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From guardians to democrats – attempts to explain change and continuity of the "military mind" in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines

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Introduction

The literature on transitions from authoritarian regimes to democratic rule has pointed out to the decisive roles of the military in the breakdown of authoritarian regimes as well as in sustaining young democracies. At the heart of this lies what Peter Feaver (1999) termed the "civil-military problematique", that is that the military possesses the coercive power that is able to suppress opposition to authoritarian rule as well as it can terminate democratization processes through a coup d'etat. Theoretically this paper draws on Huntington's seminal work "The Soldier and the State" and his concept of the "professional soldier", as well as on scholarship dealing with the appliance of the concept on non-Western militaries, namely Stepan's "new professionalism". Stepan (1971) argues that Huntington's concept of "military professionalism", which confines the military to a non-political role, has only become reality when the focus of the military is on external warfare. With the main "security predicament" of Third World states stemming from internal security threats (Ayoob 1998), different military doctrines and attitudes have emerged. The result of what Stepan termed "new professionalism" was the entrenchment of the military in politics and consequently the politization of its doctrines.

As the main internal threats continue to stem from the inside in post-authoritarian Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, it only seems logical to assume that doctrinal changes have been minor. This assessment is supported by respective empirical findings concerning the continued military's involvement in counter-insurgency, intelligence functions, and a

continued influence on policy-making. The continuities in operational terms furthermore seem to explain the perpetuation of authoritarian prerogatives in the hands of the military. Thus, the analytical focus on "security threats" and on the "poor performance" and "disfunctionality" of institutions formally in-charge of dealing with these threats (police, parliament, executive etc.) helps to analyze and clarify the scope and pervasiveness of the military's institutional autonomy in all three case studies. Yet they lack explanatory power with regard to the different attitudes and behaviour of the military vis-à-vis the civilian-led, post-authoritarian governments. How to explain the fact that Indonesia's TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia – Armed forces of Indonesia) remained politically neutral in post-Suharto Indonesia, while the Thai military removed the democratically elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra from power in 2006? I argue that this is not to be explained solely by looking at missing prerequisites of nation state building (i.e. internal legitimacy) or institutional failures, but that we must take into consideration more general dynamics between the defective/ illiberal nature of young democracies in Southeast Asia, and the attitudes/ roles of the military in Southeast Asia.

1. Huntington's "professional soldier": theorizing the "military mind" in Western democracies

The mainstream of the literature on democratization processes considers democracies as consolidated, when the authority of a publicly elected government presides over all policy arenas and actors – including security policies and the armed forces. Juan Linz (1990: 158) has described a consolidated democracy as „one in which none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interests, forces, or institutions consider that there is any alternative to democratic processes to gain power, and that no political institution or group has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision-makers". He further added that democracy can be seen as consolidated, when it is the "only game in town".

The question of civilian authority over the forces of coercion goes back to antiquity (McNeill 1982). The subordination of the military to civilian control has remained an existential question for any form of polity because of what Feaver (1999: 214) has termed the civil-military problematique: "The very institution created to protect the polity is given sufficient power to become a threat to the polity". According to Feaver, the military was formed to either attack external enemies or to ward off enemy attacks. In order to do so, the military must have tools of coercion, which in turn provide the military with the capacities to destroy

the very polity that created it. With regard to democratically organized polities, these remarks resemble another problematique: within democratic systems the military must at all times accept de jure authority of democratically elected governments, who are legitimized by the will of the people and determined by free and fair elections. Samuel Finer has famously framed this problematique:

> "There is a common assumption, an unreflecting belief, that it is somehow 'natural' for the armed forces to obey the civilian power. (...) But no reason is adduced for showing that civilian control of the armed forces is, in fact, 'natural'. Is it? Instead of asking why the military engage in politics, we ought surely to ask why they ever do otherwise. For at first sight the political advantages of the military vis-à-vis other and civilian groupings are overwhelming. The military possess vastly superior organization. And they possess arms." (Finer 1988: 5).

Hence, the civilian-military problematique is not only about the issue of the military destroying the polity that created it, but it is also determined by issues of military subordination and accountability to the democratically elected civilian authorities. This brings us to a fundamental theoretical question: how can civilian control of the military be established and maintained? Or turned the other way: how to prevent the military from interfering into politics?

In civil-military relations theory, by and large two contesting sets of approaches exist on this matter. The first main thread has been put forward by Samuel P. Huntington in his concept of "objective civilian control", according to which civilian control is actually not enhanced by maximizing the control of the civilian groups in relation to the military, but by maximizing military professionalism. By respecting an independent, autonomous military sphere within government, the professionalism of the military increases. This in turn makes the military highly divergent from society and requires a clear distribution of powers and responsibilities between the military and the civilians. The specific expertise that makes out the military profession is the management of violence and the defence of the state, "politics is beyond the scope of military competence, and the participation of military officers in politics undermines their professionalism" (Huntington 1957: 64). At the same time any meddling in military affairs by politicians is equally hindering civilian control, because it is most likely introduce the often petty power struggles of realpolitik into the military world, which in turn can lead to

a politization of the military and thus encourage political interference. The objectives and general goals of military actions are decided upon by the civilian leadership, but the implementation of these goals is left in the hands of the military. Part of the professionalization of the military is the formation of a specific form of military corporateness and ideology that prevents the political interference of soldiers. In short: military autonomy leads to professionalization, which brings about a politically neutral military serving as a tool of the government. "Civilian control exists when there is this proper subordination of an autonomous profession to the ends of policy (Huntington 1957: 71)".

The second main threat was spawned by Morriss Janowitz. While Huntington advocated the maintenance of two very distinctive spheres, the military and the civilian, in order to ensure civilian control, Janowitz held that such a separation would in fact put civilian control in danger. A military unhinged from its societal base would lead to the development of vast attitudinal differences between military and society and therefore make soldiers less prone to accept the principle of civilian control. The answer to this problem was the "citizen-soldier", representing the values and norms of society inside the officer corps. The bigger the connection between society and military, the less significant the attitudinal differences, which in turn increases possibilities of civilian control of the armed forces (Janowitz 1960).

Yet, both theoretical strands underline the importance of the principle of civilian supremacy itself. For the establishment of civilian supremacy, institutional control mechanisms alone are not able to ensure civilian control. Pivotal for civilian control is a military ethic and a military doctrine that helps to establish military professionalism and a clear distribution of powers between civilian government and the armed forces. Coming back to Feaver's civil-military problematique: "Any military strong enough to defend civilian society is also strong enough to destroy it. It is therefore quintessential that the military choose not to exploit is advantage, voluntarily submitting to civilian control" (Feaver 1999: 226).

The normative concept of the "professional soldier", embodied in Huntington's landmark study, found its repercussions not only in various scholarly publications but also in contemporary strategies for Security Sector Reform (SSR). Part of the concept of SSR laid out by various scholars and practitioners alike is what Wulff (2000) has termed the "institutional dimension" of SSR, which aims at the "professionalization of actors in the security sector". "Professionalization" is understood first and foremost as the institutional separation of the

various security actors, because "an institutional overlap between domestic public security and external defence increases the danger of intervention by the military in domestic affairs" (Wulff 2004: 13). The objective of "institutional separation" is interlinked with establishing "civilian control and management of the security sector by the government" as one of the most crucial elements of SSR (Hänggi 2003: 16). Similar notions of Huntington's concept of the "professional soldier" can be found in respective policy documents. The OECD DAC "Handbook on Security Sector Reform" refers to the primacy of democratic civilian control over the armed forces as a basic component of SSR. In practical terms "professionalization" can range from reforming the curriculum and the training of security actors, to changes of the institutional structure of the security sector (i.e. separation of military and police), the drawing of guidelines for a new, "professional" military doctrine, or even amending constitutions that guaranteed the military a role in politics (Ball 2005: 12).

2. Southeast Asian militaries: a "military mind" of a different kind

Whilst Huntington's concept of the "professional soldier" has been highly influential on a normative level, many scholars dealing with Third World militaries have criticized its limited explanatory power outside the Western world. Against the various direct and indirect political interventions of militaries in many Third World countries, the "professional soldiers" described by Huntington seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Even though the military apparatus (like all other administrative structures) in most Third World states resembled, due to the introduction of statehood through colonialism, those of the West in many aspects (rank, uniforms etc.), they certainly functioned and behaved very differently (Tilly 1992: 206). Against the background of empirical studies on the military in South America it was Alfred Stepan (1971) who pointed out that different forms of military "professionalism" exist. In his seminal work "The new professionalism of internal warfare and military role expansion" Stepan holds that the concept of "military professionalism", which confines the military to a non-political role, only works when the focus of the army is on external warfare.

On the contrary, if the main function of the military is internal, because the legitimacy of the government is challenged by parts of the population, different military doctrines and attitudes emerge. Additionally, the primacy of force in the anti-colonial struggles itself shaped a self-perception of the military as the guardian of the sovereignty of the state. Ayoob has termed this the "third world security predicament": Following the traditional (realist) definitions of

state security in the field of international relations, threats to the security of states arise from the outside. Thus the main task of the military is to guard the state's borders against potential attacks of external enemies. But for most Third World states, insecurity and instability stem from the inside. From the threat of separatism and communal violence to Communist inspired armed uprisings: the main security predicament of Third World states has been the domestic one, caused by low levels of state and regime legitimacy (Ayoob 1998: 198).

With the main security concern being the internal stability of "weak" and "fragile" postcolonial states, the militaries began to concentrate on the domestic rather than the international arena. Due to the fact that the lack of legitimacy of the government was often perceived to be intertwined with failed strategies of national development, the military's role expanded much beyond external defence. The "weakness" and perceived "disfunctionality" of newly independent governments gave way to a self-perception of the military as the guardian of the nation-state. Likewise the new doctrine legitimized military activism in policy fields such as defence, internal security, and national development – often supported by the promotion of such doctrines by the United States. While what Stepan (1971) described as "new professionalism" emerged as a doctrinal response to the specific circumstances that postcolonial armies were confronted with (i.e. the states monopoly of coercion being challenged by various armed groups), its main impact was the entrenchment of the military in politics and henceforth a lack of civilian supremacy and control. Similarly, Alagappa (2001) refers to the early stage of state formation in Southeast Asia, with the legitimacy of governments in Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and other Asian states being challenged by various insurgent groups, and the crucial role coercive forces have therefore played in processes of state and nation building and regime security. Alagappa (2001: 57) has pointed out that the "weight and role of coercion in governance is the crucial determinant of the nature and content of civil-military relations." In a nation-state, regime or government without the capacities to respond to its challengers in non-coercive ways, the "weight of coercion in governance and the political power and influence of the military would increase" (Alagappa 2001: 58).

In Southeast Asia as in many other regions this came at a price: by taking the risk of over-generalization various studies have pointed out that the patterns of civil-military relations of Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and all other Southeast Asian countries have never matched the model of civil-military relations laid out by Western scholars. Due to the most

pressing security threats having internal origins and the fact, that civilian institutions were relatively weak and at the same time simultaneously confronted with tasks to establish functioning governance, achieve political legitimacy against large ideological, religious or ethnic divides and foster nation building as well, the military took up a wider role in the political, economic and social sectors. Militaries in the region have led ministries and sometimes even governments, served as parliamentarians, bureaucrats and in the diplomatic service, built roads and schools, policed villages, ran hotels, and owned TV-stations, rice mills or airlines (Alagappa 2001, May/ Selochan 2004, Mani 2007).

Thus, the strict separation of civil and military spheres was never reproduced in Southeast Asia. Furthermore its large capabilities in politics, economics and society guaranteed the military a far-reaching institutional autonomy and made it a dominant political force under authoritarian rule. Linked with the vast array of socio-political and economic functions came corresponding doctrines, which legitimized military involvement in politics - sometimes even against constitutional processes. But what's more is that the doctrinal inclinations have been reflected in the constitutions and in the organizational structures of the military. In turn these have facilitated, and sometimes even engrained, participation in government and business (Crouch 1997, Sundhaussen 1985). Accordingly, politization and institutional autonomy have aggravated democratic control of the security forces. Bellamy and Hughes (2007: 42) note that "rather than protecting their citizens, in practice the region's militaries have expended more effort controlling, killing, torturing and arbitrarily imprisoning them in order to maintain a particular order or regime. The primary purpose of armed forces in the region has been to protect states and regimes from internal opponents rather than external aggressors". Michael C. Desch (1996: 4) has further pointed out that the threat perception (external or internal) influences the military not only in functional terms, but "if a country faces a significant internal threat, the institutions of civilian authority will most likely be weak and deeply divided, making it difficult for civilians to control the military".

3. Challenging the "military mind"? Post-authoritarian reforms of the armed forces in Southeast Asia

In the light of the specifics of civil-military relations in Southeast Asia it comes as no surprise, that central demands of the democratic reform movements in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines have included the depolitization of the military, the supremacy of democratically elected civilian authority vis-à-vis the security forces, and the prevention of military

involvement in domestic (political and business) affairs. Demands to professionalize the military have resulted in a variety of reform strategies and policies in the three countries, challenging the "military mind" and respective military doctrines, as well as the military's corporate interests, to a certain extent.

Indonesia

In Indonesia attempts to professionalize the TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia – Armed forces of Indonesia) have first and foremost led to the abolishment of Indonesia's *dwifungsi* doctrine. Through *dwifungsi* (double function) the army had previously been able to legally expand its role into political, economic and administrative areas. This included a military-only fraction in the parliament, military-owned businesses, and military officers in top positions in Indonesia's public administration. *Dwifungsi's* structural correspondent has been the military's territorial structure, which ensured the presence of military units from the province to the sub-district level throughout the country and therefore officers with various means to influence politics at every level of government. *Dwifungsi's* abolishment in turn fostered the disbandment of the military-only fraction on parliament, the disentanglement of the military from its former political base, Suharto's Golkar party, the separation of the police from the armed forces, and the dissolution of all military bureaus for political and social affairs. 2004's "TNI law" (Law No. 34/ 2004) envisioned a "new future role (*peran*)" for the TNI as "professional army" in a democratic environment, and included a prohibition for active militaries to serve in public administration as well as plans for the abolition of all military businesses until 2009 (Chrisnandi 2007).

The new role of the military, which has essentially been laid out in a document called *paradigma baru* (new paradigm) written by leading military officers in 1999, contains four relevant principles: 1) the military does not want to be at the forefront of politics anymore, 2) the military does not seek to hold government positions anymore, it will from now on only try to influence government decisions, 3) the military's influence on politics will follow indirect methods, and 4) all tasks carried out by the military in accordance to the principle of "role-sharing" with the civilian authorities (Sukma/ Prasetyono 2003: 22). Indonesia's "whitebook" on defence states that the transformation of TNI into a professional army "requires a TNI which does not practice politics, is under the command of a government chosen by the people in a democratic and constitutional way, is well educated and well trained, is sufficiently

equipped, and a TNI whose budget and welfare is properly provided for".[1] Drawing on indirect influence rather than being at the forefront of politics, the four principles of the *paradigma baru* do not demand a fundamental reform of the military doctrine and in many ways contradict parts of the "whitebook" published by Indonesia's defence ministry.

With one success of the aforementioned reforms being the political neutrality of the military during the 1999, 2004 and 2009 elections and the lack of attempts to directly influence politics, it must be noted that doctrinal changes (embodied in the abolishment of *dwifungwsi*) have not been paralleled by changes in structural or operational terms. The territorial structure of the military, which allows the military to influence government policies from the provincial to the village level, is still intact. Likewise, through failures to abolish the military businesses, the TNI continues to raise huge sums of money outside the government budget and without government scrutiny (Sebastian 2006). Plans to reduce the military's involvement in business have been coupled with continuous boosts of the military budget. The institutional separation of military and police has also never been fully implemented in reality. Due to a perceived inability of the police to maintain domestic security, a wide range of police tasks is still carried out by the military (Honna 2003: 241). Such dynamics must be understood against a discourse, which predicted the break-up of Indonesia due to the escalation of separatist and communal tensions following the ousting of Suharto. The fear of a "balkanization" of Indonesia has dominated debates amongst military officers, politicians and international observers alike. In the context of what was seen as a looming disintegration, the military was able to regain many of its domestic functions vis-à-vis the police, which was ill-equipped and ill-trained to overtake internal security functions that had previously been carried out by the military for decades. Furthermore, debates over a future abolition, or at least a reduction, of the military's territorial command structures came to a halt. From counter-insurgency to the intelligence agencies, and with the territorial command system and the military businesses still up and running, the military has largely maintained its dominant position within the state and thus continues to influence domestic political and social affairs (ICG 2004).

The Philippines

The absence of military interventions in politics as a stark characteristic of post-Suharto Indonesia is not to be found in the Philippines. The declaration of martial law under Marcos

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[1] Ministry of Defence (2003): Indonesia: Defending the Country, Entering the 21st Century, Jakarta, 31.03.03, p. 14.

effectively disempowered the congress and banned all political parties. Backed by the military, which in turn claimed many leading positions in public service and state-owned businesses, Marcos ruled by presidential decree. Facing an increasingly popular reform movement ("People Power I") in the 1980s, prominent military figures then withdrew their support for Marcos and played a significant role in the People Power I movement which led to the oustering of Marcos in 1986. The tenure of Marcos successor Aquino was then disrupted by seven attempted military coups. The tenure of Joseph Estrada ended in 1991 after accusations of corruption led to a popular revolution termed "People Power II", which again saw the armed forces publicly withdraw support from the president and join the reform movement. In the years 2003 and 2005 the country witnessed two more coup attempts by mainly mid-ranking officers, motivated by the alleged corruption of president Arroyo, but both failed. Yet the large number of coup attempts and military involvement in other methods of regime change should not lead us to the conclusion that institutional and structural reforms of the armed forces have not been implemented. On the contrary, the 1986 constitution of the Philippines leaves the armed forces with no legal options for political intervention. Active military officers are banned from entering government or administrative positions, and control mechanisms of the Congress, previously paralyzed through Marcos' declaration of martial law, were reinstated. Furthermore, the police was institutionally separated from the military and placed under the ministry of the interior. Accordingly, the provision of internal security was to become the exclusively domain of the police, with the military's main task being reduced to external defence (Hernandez 2007).

Strategically, the new role of the military was supposed to enable the armed forces to end their role in counter-insurgency in order to improve its conventional defence capacities. To pursue this goal, reform strategies demanded a reduction of the army from 65.000 to 50.000 soldiers as well as a significant expansion of naval and air force capacities (Karniol 2002). But due to the end of the „Philippine-American Cooperation Treaty" in 1991, which had guaranteed the AFP large sums of U.S. military aid for decades, plans to expand the high-tech and therefore cost-intensive branches of Navy and Air Force were never implemented. U.S. military aid that had amounted up to 200 Million US-Dollars prior to 1991 sunk to a mere seven Million US-Dollars.[2] Consequently, the AFP modernization plans faltered (Cruz de Castro 2005: 85). 1999 saw a revitalization of the U.S.-Philippines military relations through the „Visiting Forces Agreement", which mainly aimed for an improvement of the Philippines'

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[2] John McBeth: Broken Toys: Cash-strapped Armed Forces Look for a new Role, in: Far Eastern Economic Review, 09.09.93, p. 29.

internal stability. Further, with the Philippines fostered as a major ally in the "war on terror" in Southeast Asia and a "Major Non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization Ally" (MNNA), military aid was raised to a 164 Million US-Dollars in 2005, making the country one of the world's largest recipient of U.S. military aid (Docena 2007). At the same time the "Visiting Forces Agreement", while significantly improving the financial capabilities of the AFP, linked the strategic orientation of the AFP with the strategic objectives of the U.S. in Southeast Asia, specifically the "war on terror". Subsequently, military units that were involved in counter-terrorism have disproportionately profited from U.S. military aid, while general structural reforms have again taken the back-seat.

While formally reduced to its external defence function, the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) continues to be involved in various forms of political interventions in the post-Marcos era. This does in fact question the implementation of the "professionalization" and "depolitization" of the military envisioned in the democratic constitution of 1986. Indeed, two fact finding commissions pointed out to the fact that, despite various grievances aired by the leaders of failed coup attempts such corruption, graft, and failed modernization programs, "the willingness to use armed violence to secure political changes (…) reflect a certain psychological basis (…) described as a "Messianic complex" (Feliciano 2003: 129)". What the Davide and the Feliciano Commissions described as a "Messianic complex" stems from a self-perception of military officers as "guardians of the nation" coupled with a disregard for "corrupt" and "ineffective" civilian authorities. Furthermore, „professionalization" was hampered by a failed separation of military and police in operational terms. Against a resurgence of internal conflict, namely against the Maoist New People's Army (NPA) and the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and with police capacities in dealing with the insurgents being extremely low, the military was back to its internal role by the 1990s (Hall 2004). Plans to turn the AFP into a force dealing solely with external defence matters were fully abandoned through 2003's "Philippine Defense Reform Program" (PDRP), which, in the context of renewed military ties with the U.S., shifted the strategic objectives of the AFP back to „Internal Security Operations" (ISO).[3] Backed by the Arroyo government, the security forces have increasingly targeted what has been deemed "front organizations" of the NPA, i.e. Unions, NGOs, and certain media corporations. Through that, the military became involved in many extrajudicial killings of leftist activists while remaining with impunity (Alston 2007). After all, in the context of its role in counter-insurgency, the AFP – from

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[3] Department of National Defense: The Philippine Defense Reform, Manila 2003.

intelligence functions to the construction of schools - continues to be involved in a variety of socio-political and economic tasks, which its members are neither constitutionally mandated nor trained for.

Thailand

Thailand has grappled with military coups throughout her entire modern history. With currently 18 coups between 1932 and 2006, the Thai military has time and again taken over the government from civilian rulers to safeguard the nation. After a military coup in 1991 led to bloody street protests, the king intervened and the military Junta government led by General Suchid resigned. The period between 1992 and 2006 not only was the longest period of Thai history without a military government, but also saw the implementation of various reforms increasing civilian oversight over the military apparatus. The constitution of 1997 clearly prohibited for active militaries to take up positions in government or the senate, which led to a reduction of the military influence in government and legislative. It also made political neutrality a binding principle of the military and thus ended military support for certain candidates and their political parties which had been commonplace in Thailand until then. The Asian crisis of 1997/ 98 also triggered a downsizing of the military budget of 25% and a growing determination of civilian institutions to scrutinize military procurement and to influence military promotion (Ockey 2001).

While seemingly impressive on paper, these were all "ad hoc" reform initiatives, lacking a comprehensive reform strategy that contained the necessary structural reforms to sustain the aforementioned initiatives. The 25% cut of the Thai military budget for example was not accompanied by a downsizing of the army or a reform of the army's personal structure (Thailand currently has over 1500 active generals) and corrupt promotion system. Without any plans to cushion the impact of the budget reduction, the reduction of the budget led to an increase in business activities of the military, as well as it reinforced competition between different branches and units over the scarce resources. What's more is that the doctrine of the Thai armed forces was completely left untouched, which has seriously undermined institution-centred reform initiatives aimed at the depolitization of the military. The Thai coup of 2006, as well as the reasons for launching it given by the military, further clarifies this assumption. The Thai military see themselves as the guardian of the monarchy and of a very patriarchal concept of democracy and ultimately as a genuine political actor (Pongsudhirak 2008). The reasons for launching the coup, as publicly stated by the coup leaders, included

endemic corruption of the Thaksin-government, the looming insurgency in Southern Thailand, and the blockade of national politics resulting from Thaksins re-election a few months back.

Corresponding with its doctrine, the military's operational tasks went far beyond external defence and included the provision of internal security, political stability, and national development. The institutional reforms undertaken in the period between 1992 and 2006 did not alter the military doctrine, nor did they advance changes in operational and structural terms. Due to an ill-equipped and ill-trained police, the army generally continued to maintain control over counter-insurgency operations in southern Thailand. In certain circumstances even duties such as forensic examinations are routinely being carried out by military personnel. At the same time the military continued to carry out intelligence functions, through which it has repeatedly influenced policy-making on counter-insurgency, migration issues and foreign policy (Warimann 2007: 6). Through the ISOC (Internal Security Operations Command), established in the 1960s with U.S. support as the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC), the military maintained a strong influence on all matters concerning domestic security policies and was in charge of political work aimed at undermining oppositional forces (especially during the 1970s and 1980s). Led by the army commander in chief, the ISOC remained an agency with wide ranging competencies and political influence, but with very little civilian oversight (Crouch 1997).

4. Beyond the "military mind": on oligarchic transitions in Southeast Asia

As shown above, post-authoritarian reforms of the military have rarely managed to change its pro-interventionist, political self-perception, nor have they altered the structural and operational dispositions that have nurtured many of its corporate interests. Empirical findings presented in this paper at first glance suggest, again risking over-generalization, that failures to change the military doctrines, and hence to depoliticize it, strongly correlates with shortcomings to transform its role from internal security to external defence. Interlinked with such failures are problems such as the continuing military influence on intelligence and security policy-making, its unrelenting involvement in national development as part of its counter-insurgency missions, and the limitations of civilian control mechanisms. This is catalyzed through the inability of civilian governments to sufficiently finance the military through the state-budget. This in turn has led to a dependency on "off-budget" sources of revenue, such as military businesses and/ or external aid, which in turn has exacerbated the limits of civilian oversight mechanisms. This finding is in line with research generally

highlighting the "defective", "illiberal", or "dysfunctional" character of post-authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia. The issue of incomplete transitions to democracy of many former authoritarian regimes has been broached by political transition theorists and led to the adoption of the concept of "hybrid regimes" (Bünte/ Ufen 2009). "Hybrid regimes" are formally electoral democracies that at the same time still comprise authoritarian elements and thus "fail to meet the substantive test, or do so ambiguously" (Diamond 2002: 22). By and large the "defective" character of young democracies is determined by analyzing the "functionality", or more so "disfunctionality", of their political institutions. The current institution-centred approach of transition theory has found repercussions in scholarship on civil-military relations in post-authoritarian regimes, according to which the "weakness" of civilian institutions and the police to deal with domestic security issues explain the often dire status quo of security sector reform, and the pervasiveness of authoritarian prerogatives in the hands of the military. Against this background it seems to come as no surprise, that the "military mind" in Southeast Asia has by and large remained one far distant from Huntington's concept of the "professional soldier".

While I do think that the poor quality of "civilian" institutions and their ineffectiveness to deal with apparent domestic security threats helps to explain the little changes in military doctrine, as well as the continued political influence of the military (especially in the field of security policies), it doesn't explain the different behaviour of the military vis-à-vis the seemingly "illiberal", "defective" civilian-led democracies. With many observers claiming that civilian control over the military in Southeast Asia had been firmly established - despite the fact that various authoritarian prerogatives remained in the hands of the military in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand - the swift military coup in Thailand has highlighted the differences between the three countries. Whereas the Indonesian military remained politically neutral since the fall of Suharto, middle ranking officers of the AFP have launched various ill-executed coup attempts, and Thai officers successfully removed the democratically elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra from power.

However, if politicized military doctrines combined with high levels of security threats and domestic instability would explain why militaries launch a coup, it is not Thailand but Indonesia that should have witnessed one or more military coups after its transition to democracy. The fall of Suharto, triggered by the Asian crisis 1997/98, led not only to sweeping political reforms, but was paralleled by the outbreak and/ or escalation of a variety

of separatist and communal conflicts in Aceh, Papua, Sulawesi, the Moluccas. Moreover, East Timor in 1999 (until then an Indonesian province since its occupation in 1976) managed to secede from Indonesia after an UN-backed referendum in 1999. East Timors secession and the looming internal stability of Indonesia sparked fears amongst the military, conservative elites and the international community about a *balkanization* (disintegration) of the country. Yet at the same time, especially under the tenure of President Abdurrahman Wahid, policies to reform the military even curbed its political influence to a certain extent – with little direct political interference of the military.

Thus I argue that "high levels of domestic threats" and "disfunctionality of civilian institutions" do not help us to explain, why the Thai military actually removed Thaksin from power. That is not to say that analysis of changes and continuities, along with analysis of the perpetuation of various military prerogatives in post-authoritarian contexts, are unhelpful. It certainly helps to determine the scope of the military's institutional autonomy in post-authoritarian Southeast Asian countries and provides relevant empirical findings. Thus separating "military" and "civilian" spheres and institutions clearly makes sense for analytical reasons. Yet, on the other hand the creation of autonomous "civilian" and "military" institutions goes at the expense of studying the underlying power-structures that shape not only patterns of civil-military relations, but also the general trajectories of transitions to democracy. Coming from there, policy outcomes, such as the Thai coup (Case 2007), are only seen as a reflection of the ("defective") design or the "dysfunction" of these institutions/ institutional arrangements (Aviles 2006: 7). What's more is that it blinds us to the fact, that the "dysfunction" of political institutions might be very functional to preserve or enhance certain socio-economic or political interests (Rodan/ Jayasuriya 2009: 36).

In order to gain a better understanding of the factors that brought about a military coup in Thailand, I suggest it is necessary to dissolve the dichotomy of "military" vs. "civilian" institutions and take a deeper look and the underlying power-structures of the transition processes in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. Democratization is not only a process crafted by enlightened elites, nor is it the result of institutional predispositions or historical path-dependencies. Its trajectory, scope and sustainability are just as much the product of struggle between contesting social forces (Bellin 2000: 175). This does not mean to necessarily endorse theoretical propositions that believe in one class being the historical protagonist of democratization, nor does it involve a mechanistic determination of the

outcome of changes in state-society relations driven by democratization processes by the economic foundations of society. But as Hamza Alavi (1972: 71) has put it, "the latter, although mediated in a complex way, is the ultimate determinant of the superstructure". Hence, although it possesses some institutional autonomy vis-à-vis the "civilian" institutions, the military in Southeast Asia is only *relatively autonomous*[4] (Alavi 1972), because it is determined by the socio-economic foundations of society and their corresponding political institutions. Similarly, Samuel Huntington (1968) has argued in one of his later works, thereby as a matter of fact reversing much of his pertinent theoretical argument found in "The Soldier and the State" (1957), that the causes of military interventions can not be found inside the military itself, but in the socio-economic configuration of society vis-à-vis the political institutions present.

This problematique is mirrored in the recent events leading up to the Thai coup. Transformations of the socio-economic configuration of society in Thailand through its economic boom in the 1990s have created increased demands of entrepreneurs and peasants for political and economic participation. Thaksin successfully mobilized these social groups by promising to address their grievances via the formal political process. However the democratic constitution of 1997, designed to create strong and stable executive governments as well as to maintain control over the parliament via extra-parliamentary watchdog institutions (Constitutional Court, National Anti-Corruption Commission etc.), mainly served the interests of the oligarchy (consisting of the military, bureaucracy, and the monarchy) and the middle-classes. Additionally, the power of the oligarchy rested largely on its control over the state's institutions and resources. At the same time it effectively sought to prevent an outbreak of "political instability" by containing any form of mass-based politics representing the interests of the subordinate classes. In this context Thaksin, representing domestic capital, challenged the social forces that profited from the political status quo backed by the 1997 constitution by mobilizing the urban and rural subordinate groups and promising them a slew of new social policies and benefits (McCargo 2005: 516, Rodan/ Jayasuriya 2009: 37). Attempts to voice these grievances through a political system ill-designed to respond to actual democratic contestation led to tensions between the oligarchic bloc on the one hand, and the coalition of entrepreneurs and urban and rural poor on the other. With antagonistic interests competing over access to the state's resources, and political institutions incapable of resolving

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[4] The concept of the *relative autonomy* of the state vis-à-vis society has been established by Poulantzas (2008: 172).

the conflict, a blockade of the political system evolved and as a result the emerging social conflict was taken from the institutions to the streets. Fearing "chaos" and the disintegration of their once hegemonic position within the state by an organized cross-class opposition led by Thaksin, the oligarchic bloc turned to the military to restore the old order through a coup d'etat (Ungpakorn 2007).

The Philippines and Indonesia bear some striking similarities with Thailand as their post-authoritarian political systems also were the product of a compromise between the old, entrenched elites and the middle-classes effectively marginalizing more "radical" reform demands. Democratization was brought about via an elite-run bargaining process between old elites and moderate reformers. Social forces and interests that might push for more comprehensive reforms and therefore might challenge the underlying socio-economic power-structures have been marginalized. While in both countries liberal democratic systems of politics emerged, Hadiz (2003: 596) suggests that in Indonesia "in spite of such changes, the major theme of Indonesian political economy remains the appropriation of state institutions and resources by coalitions of politico-bureaucratic and business interests". Political power is mainly exercised through money politics and political parties represent patrimonial networks rather than social forces. With regard to the Philippines, similar analysis of the "oligarchic" character of post-Marcos Philippines has been provided by Hutchcroft (1998) and Sidel (1999). The ill-executed coup attempts carried out by low- and middle-ranking soldiers were caused by grievances, i.e. endemic corruption, lack of equipment etc., that have been associated with the "predatory" character of the Philippine democracy itself (Feliciano 2003). Thus the main difference between Thailand and its two neighbours lies in the fact, that the entrenched interests of the Thai oligarchy have been effectively challenged by a cross-class coalition led by Thaksin, which tried to gain control over the states institutions and resources (channels of appropriation, coercion, legitimacy etc.). Until now no such development has taken place in Indonesia and the Philippines.

5. Conclusion

In the final chapter of this paper, I will limit myself to providing some preliminary conclusions to the research question posed, specifically how to explain the different behaviours of Southeast Asian militaries vis-à-vis democratically elected governments. First of all, one can observe that changes concerning the military doctrines and the military's self-perception as a genuine political actor have been scarce. In line with this observation, changes

in operational and functional terms have been limited and reforms of the security sector have in general often been confined to ad-hoc institutional engineering without comprising coherent structural reforms. Thus authoritarian prerogatives prevail in the hands of the military; it still holds powerful political influence, especially on security and defence policy-making. But, and again by risking over-generalization, this has been the case in all three countries. Therefore the fact that a depolitization of the military has not taken place, does not explain the differences in behaviour. Continued involvement in counter-insurgency and failed attempts to coherently depoliticize the military has also been evident in Indonesia – a country that, unlike Thailand, did not witness the removal of a democratically elected government in her post-authoritarian period.

This puzzle has brought about a need to move beyond explanatory factors such as "high levels of coercion" or "politicized doctrines". By disbanding the (analytically useful) separation of military and political institutions, I came to study the underlying power-structures and their impact on military behaviour in young democracies. My analysis suggests that the institutional autonomy of the military is only "*relative*", as it is determined by the socio-economic power-structures and their corresponding political institutions. Democratization has brought about what Hadiz (2003: 595) has described as a new democratic political framework captured by "predatory interests" nurtured by the authoritarian order. The very gradual character of democratic reforms ensured that social forces challenging the "predatory interests" were effectively marginalized. While I argue that this observation holds in the case of post-Marcos Philippines and post-Suharto Indonesia, recent Thai history shows a striking difference. The establishment of a cross-class coalition led by Thaksin, which was created through the mobilization of urban and rural subordinate groups, ultimately challenged the hegemony of the old oligarchy (military, bureaucracy and monarchy). Confronted with a fundamental challenge of not only its institutional autonomy (i.e. through Thaksins attempts to politicize the promotion of officers) but of the underlying power-structures that guaranteed its dominant position in the state, the military, backed by bureaucrats and tacitly supported by the monarchy removed Thaksin from power in 2006.

Due to the very preliminary status of my research, many potential explanatory factors actually struck my attention, but have been left out in favour of a rather less-complex argument: First and foremost I did not study the geopolitical ramifications present, i.e. the dominance of formal liberal democracies in the world system. Second, the impact of religion (the Thai

monarchy, the Catholic Church in the Philippines and the role of Islam in Indonesia) and religious actors has remained under-specified in my paper. And third, this paper is somewhat ahistoric. Without implying historical path-dependencies as such, it takes too little consideration of the historical genesis of the "modern" military apparatus in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Last but not least: Where does all this leave us in terms of policy implications, especially with regard to the aforementioned concepts of SSR? Here the conclusions are again rather murky. The reasons for this are first of all to be found in the contradiction between various attempts of institutional engineering destined at enhancing civilian control and the de facto little changes in operational and functional terms. And second, SSR in Southeast Asia requires a coherent reworking of not only the institutions but also of functions and identities. As a largely donor-driven process it has not only struggled to find "local ownership" amongst military officers for obvious reasons, but even if the language of reform and the concept of "civilian supremacy" have been formally accepted, the events in Thailand of October 2006 have clarified the wide gap between language of reform and the underlying power-structures determining the extent of institutional reforms (Beeson/ Bellamy 2008: 173).