



A Kingdom in Crisis: Thailand's Struggle for Democracy in the Twenty-First Century

Andrew MacGregor Marshall

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Struggling to emerge from a despotic past, Thailand stands at a defining moment in its history. Scores have been killed on the streets of Bangkok. Freedom of speech is routinely denied. Democracy appears increasingly distant. Long dreaded by Thais, the death of King Bhumibol Adulyadej is expected to unleash even greater instability.

Yet in spite of the impact of the crisis, and the extraordinary importance of the royal succession, they have never been comprehensively analyzed, because Thailand's draconian lese majesté law has silenced most discussion - until now. Breaking Thailand's draconian lese majesté Andrew MacGregor Marshall is one of the only journalists covering contemporary Thailand who tells the whole story. He provides a comprehensive explanation that makes sense of the crisis for the first time, revealing the unacknowledged succession conflict that has become entangled with the struggle for democracy in Thailand.

A Kingdom in Crisis: Thailand's Struggle for Democracy in the Twenty-First Century **Details**

Date : Published October 9th 2014 by Zed Books (first published January 1st 2014)

ISBN : 9781783600571

Author : Andrew MacGregor Marshall

Format : Paperback 248 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Politics, Cultural, Asia

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From Reader Review A Kingdom in Crisis: Thailand's Struggle for Democracy in the Twenty-First Century for online ebook

Hunter Marston says

A scathing critique of the Thai monarchy and modern Thai politics. The history is a little twisty and poorly edited, but the last chapter with Marshall's prognosis for the future is spot-on. Worth a read, with a grain of salt, knowing Marshall's out to get the Thai royal palace no holds barred, and skipping out on a range of politics, culture, and history that fall outside of the throne and inner palace intrigues.

Anne Charlotte LE DIOT says

Just finished it a day after King Bhumibol died and that's been most enlightening... True journalism. A must-read for all interested in South East Asia and how a country that has such a polished image in the eye of the general Western public can be so polarized, so crippled by propaganda and stifled by a minority who's living in an age where despise of the majority is so prevalent. Truly an eye opener on what the monarchy has done to this people and country. And not just the monarchy. A totally anachronic business elite and army too.

Andy Mac says

An interesting book about the political history of Thailand, recommended by a friend. Some of it is disjointed and a little hard to follow the jumps in time the author makes, but gives a very strong overview of the intense politics playing its way through the country as well as some of the causes of the various coups and government crackdowns.

Ian says

I am a fan of Marshall and his work.

This monograph describes the history and nature of the political crisis playing out in the Kingdom of Thailand.

MacGregor argues that Rama 9, the king of Thailand, is not as he is invariably portrayed—a powerful and decisive ruler—the "Father of the Kingdom", rather that he is no more than "a pliant and mostly powerless monarch who tended to do what he was told." The true rulers of the Kingdom are the traditional elite, the landed aristocracy, who dominate the military, civil service, the legal system, and politics. Throughout his long reign Rama 9 has done little more than allow himself to be used as a figure head, and to lend his prestige, wealth and carefully constructed reverence to strengthen the status quo.

The crisis underway is a struggle between the traditional aristocracy, the new capitalist class, led by the billionaire and former Prime Minister Taksin, and the emergent Thai working class, now more powerful than before. This is a struggle that has damaged the country and penalises its people. The elite are desperate to retain their power, and are terrified of the succession of the King's son, who is aligned to Taksin.

This elite are opposed to democracy, and are corrupt and ruthless. In 2014 the democratic and mildly reformist Thai government was overthrown in a coup. Civil war, following the death of the King, is likely.

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Reviewed by Asian Review of Books

TG Lin says

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Sami Stringer says

Before I read this book, I knew very little about Thai politics. I knew they liked their king, there were lots of protests that involved different colored shirts, there's an occasional military coup, and an exiled former prime minister (Thaksin Shinawatra) bought a British soccer team.

The king, Rama IX, is 87 years old and in ill health. Marshall's contention is that the political upheaval that has rocked Thailand since 2005, which on the surface is a contest between Thaksin, a populist strongman, and the traditional elites, is actually about the royal succession. Thaksin supports the designated heir, crown prince Vajiralongkorn while the elites fear that a Thaksin-Vajiralongkorn alliance would freeze them out from the access to the palace that has been their basis of support. They would like to see his sister, Sirindhorn installed as regent.

In Thailand itself, it is complicated to discuss these issues because of the draconian *lèse majesté* laws that have seen people sent to prison for years for saying anything disparaging about the monarchy.

This book also contains a brief history of Thailand's transformation into a modern state, contrasting the official palace narrative with a more objective accounting. It's just enough to help make sense of the current situation.

I highly recommend this book as an introduction to Thai politics. Thailand will be going through some interesting times when Rama IX dies, and Marshall had provided a great guide to interpret these upcoming events.

Marshall's work is an invaluable summing up and examination of the political upheaval present in Thailand, from last century on through immediate history. Describing the balance of power (or rather, the sometimes lack of balance) between the people and the monarchy, and between what is said versus what actually happens, along with the frightening lack of freedom of speech, Marshall moves through recent history with an eye toward analyzing the current political crisis which has been ongoing and is now heightening as the country prepares for what will come with the current king's death, something which may not be far off, given his ill-health. With instability in the country likely to rise and with royal succession under heavy discussion, all of the matters this book tackles have been discussed only rarely because of Thailand's *lese majeste* law and the utter disconnect between what is said to be happening and what is actually occurring. This author, and this work, has cut through that confusion to attempt an in-depth analysis.

For any reader interested in current global politics, in free speech, or in struggles for democracy, this is worth reading, and of course, it will be of interest to readers who want more understanding of the political and cultural climate in Thailand. Marshall's work is smart and well-researched, and his style is both engaging and clear. He carefully documents the peoples' ignored struggles for democracy here, just as he explores the reason that it is still a struggle, and political crisis so clearly in view.

MacGregor argues that Rama 9, the king of Thailand, is not as he is invariably portrayed—a powerful and decisive ruler—the "Father of the Kingdom", rather that he is no more than "a pliant and mostly powerless monarch who tended to do what he was told." The true rulers of the Kingdom are the traditional elite, the landed aristocracy, who dominate the military, civil service, the legal system, and politics. Throughout his long reign Rama 9 has done little more than allow himself to be used as a figure head, and to lend his prestige, wealth and carefully constructed reverence to strengthen the status quo.

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This elite are opposed to democracy, and are corrupt and ruthless. In 2014 the democratic and mildly reformist Thai government was overthrown in a coup. Civil war, following the death of the King, is likely.

Vykki says

This book had a lot of facts and the author did a lot of research. I did learn a lot about Thailand if you like non-fiction you would like this book. I won this book on Goodreads Thank you.

Dan says

Before I read this book, I knew very little about Thai politics. I knew they liked their king, there were lots of protests that involved different colored shirts, there's an occasional military coup, and an exiled former prime minister (Thaksin Shinawatra) bought a British soccer team.

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Scott says

First off, I live in Thailand and support a return to democratic rule in the country, so I am not opposed to Marshall's purpose in writing the book, but this book really misses the mark in so many areas.

Marshall takes an overly simplistic and judgemental approach to describing Thai culture and history, as well as presenting rumour and speculation as fact. His predictions about the royal succession appear to have also been way off the mark.

He relies way too much on cherry picking quotes of others to make his points and the work lacks any type of theoretical focus or critical analysis of the sources which support his opinions.

This book is neither good scholarship nor good journalism.

A more scholarly or informed work exploring some of these topics by a top notch scholar or well informed and connected journalist willing to burn bridges and never return to Thailand is welcomed, but this work does not appear to be based on objective analysis of known facts, and instead is a biased presentation of rumour and gossip by someone without a strong understanding of the culture or any real insider information.

Anna Gallegos says

As an American who has never paid much attention to Asian politics, I found this book to be absolutely fascinating. This book is obviously written for a Western audience as Andrew MacGregor Marshall walks readers through the history of Thailand's monarchy, its current quasi-constitutional monarchy and the ongoing battle to gain control of the country as the death of its do-nothing king looms near.

While the book is well researched, MacGregor Marshall approaches Thai politics from the perspective of someone used of idea of Western democracy for all. He sides against the Thai elites in hoping that everyone will have the right/ability to vote, but he does little to capture the political voice of the rural poor and upcoming middle class except in describing what seems like endless coups and protests in the last ten years.

The author does a great job in encapsulating the power struggle between the elites, the monarchy, and anyone who attempts to upset the status quo; and the repressiveness of its censorship laws.

This book is a good catalyst of anyone looking for further insight into Thai politics.

View Riddell says

Can't really comment much. I live in Thailand. Just wanted to read it to see what all the fuss was. The problem I have is that since the big sources cannot be named, it was hard to decide which was real and which was mere speculation.

David says

a book that looks into the "truth" of Thailand. This book reveals the truth behind Red Shirt, Yellow Shirt and the relationship with Thai King. The dirty secrets and the politics behind for hundred of years. This book is predicting more crisis and social unrest to come. Genuine book!

Thornthawat Thongnab says

This is one of the most terrifying books I've ever read. And the ban didn't have anything to do with that sentiment.

As a breakdown of Thai history from the Ayutthaya era onward, this is an excellent book that makes clear the machinations behind many historical events we learned about in school years ago. As an analysis of

Thailand's modern political crises, it falls short. The author lays out his theories right from the start and uses them as the lenses through which he views all events, and this leads to strange patches in which he credits several massive historical (and current!) occurrences to willful ignorance or downright malevolence by the powers that be instead of far simpler political or humanistic motivations that actually fit the 'narrative' better.

Also, the gravest, most controversial statements (or accusations) appear without citation, making it difficult to determine if they are the author's views, factual analysis, or information provided by concrete sources. Of course, revealing the sources for this information will lead to certain death to those involved, so the absence of citation here is very reasonable. That doesn't make it any less of a shame.

The book has its fair share of flaws, and its version of history is bound to infuriate far more people than it enlightens. Only time can tell if it will go down as a heralded masterpiece or a load of misguided, if well-researched, baloney. However, Andrew MacGregor Marshall wrote this book to tell us, the people of Thailand, that we need to talk. As a conversation starter, *A Kingdom in Crisis* is a spectacular, explosive success.

Jennifer Collins says

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All together, this is a stunning and engaging piece of journalism, and well worth the time for anyone interested.
