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Militarization and Terrorism and counter – terrorism measures in Thailand: Feminists and women human rights defenders

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I have got four keywords in my talk on Thailand today, namely Militarization, counter-terrorism measures, feminists and women human rights defenders, and multiple patriarchies.

1. Militarization

Militarization is not merely about the preparation for and conducting of armed operations in the war zone and battlefields, but the whole process of the **production of aggression, hostility and violence** which becomes institutionalized throughout the entire society. It relates with militarism - an ideology reflects the level of militarization of a state and its mechanisms as governed by military culture and its legacy, e.g. the clothing, toys, comics, video games and tv shows.

As importantly, the whole process of militarization occupies many interconnected characteristics that include all levels of society. The process of militarization includes structural organization as established through internal security councils and legislations. It can also happen that policies directed by civil governments are conducive to such process, as it is the case here and in Thailand.

Often enough, people's political participation and check and balance between and among the constitutional executive, legislative and judicial powers are superimposed by militarized democracy when the issue of secrecy regarding military action is involved.

2. Counter Terrorism Measures: Legislative and Security Tools

Militarists including military personnel and militarized civilians, always claim that the development and maintenance of the military ensures national and social order which literally means an imposition of the military order and virtues on civilian society.

Despite having kept the martial law intact over dozens of provinces in Thailand and setting aside peoples' right to assemble and other fundamental rights, the military still wants to maneuver the powerful grips through some other legislation. The measure empowers the military to be in charge of security and make arrests without warrants in the name of maintaining order. (Associated Press, 30 October 2007)

The Emergency Decree which has been criticized as a license for soldiers and police officers to kill and be protected from criminal prosecution for murder is still applicable in the three provinces of the lower south of Thailand. "The emergency decree makes it possible for soldiers and police officers get away with murder," (*Professor Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killings in Un Expert Calls on Thailand to Repeal Emergency Regulations that Violate Human Rights Law on 18 July 2006 at: www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/: visited on 25 November 2007*)

The atrocious Internal Security Act that seems to emulate the US' Homeland Security Act and Britain's Internal Security Law' has been passed by military appointed National Legislative Assembly hurriedly before it ended the assigned term in office. The legislation equips internal security units with vast authority through the broad definition of national security. The Act institutionalizes the military power through re-establishing the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), an old anti-communist military arm set up during the cold war. Internal Security Operation Council (ISOC) has the authority to prevent, suppress, revoke, halt, and correct or minimize situation including taking up various measures varying from announcing a curfew, specifying off-limits zone, forbidding communication route etc. all of these affect gravely on citizen's rights and freedom.

Despite the vital impact of the Act, no scrutiny system is allowed.

Operations under this law are not subject to the administrative procedure laws and law on establishment of administrative court while it provides impunity to criminal liability, civil liability or disciplinary action for officers who act under this law.

The Internal Security Act establishes military state within democratic state, in other words, it will nurture Thai militarized democracy. The Act has given ill-defined and overly broad law enforcement and administrative powers to the Royal Army Commander as the Director of a revived Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), with little accountability to parliament and the courts. (The International Commission of Jurist's comments: www.icj.org)

According to the Act, even with the election and civilian government, Thailand is still ruled by the authoritarian militarism. Post – election Thailand has not returned to democracy as expected. The Act shows disrespect to the letter and spirit of a constitution that the military itself has given an approval while disregards international human rights standards. The chief of Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) is changed from a prime minister to an army chief, an expansion of power and personnel, huge budget increase for the military, 20 ministries are put under the command of ISOC. All of these are parts of the process of militarization and strengthening of militarism in the country. Despite the 'justification' for issuing of the legislation as a base to fight against terrorism, critics maintain that the conflicted situation in south of Thailand is more of a homegrown rather than international. The unrest occurrences do not pose grave security threats by which military operations are required.

Some critics address an irony that from the moment the Internal Security Act is enforced, there will be no more rumors about coup d'etat. All needed to oppress and suppress civil liberty are already incorporated in the legislation.

Much still needs to discuss about deprivation of press freedom and internet censorship law which is seen by critics as the most visible aspect of this government to stage cyber war against its own citizens.

3. Feminism and militarization: Women/feminist human rights defenders

Concerns from feminists are on a convergence of patriarchy and militarization and the relationships of governments' national security doctrines and the masculinized sexualized violence exercised by men, of any nationality, not only Thai; the military maneuvers its power through vast financial, labor, and material resources and close ties to the state. Often enough, groups of women are "maneuvered" to support military operations and to sustain the military's political legitimacy and militarized masculinity in various manners and forms, (Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Some instances include proudly sending young boys to military academy and war. It has evidently happened in Thailand.

Concerns of feminists are not only about impacts of militarization, terrorism and counter- terrorism, and their impacts on women human rights defenders. Stories have been hushed up about women on the ground have been intimidated, deterred from and deprived of enjoyment of basic human rights economically, socially, culturally, politically and as citizens. They were abducted, sexually abused and even eliminated at the road check-points, their villages and homes.

To me, women on the ground comprise all women who act on, speak out and write about the rights of their own or others, little women on the streets, women who rally against state and community unjust treatment, young and old women who stretched out their arms guarding the monks protesting the military junta in Rangoon. They are women human rights defenders in great number whom feminist human rights defenders need to pay attention to their plight no less than that of the high profile ones. Hence, it is a truly heavy task placed on and expected from feminist human rights defenders.

Yet, the questions lie whether we have feminist human rights defenders in big number and with such number if they are attentive to the issue of militarization and patriarchy? The reply will be obviously and certainly not!

4. Multiple Patriarchies

As cases shown in Thailand and various places elsewhere, many women human rights defenders do not represent women's best interest in fighting against patriarchy and militarization. Many women human rights defenders defend for people's rights and not necessarily realize the multi patriarchal character of militarism, nor are they feminists.

In fighting against militarization, there is, hence, a critical need to empower women human rights defenders and transform them to feminist human rights defenders. In the process of transformation from women human rights defenders to feminist human rights defenders they are to be aware of and explore the existence of multiple patriarchal structures on the construction of what may be multiple co-existing systems of patriarchy. They have to tackle multiple patriarchal institutions like the household, community, markets and the State; all of which reinforce and reproduce masculinity and gendered power relations.

In contemporary Thailand, whilst some feminists oppose militarization, a good number of women's rights activists (however, categorization of feminists and women's rights activists needs a debate.) are swayed by the hatred of the former corruptible civilian prime minister and impatience in the judicial and democratic process to prosecute him and his cronies, thus give support to the 2006 military coup d'etat, and indeed militarization and patriarchy.

A feminist reminder is that women have to keep in mind that the military is part of the state apparatus and reflects its patriarchal character; analysis on militarization needs to extend to the ways in which gender (race, class, and religion etc) relations in the military are parts of state relations. (Ilene Rose Feinman, *Citizenship Rites: Feminist Soldiers and Feminist Antimilitarists*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1999)

As elsewhere, women, together with children and teachers in the three southern provinces of Thailand as the 'vulnerable groups', are primary targets of attacks. Hundreds of widows whose husbands were killed or disappeared in the troubled areas have been living under threat and violence, be they – physical, spirit or mind, from the presence and operations of military forces and Islam extremists. Many women and their families do not dare to

report rapes by soldiers scouting the areas, when they went to work in rubber plantations in the wee hours. Most people turn a blind eye and say nothing about any violence or sexual abuses, after learning that even the local authorities have told the rape victims to hush up for fear of consequences if the cases were processed. Women and their families cannot classify any longer the good and the bad and who are the actual perpetrators.

Feminist human rights defenders need to underline and inform the public the meaning of systematic use of rape in warfare as a war crime and that rape has been internationally defined as a crime against humanity not just the victim due to the fact that the situation in the three provinces of southern Thailand has deteriorated to the level of war, given the military spending and attitudes, presence of the forces and actual fighting.

The latest manifestation of militarization is the policy to deport pregnant migrant workers from the neighboring countries particularly Burma, as announced by the junta leader in which 'women' human rights defenders need to grasp the different impacts on male and female migrant workers' issue. The general said that a special arrangement would be made through the powerful National Security Council to deal with these migrants' babies, warning that otherwise there would "certainly be more problems in the future, particularly the problem of demands for rights, which will increase".

(See also, the Nation Newspaper Editorial, "Migrant Workers Deserve Better", published on 16th November 2007)

Feminist human rights defenders will see that the multiple patriarchies of state, militarism, and gendered power relations clearly shine in this issue.

Militarization, militarism, state apparatus and multiple patriarchies are not straightforward and raw in nature or characteristic. Women human rights defenders need to work closely with feminist human rights defenders; both groups have no other way but empowering each other and gender sensitize other members of the rights movements against militarization.

The new political 'development' seemingly for another era of democratization in Thailand with the general election held in December 2007; a civilian government has been brought back and the constitutional parliament is in function, all of those can present a false image of the real situation. It can be a misleading analysis of the so-called 'democracy' and positive scenario of gender equality and women's human rights. Whilst most cabinet members who do not have 'not so nice and clean' background, are under the leadership of the prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, who is considered as the nominee of the previous prime minister who has been under many corruption charges, let alone the grave violation of human rights. The instances include the extrajudicial killings of drug suspects and peaceful demonstrators in the south of Thailand. The current prime minister who himself, during his time as the Deputy Minister of the Interior, had a significant role in the 1976 bloody suppression causing hundreds of lives of the students and intellectuals rallying under constitutional rights to voice dissent against a dictator.

In short, despite the fact that women's human rights defenders in the women's movements have brought about some positive legal changes for women's human rights, there are however the political, economic and social patriarchal contexts especially through militarization that obstruct the ideal legislation and enforcement to cover all areas which have been identified in the international instruments especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination against Women and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Evidently, there are diverse strategies and approaches that feminists have been taken up in fighting for their inherent human rights, yet the goal is common - eliminating all gender inequalities while defending for women's human rights.
