important member of Navapop, one of the ultranationalist front groups set up by the Right over the past three years.

As another indicator, Admiral Sangad and the other leaders of the coup belong to the same faction of the military that sided with the King to force Generals Thanom and Prapass into exile in 1973. Sangad is not only a staunch Monarchist, he is the first naval officer in recent times to become Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Sangad is not reputed for an interest in politics. As head of the Navy, however, it would be logical for him to throw his hand in with the Palace. (The Navy, which did not participate in the historic putsch of 1932, has remained staunchly Royalist since, and, until recently, has been on the outside of Thailand’s defence budgets. The Navy has been viewed with caution by more secular Army strongmen after an unsuccessful coup attempt with Royalist overtones in 1951. It is a measure of the Palace’s increasing influence that Sangad became Supreme Commander.)

Thammasat faces Bangkok’s Chao Phraya River. Appropriately, Navy patrol boats were used to cut off students from a river escape route. Other police and military units also suggested the hand of the Palace was deeply entangled in what was going on: Metropolitan Police, whose commander ordered the first shooting of students in October 1973 and many of whose officers were early recruits to Nava-
pol; Border Patrol Police, an elite counter insurgency force set up in the mid 1960s under patronage of the Palace; and Special Force paratroopers from Hua Hin, a southern coastal town where the King keeps a seaside home.

Behind the police and military stood "patriotic groups." Most prominent among these groups were the kheun-frocked Village Scouts. The Village Scouts are a paramilitary organization set up primarily outside Bangkok. Members swear special allegiance to the King.

The Village Scout movement is a modern revival of an organization called the Wild Tiger Corps established in 1911 by the last of Thailand's strong monarchs. The central reason for the current movement's existence is not much different from that laid down for its predecessor in the original proclamation of King Rama VI: "to make the Thai people in general feel loyal to the leaders of the Kingdom in accordance with wise customs."

Like the Border Patrol Police and Special Forces, the Village Scout movement is a product of CIA-assisted counter insurgency programs of the 1960s. It is ultranationalistic, even racist (for Jew read Vietnamese) in character, and staunchly anti-communist.

Most members are adults who live in the provinces: petty officials, small businessmen, teachers, housewives, farmers. Members sometimes carry guns. The tiger is their symbol.

Members do not often assemble spontaneously in Bangkok; nonetheless, at least three busloads of Village Scouts, plus vocational students belonging to a viciously right-wing urban group called the Red Gaur, formed the core of the orchestrated mob who tormented and killed at Thammasat.

Members of the Village Scouts gain respect and influence in their communities because of their close association with the Royal Family, who usually afford them audiences during provincial tours. Since the coup, it has been Prince Vachiralornkorn who has been touring in the provinces, receiving Village Scouts and other local groups. What role circumstance plays here one cannot be sure, but October 6 and the events leading up to it give all the appearance of involving the Prince closely with the Royalists' surge to power.

The Prince is clearly not as clever as his elder sister, Ubolrat, who went off to M.I.T. several years ago to study nuclear physics (and later created a national scandal by abdicating to marry a foreigner.) Still, the Prince looks like a prince. He is tall by Thai standards, is rawboned and fit, and has a winning smile. It has long been rumored in Bangkok that he was being groomed to become an active figure in Thai politics on the Palace's behalf. In this regard, the Prince's arrival back from military intelligence school in Australia on October 3 was most convenient.

The Prince is the King's only son. He graduated from Australia's Dunrobin Military Academy last December. After graduation he returned to Thailand. One of his first public appearances — standing in for the Queen before the Thai Red Cross on December 12 — was significant even at the time. Associating the Monarchy for the first time with the chauvinistic rhetoric of Navapol and other extreme right-wing groups, the Prince repeatedly used the expression Pao Thai (literally, Thai Tribe), a seldom used phrase with fascist overtones, in calling his countrymen to concern themselves with the "freedom and survival of the Thai race."

The Busy Crown Prince

The Prince toured the troubled Mekong border with Laos and rode in the front seat of his father's limousine when the King took the annual review of the Royal Guard, and, for the first time, warned of "various forms of sabotage against our Kingdom," while admonishing his soldiers to "be wary the danger which is coming close....prepare your physical and
mental strength and be ready to cope with any emergency..."

The Prince soon returned to Australia, but the build-up for October 6 had begun. In what may have been a trial run for the Thammasat siege, about a thousand people belonging to Rightist groups were bused to Bangkok for the military’s annual pledge of allegiance to the King. At that ceremony, Admiral Sangad tipped his hand, warning those gathered that “you can see the subversion and infiltration everywhere.”

If the established order was being threatened, the Bangkok Left was being killed. In February, the Secretary General of the Socialist Party, Boonsong Punyodayana, a sociology professor with a doctorate from America’s Cornell University, was assassinated, becoming the most prominent of roughly 50 liberal or socialist political figures to be killed since such incidents began happening in mid-1974. Bomb and grenade attacks were launched upon the headquarters and political gatherings of Left and Center-Left parties and political groups. Students organizing workers in factories on the fringe of Bangkok and workers themselves, came under increasing police pressure and right-wing political intimidation. Leaders of the Socialist Party were forced to curtail their activities or go underground.

By March the Center-Right Government of Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj was in serious difficulty with Sangad and other military leaders over its handling of internal political disorder and for Kukrit’s stubborn refusal to come to terms with the U.S. over a residual American military presence once American troops evacuated various Thai air bases on March 20. By that time, the nominal leader of Navapol, Wattana Kleymon, a pugy young demagogue who has spent most of his recent years in the U.S., was prepared to promise foreign journalists that important things would happen in seven months time. Other Navapol members were willing to brag that they had the personal support of the Queen.

In the April elections Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj lost his seat in Bangkok’s Dusit constituency to arch conservative Samak Sunturovej and two other members of the rival Democrat Party. Dusit constituency contains the Palace and is heavily weighted with military votes. Kukrit is said to have stood there in order to be clear that he could form a government with mandate from the King and the Military. Samak, a former employee of the Israeli Embassy in Bangkok, is a virtual unknown in Thai politics by comparison with Kukrit. It is unlikely that he could have ousted Kukrit (and gone on to become Minister of Interior in the post-coup regime) without support from the Monarchist factions of the Military.

The April elections also saw Kukrit’s Social Action Party ousted from power by the rival Democrats, who formed a new coalition government under Kukrit’s ineffectual brother, Seni Pramoj. Presiding over a faction-ridden party that was being gutted by its own right-wing, Seni offered the perfect target against which to lead a coup.

The final obstacle to that coup may have been removed that same month when someone pulled the plug on the hospital oxygen tent that had been keep-

ing alive the Military’s capo, retired General Kris Sivara, after he had been bedridden with a heart attack. A complex figure, Kris had kept his lines open to the Left. He was a friend of Socialist Party politician Kayasa Sukhiai (now with the Thai Communist Party), had sometimes warned Bangkok Leftists when their lives were in danger and, reportedly, sometimes even given money to student politicians. Who killed Kris has not been established, but many are known to have been unhappy with his sit-tight leadership. Kris had been a restraining force on the Military’s various coup-planning factions. His death passed the mantle of military leadership to Admiral Sangad.

American’s Role in Thailand

The intrigue that surrounds the events leading up to October 6 raises the obvious question: What role did the CIA and other agencies of American intelligence play? The first thing to be said in this regard is that from World War II onward the United States has been so deeply involved in Thai politics that very little American direction would have been necessary to propel events along a course favorable to American interests.

World War II offered the U.S. a superb opportunity to establish political contacts that have flourished and multiplied for the past 30 years. At the outbreak of the war, for example, Seni Pramoj was a youthful lawyer of royal lineage who had been made Ambassador to Washington. Reflecting the Palace’s distaste for Japanese occupation, Seni refused to deliver the instrument of war. He went on to cooperate closely with OSS (and British Intelligence) against the Japanese.

Because of its links to the Palace, OSS was able to place American agents in Bangkok even during Japanese occupation. These links included a close relationship with Queen Mother Srisangval, a strong-willed and dynamic woman, who has been a lifetime influence on the King. For her health, the Queen now spends most of her time in Switzerland. Until recently, however, she has been more active than any other members of the Royal Family, lending her patronage to the Border Patrol Police and other programs which have closely involved the CIA suppressing the Thai Communist Party.

With Thailand ever poised as the next domino across the Mekong from Indochina, the Cold War through its various phases has afforded the U.S. ample opportunity to build on the contacts made during World War II. Police General Vasit Detkunchorn, the King’s Military Attache, is one of the better examples of how deep American penetration has gone.

Vasit is an American-trained counter insurgency expert, a specialist in ideological warfare who is believed in some quarters to be one of the chief architects of the new Royalist politic. Vasit has been popular with Americans. He has operated closely with the CIA and other agencies concerned with Communist suppression much of his career. A friend of the Queen as well as the King, and one of Thailand’s more brilliant middle-level officers, Vasit may be one
of the most powerful men in Thailand today.

Vasit is one of several behind-the-scenes figures who have a background of association both with American intelligence and with the Monarchist Right. Another such officer is Colonel Sudsai Thephaatsadin, a protege of Jasakul who works (as Vasit has also) for Thailand's infamous Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC). Sudsai is the acknowledged founder and leader of the Red Gaur movement mentioned above. He openly proposed violence against student and other Leftist groups on the dubious theory that raising the fear associated with Leftist causes would separate "hardcore" militants from less dedicated followers.

ISOC is widely believed to have been operations center for the intimidation, terror and assassinations leading up to October 6 and on the day itself. Clearly, many of the senior officers involved in ISOC have been deeply involved with the Monarchist Right. Moreover, according to the key officers we know, we do know that ISOC, which was established in 1965 at the suggestion of Ambassador Graham Martin, received CIA advisors and assistance under the cover of American economic aid until 1974. Sources close to ISOC say the CIA still maintains discreet contacts with members of the Command and funnels money to some of them.

U.S. spokesmen have denied American involvement in the coup. On past record alone, those denials mean nothing. More important point out: major American police and military assistance to Thailand began in 1930. After 26 years of intimate association with Thai politics, having trained many of the key officers, and having helped form the command structures by which repression works, the answer can only be that the Americans were involved in the coup. The coup would not have taken place without at least tacit American support. Until proven otherwise, active American participation in October 6 should be more assumed than dismissed. After all, the U.S. did have motives.

The days of sworn American promises to protect Thailand from foreign threats and (in the words of the 1962 Thanat-Rusk Communiqué) "internal aggression" have ended. When the Indochina War stopped, Thailand was mustered out rather quickly. The country is no longer considered a strategic American ally: the U.S. has nonetheless attempted to keep enough influence in Thailand to ensure that Thailand's future development will heed the re-shaping of America's Southeast Asia strategy.

American concerns, particularly those of the Defense Department (which may have had a bigger role in shaping October 6 than the CIA), have been, first, that Thailand not make an independent rapprochement - in fact, not make any rapprochement whatsoever - and, second, that Thailand continue to permit American access to still useful military installations left over from the War.

From the Mayaguez onward, American policy has played a spoiling role in Thai-Indochina relations. For example, U.S. Army study was released without identification through the Thai press purporting to show Vietnam intends a long-term strategy to dismember Thailand, including aiding Laos to annex the North-east. This study was also widely distributed through the Thai bureaucracy and has become a principal source for Rightist groups arguing for repression against the Left. Meanwhile, the U.S. has stopped all financial support to the Mekong Basin Committee, the UN body that at present offers the only opportunities for Thailand and Indochina working out constructive functional (e.g. hydroelectric) projects among themselves.

Whatever concern the U.S. held for Thailand's experiment with parliamentary democracy after October 1973 ended when Ambassador William Kintner was recalled during the first half of 1975. Kintner, who had become personally involved in defending Washington a more open political environment for Bangkok, was hustled off to a cubbyhole basement office just inside the entrance to the State Department. In his stead came Charles Whitehouse, former deputy to Elsworth Bunker in Saigon and more recently Ambassador to Laos. Whitehouse has never had much of a chance to acquire a taste for democratic regimes.

On arrival in Bangkok, Whitehouse set about trying to negotiate the residual American military presence opposed by Thailand's Foreign Ministry because of its implications for Thailand's relations with its Indochina neighbors. There was no concealing the anger of the American Embassy, nor the embarrassment of Kissinger before the Defense Department, when the Kukrit government would not come to terms last March and Whitehouse was left to find his own way out of Government House.

There were no tears in the Bangkok Embassy when Kukrit lost not only his position as Prime Minister, but his seat in Parliament. Nor were there many when Parliament also lost its mandate. An indecent interval of a few days only separated the killings at Thammasat from an announcement that American planes have begun using Takhi Air Base for refueling on their way to the Indian Ocean base on Diego Garcia, and from Kissinger's condescending pronouncement that the U.S. was now willing to begin discussions with Vietnam on the problems which bar normalization of relations.

There was no interval at all between the coup and the new regime's protestations of loyalty to the tradition of Thai-American friendship. Dutifully, one of Prime Minister Thanin's first orders of business was the sacking of Anand Panyarachun, Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs, antagonist of Henry Kissinger and one of the designers of what Anand and his team (most of whom have also been removed) were calling Thailand's new policy of "equidistance." As one State Department official in Washington put it, things in Thailand are going "normally."

Just as the Indochina War was ending a famous temple nearby Thailand's Mekong border with Laos collapsed suddenly to a heap of rubble. Particularly coming when it did, disintegration of That Luang, by most accounts, portended difficult times ahead for the Thai Monarchy. And there is temptation to liken Thailand's royal institutions and the semi-feudal society they stand for to that old pagoda, grand, but only a shell of itself. The temptation is dangerous if it leads to the conclusion that the new Monarchism and
the Thais behind it are merely American agents.

**Thailand and Indochina Countries**

American influence aside, Thailand's situation is very different from that of Vietnam and the other Indochina States where revolutions have just been fought, in fact, different from all the other countries of Southeast Asia. Thailand's aristocrats were never displaced by colonialism; they have, moreover, adapted quite well to capitalism. The Palace today is not just a museum for another century's pomp and circumstance; it is also corporate headquarters for a modern conglomerate. The Crown Properties, in addition to being the nation's biggest landowner and major developer of agribusiness, controls three of the country's largest banks (Siam Commercial Bank, Thai Farmers Bank, Thai Danu Bank) as well as the country's major industrial grouping (the Siam Cement Group). It also has a hand in Bangkok real estate and Thailand's tourist industry.

October 9 and the events leading up to it -- the rise of the Radical Right with the Palace deeply involved if not handling the situation -- cannot be explained just as somebody else's imperialism. They are equally a product of reaction from deep within Thailand's national bourgeoisie. What with the oil crisis that sent the world into recession and the hundred flowers bloom of domestic politics both beginning in October 1973, the interests of the Crown Properties and of most other local capitalists have been slumping badly. Communist takeover in all of the Indochina States, including abolition of Monarchical institutions in Cambodia and Laos, have added a further note of political insecurity.

It would appear that Palace advisors have concluded that even the minimum interests of the financial empire over which they preside cannot be accommodated within the framework of the kind of Socialist state likely to be spawned in Thailand, where the present gap between rich and poor is dramatic, and the actual situation of the poor more serious every year.

Doubtless such an assessment is the correct one; moreover, had parliamentary democracy been allowed to continue it would almost certainly have brought a Socialist state quite soon. Like Chile, Indonesia and other countries which have moved toward the Left in similar ways, but with the Military left behind in scuttling alliance with conservative political and economic interest groups, Thailand has now just as inevitably produced a Fascist dictatorship.

The tragedy for Thailand is not so much the dictatorship, which is inherently unstable, but what it dictates: that transition from a semi-feudal to a modern state by evolutionary means has proved ill-fated. Discussion even at Cabinet level of legalizing the Communist Party has given way to the mean rhetoric of men like the new Minister of Interior Samak Sunthorn, who was soon on national television filled with just one regret: that the troops at Thammasat had not been able to shoot faster.

The Communist Party will now have a significant number of allies. Already leading members of the Socialist Party and of the Bangkok Left have made a commitment to join in guerrilla warfare. Members of the United Socialist Front, New Force Party, and the left-wing of the Democrat Party, plus many newly politicized workers and farmers will likely make a similar choice. To be realistic, the Left remains weaker than the Right in every respect, including its hold on public opinion and support. But for the first time in Thai politics the Left has become both revolutionary and part of the mainstream of Thai political life. There can be no going back to the politics of cliques. The era of the five-tank putsch is dead.

The fight cannot help but be a bitter one, and its implications for political relations in Southeast Asia are important. The Vietnamese, who have in the past gone out of their way to show their appreciation for the Socialist Party's commitment to exhausting the path of parliamentary struggle now have much more excuse to fulfill the prophecies of the Thai Right by giving large-scale military assistance to Thailand's guerrilla movement. Vietnam placed hope in Thailand, but those senior diplomats, including the last Foreign Minister Pichai Rathana, who were committed to changing Thailand's position from that of a rampart in an American wall against Communism to a regional bridgehead between the Communist states of Indochina and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have lost their influence.

**THAI MILITARY:**

**The Persons and Factions**

In 1932, Field Marshal Phak Phibunsongkham (ranked Col. at that time) was one of the members of "kanaraj" (group led by Dr. Fridi Panyow) which disposed the absolute monarchy system of Thailand.

Marshall Phak Phibunsongkham regained power in a coup carried out by Marshal Phin Chunthanav (Maj. Gen. Chartchai Chontha's father) in 1947. A clique called the Soi Ratchakrut was formed around Marshall Phibun and was headed by police leader Phao Siyanon (close associate of the CIA). In 1957, F.M. Sarit led a coup which defeated and ousted General Phao and brought an end to the Soi Ratchakrut influence in the military. Meanwhile the F.M. Sarit clique gradually split into two groups, one led by F.M. Thanom Kittikachorn and F.M. Prapass Chunsatira, the other led by Police Gen. Prasart and Air Marshal Thawee. When Sarit died in 1963 the power was handed over to the Thanom-Prapass clique, and Prasart's group stepped aside.

The popular uprising in October 1973 which drove the "Tyranny of three" (Thanom-Prapass-Navong) out of power split the military into three groups: The Gen, Kris clique, the Thanom-Prapass clique led by Lt. Gen. Yo and a clique supported by the Chart Thai Party and led by Lt. Gen. Chalard. Lt. Gen. Vitoon, a significant military figure who was a mercenary commander in Laos working closely with the CIA, was part of the Gen, Kris clique. Due to strong support from both the CIA and the aristocracy and to his strong ambition, Gen. Vitoon made his way to the top of the military ladder quickly.

As indicated in Chart 1, the key posts in the Army structure are those of...
commander in chief, associate commander in chief (considered as a waiting post for the commander in chief, the chief of staff and the Army First Division commander—the army's biggest division covering the central part of Thailand). In 1975 besides the Army First Division commander post held by Lt. Gen. Yot, all top army posts were occupied by Kris's men, led by Gen. Bunchai. In October 1975 Praman Adireksan, after the king tried to promote Lt. Gen. Chatrad to associate commander-in-chief, causing dissatisfaction among the military. Lt. Gen. Chatrad was later transferred back to an unimportant post in Army headquarters. Since then, Gen. Chatrad's clique has been considered “dangerous” and been kept within the lower rank level. When Gen. Bunchai's term ended in October 1975, a transfer of military personnel was conducted resulting in the line-up shown in Chart 2. Lt. Gen. Yot was demoted while Lt. Gen. Vitoon was promoted. The other members of the Kris clique were promoted according to ordinary procedure.

**Supreme Military Command**

In Thailand’s military hierarchy, the Army is considered to be the most powerful group. One who assumes the top post in the army is automatically regarded as the leader of the whole military. The Supreme Military Command Headquarters is no more than a formal institution because it has no power base and is generally assigned to the “out-course” army general. However, the generals in the Supreme Military Command as indicated in Chart 3 and Chart 4 have “close ties” with American military personnel. Gen. Klongsak, Gen. Chareon, Gen. Sayod (the leader of the Communist Suppression Operation Command, which later developed into the Internal Security Operation Command), all are part of the Supreme Military Command. However, the commander in chief of the army is at the same time the chief commander of ISOC.

The total force of Thai military is around 210,000, among which the army's force is 141,000, navy 27,000 and air force 42,000. Aside from them, there are Volunteer Defence Corps who are trained by the military and frequently work with the police and the Border Patrol Police which directly belongs to the Royal Palace. The numbers of Civil Volunteer Forces and Border Patrol Police are around 52,000 and 14,000 respectively.

**Who Staged the Coup?**

There are many groups within the Thai ruling classes who wanted to stage a coup because of the intensification of their contradictions with the student-peopel movement after October 14, 1973. The three principal groups are the Praman-Chatchai Group, the Aristocrats' Group and the Military Group.

1. The Praman-Chatchai Group is backed up by the Chart Thai Party and some of the military who broke off from the Kris Group. This group represents the interests of the comprador class connected with American and Japanese capital. In the political aspect they have the industrial bourgeoisie closely connected...
with the U.S. This is evident in the fact that Chathchai went to the U.S. frequently before and after the April 1976 election. They were constantly involved in recruiting people to violently oppress progressive movements and acted both as agents and protectors of foreign interests via a-vis popular opposition to exploitation by such companies as the Billington Co. (former TEMCO-Thailand Exploitation and Mining Co., a subsidiary of Union Carbide Co).

(2) The Aristocrats' Group is extremely afraid of social change, especially after the overthrow of the Laotian monarchy, and desperately wants to destroy the popular movement. The Aristocrats' Group has great land interests in the central and northern parts of Thailand. Formerly, they made all their income from rent on land-holdings, but they have begun to participate in investment in the manufacturing industry hand in hand with foreign capital. They have been important in supporting the Border Patrol Police. Recently they organized the Village Scouts to protect and promote their status and power. Before the October coup, the Aristocrats' Group conspired with Chart Thai Party to plan a coup. But they participated in the National Administrative Reform Council after the coup succeeded. It is believed that the Aristocrats' Group backed various groups planning a coup so that they wouldn't lose their power in the event any of them might win. Surprisingly, the CIA also backed numerous groups before the coup.

(3) The Military Group, including General Sangad Chairoyu and Air Force General Kamol Thechatunka, led the October coup along with the old Kris Sivara Military Group, the Aristocrats' Group, and the CIA.

The CIA has been the most important external factor influencing the above ruling class groups. It has acted as a moderator among them and cultivated close relationships with all of the different groups by providing intelligence information, money, and personal relationships. There were at least two alliances of groups—one consisting of Pramun-Aristocrats-CIA-Chathchai and Vitoon Military Group and the other comprising Old Kris Group (Bunchai; Sangad)-Aristocrats-CIA Group.

By National Anti-Fascism Front of Thailand

Chathchai Bunnaratphong
- Gen. Sorn Na Nakorn
commander in chief
- Gen. Prasert Thammasiri
commander in chief
- Lt. Gen. Anan Dhamnikorn
Army 1st Division commander
- Lt. Gen. Phin Thammasiri
Army 4th Division commander

Lt. Gen. Chailard (now deposed)
Lt. Gen. Vitoon Yasawas (in Japan)

WHO'S WHO

Amorn Sirikaya
Admiral, commander in chief of the Navy
the former Deputy Defense Minister / Gen. commander in chief since April / most powerful military figure in Thailand

Bunchai Bunnaratphong
General, the former deputy Army commander in chief

Chailard Hiranyakiri
General, Air Marshall, Social Justice Party Head

Charnechai Chumphavan
Air Chief Marshal

Dawee Chualala
general

Kamol Thechatunka
Air Chief Marshal

Krangnak Chamanand
General, the associate commander in chief emerged as the A.R.C. Secretary / CIA connection

Kris Sivara
the late Army commander in chief

Narong Kittikachorn
Colonel, Thanom's son

Phao Siyanon
Police General / F.M. Piton's subordinate / CIA close associate

Prachub Suntarangkul
Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister in the Kukrit Pramoj Cabinet / Chart Thai leader

Pramarn Adireksarn
General

Prapas Churasatida
Admiral, commander in chief of the Navy
the former Deputy Defense Minister / Gen. commander in chief since April / most powerful military figure in Thailand

Samak Suntoroje
Sangad Chairoyu
Sudrak Hotsadinthong
Sorn Na Nakorn
Srisuk Mahaithorathap
Sunthorn Hongladarom
Thawat Phisuthiphun
Thanom Kittikachorn
Vitoon Yasawas
Vasit Detkunchorn
Watthana Khiemmon
Yot Thaphasadin

Interior Minister
Admiral, the 80-year-old former Supreme Commander
Col. / Thawat's close friend
ISOC Col. / founder of Red Gaur
the army commander in chief, General
the National Police Chief, General
the former secretary-general of SEATO
ISOC Col. and chief of staff,
Chulachomklao Academy teacher
former dictator, Field Marshal
Lt. General / (Mercenary troop commander operated in Laos, CIA connection)
King's military attaché / ISOC Chief of Staff
a special consultant to ISOC, founder of Navane
Lt. General, former 1st Army division Commander / Prapas's subordinate