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**Civil-Military Relations, Democratic Consolidation
and Civilian Control: Insights from South Korea's
Experience and Prospects for Thailand**

Centre for East Asian Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
Master's thesis

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Abstract.

The thesis focuses on civil-military relations (CMR), democratic consolidation, and civilian control in the Republic of Korea (ROK), especially during Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam's presidencies in the Sixth Republic. This transitional period shifted the ROK from authoritarianism to democracy, offering a valuable case for examining these developments. Therefore, this study aims to explore and analyze the impact of the 9th constitutional amendment on CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian supremacy in the ROK, including how military reforms during the Roh and Kim administrations affected these elements, as well as the prospects for Thailand. The primary sources for this thesis include English-language secondary literature and qualitative data, including Thai sources on democratic consolidation in the ROK and an interview with a Thai scholar to support the arguments. The study found that the 9th constitutional amendment provided a legal foundation for establishing democratic consolidation and civilian control, while the military reforms, making the armed forces more accept the authority of the civilian president. To improve CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian supremacy in Thailand, the mission of the Ministry of Defense must be reexamined, and the state should separate the monarchy from national security.

Key words: Civil-Military Relation, Democratic Consolidation, Civilian Control, The Republic of Korea, Thailand

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Abbreviations

AIC	The Army Intelligence Command
ANSP	The Agency for National Security Planning
ASC	The Army Security Command
BAI	The Board of Audit and Inspection
CGC	The Capital Garrison Command
CMR	Civil-Military Relations
DIA	The Defense Intelligence Agency
DJP	Democratic Justice Party
DLP	Democratic Liberal Party
DSC	The Defense Security Command
KCIA	The Korean Central Intelligence Agency
KMA	The Korean Military Academy
NCPO	The National Council for Peace and Order
NCU	The National Conference for Unification
MFP	Move Forward Party
MND	Ministry of National Defense
MSC	The Military Security Command
NDRP	New Democratic Republic Party
NSC	The National Security Council
PSS	Presidential Security Service
RDP	Reunification Democratic Party
ROK	The Republic of Korea
SCNR	The Supreme Council for National Reconstruction
UNC	United Nations Command
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPP	Unification People's Party

Chapter 1: Introduction

The martial law crisis in the Republic of Korea (hereafter, ROK) on 3 December 2024, when former president Yoon Suk-yeol declared martial law, claiming to protect the country from threats from North Korea, and the return of the armed forces in politics provide a valuable case for examining the dynamics between civilians and the armed forces, particularly during the democratic transition period in the Sixth Republic. Therefore, this study will explore civil-military relations (henceforth CMR), democratic consolidation, and civilian control in the Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam administrations, examining how the 1987 constitutional amendment, military reforms and societal changes impacted CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian control.

The research will also examine how these factors led to the ROK transformation into one of the democratic nations, providing prospects for Thailand, where the military still dominates in politics, as evidenced by the 2014 coup. After conducting the study, I intend to address the following research questions:

- What impact did the 9th constitutional amendment in 1987 have on CMR, democratic consolidation and civilian supremacy?
- In what ways did presidents Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam's military reforms shift CMR in ROK?
- To promote Thailand's democratization, what specific insights can the country learn from the ROK, particularly in relation to CMR and civilian control?

A transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic government under President Roh Tae-woo's leadership established a historic turning point in ROK politics. It ended a military regime that began with Park Chung-hee in the 1961 coup, followed by the second military coup by Chun Doo-Hwan in 1979. Under the first directly elected president, Roh Tae-woo, several reforms were carried out both militarily and politically, the establishment of civilian control over the military was the most significant. This benefited his successor president, Kim Young-sam, who continued to pursue democratic and civilian control.

Concerning the research questions mentioned earlier, the main source for the study is English-language secondary literature and research relies on qualitative data, including Thai sources on

democratic consolidation in the ROK and an interview with a Thai scholar to support the arguments.

The first question will investigate the impact of military reforms during Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam from 1988 to 1998, focusing on the approaches that each president underwent to shift CMR in the ROK. The second question will analyze the military reforms carried out during that period, along with policies related to democratic consolidation and civilian supremacy that shifted the dynamics of the armed forces and civilian authorities. It will focus on how these changes strengthened civilian control over the military and reduce the military intervention in civilian politics, enhancing political stability. Concerning the last question, Thai politics will be discussed, focusing on the ROK experience in transitioning to civilian government and its implication for Thailand. Additionally, Thai scholars' research on democratic consolidation in the ROK will be examined for deeper insights. Finally, an interview with a Thai scholar on Thai politics will be introduced, making the research more comprehensive.

The research questions mentioned above aim to fill gaps in the existing literature on the ROK's CMR, democratic consolidation, civilian supremacy as the outcome of the 9th constitutional amendment, military reforms during the Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam administrations, and the prospects for Thailand in establishing its civilian control over its military have not been discussed in the existing literature. The objective of the study is to address these issues to provide a more comprehensive understanding of CMR, the consolidation of democracy, and civilian supremacy in the ROK, including the possibility of Thailand in implementing its own civilian control, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of democratic transition and civilian control over the armed forces.

Regarding the limitations of the study, the shifting dynamics between civilians and the military, along with the consolidation of democracy, depend on both internal and external factors. One cannot deny the influence of international pressure on authoritarian regimes. External factors, such as international actors, communism, the relationship between North and South Korea, the U.S.-South Korea relations, and U.S. foreign policy towards South Korea, are all important factors in shifting CMR in the ROK. However, these elements will not be included in the paper. Nonetheless, researchers who have conducted extensive studies on external factors in democratization and civilian control, such as Ahlquist and Wibbels (2012), Obydenkova and Libman (2012), and Zelenko (2019), have provided valuable insights into the role of external

factors in political transitions from an international trade perspective. Additionally, another study that incorporates the themes of civilian control and external factors can be found in the article by Wu (2023).

In every political activity, informal relations between individuals play a crucial role, especially in negotiations and compromises during the democratic transition. However, these informal political relations are not included in the study due to limitation in both resources and my language proficiency.

Another limitation that I faced during the study was the language barrier. As my proficiency in Korean language is not at a level where I can read Korean news, relevant laws, journals or Korean academic articles by myself, thus AI tools were used during the translation process. Furthermore, the lack of Korean language skills also limited my access to primary sources that were written, printed, and published in Korean, especially during the Roh Tae-woo administration. Therefore, most of the sources in this paper are based on English academic articles and translated versions of relevant documents.

The study is divided into 8 chapters. The next chapter, the literature review, will discuss the existing literature on CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian supremacy in both the ROK and Thailand. Chapter 3, the conceptual framework, presents the key concepts of the study, which are CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian control. In Chapter 4, ROK politics will be discussed and analyzed, focusing on political history and the First – Fifth Republic. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the impact of the June 29 Declaration and the 9th constitutional amendment on CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian supremacy during the Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam administrations in the Sixth Republic. Chapter 6, Thai politics will focus on the coup in 1932, 1947, and 2014, the connection between the monarchy and the armed forces, and current politics in Thailand. Chapter 7, the discussion, presents the analysis and argument of the findings. Finally, the conclusion of the study will be presented in Chapter 8.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study aims to fill gaps in literature on the ROK's CMR, the consolidation of democracy, and civilian supremacy, while also examining the prospects for Thailand in establishing its civilian control over its military.

The existing literature concerns CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian control in the ROK, includes the work of Croissant (2004) who argues that the ROK's democracy is considered consolidated (p. 358). The author proposes the push and pull factors that contribute to the establishment of civilian control, the push factors consist of ideological coherence within the armed forces, the homogeneity of the military, the armed forces' economic interests, and resources (*ibid.*, pp. 361–363). The pull factors encompass internal security threats, external national security threats, economic development, and the pattern of civil institutions (*ibid.*, pp. 363–365). The author concludes that the ROK demonstrates a level of democratic consolidation as the number of retired military officers in politics reduced, especially during the Kim Young-Sam administration, the push and pull factors were neutralized due to the reforms, the factions within the armed forces were moderated, and the emergence of civil consensus and the lessening of external security threats (*ibid.*, pp. 376–378).

Croissant & Kuehn (2009) presented a study that focuses on civilian control and the transition process from authoritarianism to democracy in five countries: Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. The research discusses the three factors: authoritarian's historical legacies and the route to democratic transition; the military's involvement in internal security; and the relationship between development and democratic consolidation. The authors conclude that only two countries Taiwan and South Korea have democratic consolidation, where civilian authorities exert control over the armed forces and prevent military influence in politics (p. 208). Furthermore, the authors argue that the higher level of economic growth, the deeper level of democratic consolidation in these countries, and the less likely a military coup attempt would occur (*ibid.*, pp. 209–210). Nevertheless, the study failed to explain the 2006 Thai coup when the military did not acknowledge the effect of military intervention on national economic growth.

Kim K. J. (2014) argues in his study that South Korea has successfully implemented parliamentary control of the military, preventing armed forces officers from intervening in

politics. However, democratic consolidation within the Ministry of National Defense (MND) has been less successful due to ongoing threats from North Korea and the high-levels of the MND are still dominated by retired military officers (pp. 124–126). These results are similar to research presented by Kim Kyung-Pil (2021). The author argues in his research that military influence has not yet disappeared from South Korean politics, even after the dissolution of Hanahoe (Society of One), a dominant military faction during the Fifth Republic, in 1993 (p. 364). According to the author, the civilian government partially controls the military budget, personnel, and institutions (ibid., p. 360) Meanwhile, the armed forces and the MND have sought to maximize their influence through president without obtaining approval from other officers (ibid., pp. 363–364).

Heo & Hahm (2014) analyze the consolidation of democracy in the ROK from a cultural perspective. The authors argue that the factor contributing to the delay in democratic consolidation is a Confucianism-based political culture (p. 919). South Korean political culture is based on hierarchy, harmony, and stability and these characteristics of Confucianism are predominant in society and promoted within family, academic, and institutional settings, which are responsible for factionalism and regionalism in South Korea (ibid., pp. 933–935). This research argues that even though Heo & Hahm provide an alternative approach to investigate democratic consolidation, political culture alone cannot explain the slow progress democratic consolidation. It is necessary to examine other factors, such as institutions, legislation, and societal dynamics, as each element is interconnected in the process of democratic consolidation.

Furthermore, studies on democratization, democratic consolidation, and civil-military relations in South Korea can be found in the research conducted by Kim, C. I. Eugene (1975), who argues that the military during the Park administration perceived nation-building as its mission and opposition polarized society, thus the regime was unwilling to transfer power (p. 314). Cho (2001) presents a successful case of democratic consolidation in the ROK through the establishment of civilian supremacy over the military (p. 117). Saxer (2004) argues that the ROK armed forces dominants in national security and defense spheres as in other democratic nations and that the role of the military has changed since democratic consolidation (p. 403). Croissant et al. (2012) present a comparative study of new East Asian democracies and conclude that the ROK and Indonesian civilian governments successfully implemented civilian control and were able to eliminate military's influence in politics (p. 1). While Yun & Min (2012) argue that the ROK is constantly in the process of democratic consolidation, as the study

indicates an imbalance between individuals (input) and political institutions (output) (pp. 145–146). Heo (2013), who argues that although the ROK has transitioned to democracy, its democracy has not yet consolidated (p. 569). Arevalo (2021) analyses CMR and democratization in Algeria and the ROK and summarizes that the withdrawal of the armed forces led to the collapse of the authoritarian regime and the implementation of democracy (pp. 51–52). Kim & Kuehn (2022) argue that the institutional structure of the MND limits civilian supremacy and the institution remains military-dominated (p. 886).

Research on South Korean democratization, democratic consolidation, and civilian control conducted by Thai scholars includes the study by Tantisunthorn (2016). The author argues that since 1992 South Korea has experienced an increased level of citizen participation, leading to the emergence of professional politicians, and a key factor contributing to this political awareness among citizens was the education (p. 2). The previous military regime placed great emphasis on education development as a crucial element of state-building and economic growth (ibid., p. 2). After the 1986 movement, the president agreed to the constitutional amendments proposed by the opposition, which led to political reconciliation and the political reforms known as the June 29 Declaration 1987 (ibid., p. 2).

Nuangjamnong (2020) investigates both internal and external actors, particularly the U.S. in South Korean politics during the democratic transition. The author points out that the actor that played a significant part in democratization in the ROK was the ruling government, as demands and pressure from other actors, such as civil institutions and the U.S. had a direct impact on the constitutional amendment in 1987 (pp. 146).

Another research conducted by Nuangjamnong (2021) provides an insightful analysis of South Korea democratic consolidation and civilian control. According to the author, the rise of Roh Tae-Woo as the president helped guarantee the stability of the democratic transition as Roh was able to exert power over the military, ensuring a military coup was unlikely (p. 9). Furthermore, the author states that the purge of politicized and misconduct officers, especially members of Hanahoe had positive impact on democratization in the ROK (ibid., p. 14).

Comparative studies on democratization and democratic consolidation in South Korea and other countries: Thailand and Myanmar, conducted by Thai scholars, can be found in the research by Suwannaraj & Khamchoo (2014) and Makcharoen (2023). The study by Suwannaraj &

Khamchoo (2014) conclude that social movements had a direct role in initiating the democratic transition in the ROK, while Thai civil institutions were more polarized, contributing to political crisis and military intervention (pp. 71–72). Additionally, the shift in the middle class's attitude toward a military coup was evidenced by their support for the 2014 coup (ibid., p. 72).

Makcharoen (2023) highlights the factors that contributed to democratic transition in South Korea and Myanmar. The author summarizes that the factors that led to the transition to democracy were modernization through economic development, external influence, and the role of political actors (p. 75). Those political actors in the ROK adhered to principles of democracy, which led to the success in establishing democracy. In contrast, Myanmar's political actors and the military maintained an authoritarian attitude and did not adhere to democratic ideology (ibid., p. 75).

However, the above-mentioned studies on the ROK's CMR, the consolidation of democracy, and civilian supremacy by scholars do not address prospects for establishing democratic consolidation and civilian control in Thailand. The gaps in existing literature that need to be discussed concerning Thailand's distinctive political system, where the monarchy and the military have impact on CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian supremacy.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

The study aims to investigate the impact of military reforms on CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian supremacy in the ROK. Therefore, the key concepts from relevant literature will be examined and analyzed for a deeper understanding of the main topic of the research.

Civil-Military Relations (CMR)

The first main term to be investigated is CMR. CMR are closely tied to democratic consolidation and civilian control. Huntington (1964) argues that the main focus of CMR is on the dynamics between the state and military officers, as the state is responsible for managing and providing resources to important policies, including military security, which CMR is one aspects of state security policy, aiming to increase national safety in all areas; society, economic, and political institutions against threats from other states (pp. 1–3). As a result, in investigating CMR, the first requirement is to outline the military officer (ibid., p. 3).

According to Huntington professionalism of military officers is essential as it separates military personnel from warriors and is linked to the CMR (ibid., p. 7). The characteristics of professionalism can be examined through expertise, responsibility, and corporateness, as a professional officer must possesses specialized skills and knowledge through education and experience, using these skills to serve society within custom and law boundaries, and sharing a sense of collective professional with the institution (ibid., pp. 8–10).

Finer (1976), who contributes insights into the military in the politics and military intervention argues that the causes that lead to military intervention are the belief of the ‘manifest destiny’ within the military, national interest, other interests (for example, class interest, regional interest, cooperate-interest of the military, and self-interest of the officer), and the mixed motives of the armed forces (pp. 28–53). Finer also points out the conditions leading to the intervention of the military, which consist of two main factors; the increasing dependence of civilians on the armed forces and the popularity of the military (ibid., pp. 64–76).

Scholars who have conducted research on military reform, CMR, and democratization include Pion-Berlin & Martinez (2017), who argue that the reform of the CMR is a process that requires time, while some CMR reform occurs during the democratic transition period, others may occur during the consolidation, therefore, the advancement of democracy is linked to the CMR (p.

14). The authors point out that democratic consolidation occurs when the armed forces are transformed, and the goal of the transformation is to make the military becomes a tool of the state (ibid., pp. 20–24). The nation can initiate the military reform by carrying out CMR reforms, which are related to six aspects: power, law, institutions, knowledge, values, and performance, as these six elements work hand in hand with each other (ibid., pp. 28–34).

In 1995, Schiff presented ‘Theory of Concordance’ arguing that the theory of concordance offers a new approach to investigating the relationship between military and civilian as it includes ‘dialogue, accommodation, and shared values or objectives among the military, the political elites, and society’ which are overlooked by the contemporary CMR theory (p. 12). Domestic military intervention is less likely to occur when the three partners have a mutual agreement on the role of defense forces within society (ibid., p. 22). Nevertheless, Schiff’s theory is criticized for not providing anything new (Wells, 1996, p. 269).

The weakness of theory of concordance is that it fails to address the nature of democracy where civilians hold authority over the armed forces and it is less likely that the three partners (the military, the political elites, and society) will reach a mutual agreement on the role of officer corps. As the armed forces, political elites, and civilian may have different perspectives on national security threats, making it less likely that the three parties will achieve a mutual settlement. These limitations of the concordance theory reduce its applicability in a democratic social context.

Feaver (2003) argues that civilians create the armed forces to protect themselves from enemy, however, it is necessary to ensure that the military will act according to its original purpose, and as a result, CMR is a strategic relationship between civilians and the armed forces within a hierarchical form (p. 54). It is strategic relationship because the decisions of the civilian are based on their expectations of what the military is likely to do, and vice versa, and it is hierarchical because civilians have authority over the armed forces (ibid., p. 54). Feaver outlines the dynamics between civilians and military as the ‘principal-agent framework’ where the principal wants to hire a hardworking agent, and the agent wants to be employed for the wage, so he appears more diligent than he actual is (ibid., 54–55). Once the agent is hired, he will do as little as possible while informing the principal that he is working diligently, this situation so-called the moral hazard problem. The principal-agent framework examines how the principal can shift the dynamics between the two to ensure that the agent will perform as he intended to.

Brooks & Levi (2019) argue that CMR involves several relationships between the armed forces' institutions and other bureaucracies, including the dynamics between leaders and their institutions within the armed forces (p. 380). Furthermore, the authors discuss the concept of a civilian leader, arguing that it can be divided into two definitions: the first focuses on the means of becoming a leader and the status of a leader after assuming the office, and the second emphasizes on the function of the leader (*ibid.*, pp. 380–381). They point out that military officers can become a civilian leader once they take off their uniforms after the coup and military leaders also operate the armed forces, similar to civilian leaders manage state's affairs (*ibid.*, p. 381). Based on the authors' argument, this study argues that a civilian leader is an individual who is democratically elected to serve as the head of the executive and is not involved in overthrowing a previous government by force.

Bell et al. (2022) argue in their paper that CMR impacts the variation in human rights practices. In states where civilian control is low, or where conflict between civilian and armed forces occurs, there is greater of variation in human rights practices, such as in Tunisia, where military refused the president's order to oppress protestors with violence, while in Myanmar, the government was unable to prevent the armed forces from killing a minority group, Rohingyas, in the country, therefore, the military could be both a threat and a protector of human rights (p. 702), as each actor has their own preferences and would act in accordance with them (*ibid.*, p. 703). The authors (*ibid.*, p. 705) perceive the abuse of human rights as a tool that authorities use to suppress and control opposition, with state leaders as principles, assigning tasks of suppression to agents, the military. Because the armed forces are on the frontline and would involve in violence with the people, they are more likely to take the consequences of acts of oppression into consideration than their principles, and at the same time, they could be used as scapegoats by principles for acts of force, even though they carry out the operations under direct orders of the principles (*ibid.*, p. 707).

In summary, CMR refers to the interaction between civilians and military within a democratic society, where civilians hold superiority over the armed forces. A civilian leader refers to the head of government who is elected through a democratic process and does not seize power from a previous leader through a non-democratic process. Additionally, CMR, democratic consolidation, civilian control, as well as human rights are interconnected matters, with each factor having impact on the others.

Democratic Consolidation

The second concept that will be investigated is democratic consolidation. Linz (1990) argues that the concept of democratic consolidation is when democracy is the only legitimate principle of governance, with no significant political actors considering that there is an alternative route to gain power, and no veto to interfere with the democratically elected government (p. 158).

Schedler (1998) states that, originally the term democratic consolidation was used to describe the difficulty of securing new democracies, prolonging their long-term stability, preventing them from authoritarianism and ensuring that democracy is the only legitimate system in society (p. 91). However, he points out that the definition of democratic consolidation began to encompass several factors, such as the establishment of political parties, decentralization, judicial reform, and economic stability, making the term ambiguous and difficult to incorporate into the analysis (*ibid.*, p. 91–92). Therefore, to avoid the confusion, Schedler argues that only classical meanings or negative formulations should be used. The negative notions of democratic consolidation Schedler refers to are ‘avoiding democratic breakdown and avoiding democratic erosion’ and the concept should only be used to define a democratic rule expected to last in the long-term (*ibid.*, p. 102). Avoiding democratic breakdown refers to preventing new democracies from collapsing, while avoiding democratic erosion concerns the regression of democracy into semidemocratic rule (*ibid.*, pp. 94–98).

Im (2004) discusses the negative and positive terms of democratic consolidation in analyzing democratic consolidation in new liberal democracies. He argues that the negative concept of democratic consolidation fails to explain the actual transition of new democracies that have progressed to liberal democracy, thus it is unable to analyze democratic consolidation in new liberal democratic states (pp. 181–182). He states that a positive concept is essential for analyzing new liberal democracies, as the method evaluates how closely a nation moves towards full democratic governance and focuses on the quality of democracy, rather than the survival of democracy (*ibid.*, p. 182).

While a variety of definitions and approaches to the term democratic consolidation have been discussed, this paper will adopt the negative notions of democratic consolidation proposed by Schedler (1998), as it provides a clear picture of the concept. Therefore, democratic

consolidation refers preventing new democracies from collapsing and gradually falling into semidemocratic rule.

Civilian Control

The third keyword to be explored is civilian control, as it is one of the key concepts in the study, understanding the concept of civilian control is important in CMR and democratic consolidation. Huntington (1964) states that civilian control relates to the power dynamics between civilians and the military, where civilians are able to diminish the power of the armed forces (p. 80). In order to minimize the military power, He examines two forms of civilian control: 1) subjective civilian control which consist of maximizing civilian power, civilian control by governmental institution, civilian control by constitutional form, and 2) objective civilian control – maximizing military professionalism (ibid., pp.80–85). He argues that the latter is the most effective approach to reduce military power by enchanting the professional attitude among military officers, making them politically neutral, and transforming them into tools of the state who are prepared to operate under legitimate civilian authority (ibid., pp. 83–85).

Croissant (2004) states that in civilian states, the military operates under civilian oversight, therefore, civilian control represents a state in which the civilian government has authority over the armed forces (p. 358–359). Additionally, the civilian government has power to formulate military policies and strategies to achieve goals established by civilian authorities (ibid., p. 359).

Meanwhile, Trinkunas (2005) provides an alternative definition of civilian control, arguing that while Huntington focuses on military professionalism to minimize the power of the armed forces and maximize civilian authority, it is the civilian agencies' capability to monitor military operations and activities that is the most significant factor of civilian control (pp. 5). Civilian supremacy occurs when civilian authorities can oversee the armed forces' policies and approve military operations through the defense organization (ibid., pp. 5–6).

Pion-Berlin and Martinez (2017) point out the problematic concept of civilian control. The authors argue that in authoritarian states, such as China and countries in the Middle East, the armed forces are under civilian supremacy, yet these states are not democratic, while civilian authority over the military is a key condition for civilian control, it does not capture all aspects

of the concept, as the armed forces must also adhere to the laws and democratic values in the society (p. 22). Nevertheless, the authors state that democratic civilian control denotes that civilians have uncontested superiority over decision-making process (*ibid.*, p. 22).

In conclusion, civilian control is the absence of military influence in defense policy-making, with the civilian government being responsible for decision-making, approving military budgets and operations, regulating armed forces through legislative branch, and defining the role of military within the context of a democratic society.

Chapter 4: South Korean Politics

The main focus of this chapter is the political history of the ROK, starting after the Japanese annexation to the establishment of the First Republic and ending with the fall of the Fifth Republic. The purpose of this section is to provide the background and context of South Korean politics to understand the evolution and the challenges in political dynamics.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 1987, the Republic of Korea (ROK) is a democratic republic, where the president is both the Head of the State (Article 66) and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces (Article 74). President is elected directly by the people every five years (Article 67), with a limit to a single term only (Article 70) (Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 1987).

The ROK has had 13 presidents (see Table 1), each president represents a political transition and challenges of ROK politics, particularly corruption scandals. The country is currently under the Sixth republic, which began in 1988. Each republic has its own distinctive characteristics and represents changes in the political system and constitutional framework.

Table 1 List of Presidents of the ROK

No.	President	Term	Remark	After the office
The 1 st Republic				
1	Rhee Syngman	1948–1960	Resigned after the April 19 Revolution	Exiled to Hawaii
The 2 nd Republic				
2	Yun Po-sun	1960–1962	Resigned after the May 16 military Coup in 1961, carried out by Maj. Gen. Park Chung-hee	
The 3 rd Republic				
3	Park Chung-hee	1963–1972	The 4 th Republic (The Yushin Regime)	Assassinated in 1979, marking the end of Park's era
		1972-1979		

4	Choi Kyu-hah	1979–1980	Resigned after the coup led by Lieut. Gen. Chun Doo-Hwan in 1979	
The 5 th Republic				
5	Chun Doo-hwan	1980–1988	Resigned after the June Democratic Movement in 1987	Jailed
The 6 th Republic				
6	Roh Tae-woo	1988–1993		Jailed
7	Kim Young-sam	1993–1998		
8	Kim Dae-jung	1998–2003		
9	Roh Moo-hyun	2003–2008		Committed suicide amid bribery allegations
10	Lee Myung-bak	2008–2013		Jailed
11	Park Geun-hye	2013–2017		Impeached and jailed
12	Moon Jae-in	2017–2022		
13	Yoon Suk-yeol	2022-2025	Suspend on Dec.14, 2024 by parliament due to the declaration of Martial Law on the night of Dec. 3, 2024. On April 4, 2025, he was officially removed by the Constitutional Court	Impeached

Source: 1. <https://www.koreanculture.org/korea-information-government>

2. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/list-of-presidents-of-South-Korea-2050294>

3. <http://voanews.com/a/the-troubled-history-of-south-korean-presidents/7888069.html>

The Development in the South

The Moscow conference in 1945 included four dominant nations, the U.S., the USSR, China, and Britain. They agreed to place Korea under the trusteeship for four to five years before Korea gained its full independence (Seth, 2020, p.101). The U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission was formed at the conference to outline the details of the trusteeship. Seth states that, because of the Soviet demand, the people of Korea and the organizations that opposed the trusteeship were forbidden from participating (ibid., p. 101). As a result, only political groups that supported the trusteeship were allowed to join the meeting.

Following Japan's surrender in August 1945, the 38th parallel was used to divide North and South Korea (Seth, 2020, p. 1). In the South, the ROK was governed in an authoritarian manner by the first president of the country, Rhee Syngman, who secured his regime by using the bureaucracy, the police, and the armed forces to threaten and arrest National Assembly members to protect his supporters (*ibid.*, p. 106).

The Korean War (1950–1953)

During the Rhee administration, North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel and invaded the ROK in 1950, marking the beginning of the three-year Korean War, which ended in 1953, when the Armistice Agreement was signed in Panmunjom to temporarily end the fighting (United Nations Command, n.d.).

According to Sandler (1999), the Korean War reflected international politics at that time, where the confrontation of the Soviet-U.S. played out in the proxy war (pp. 3–4). To counter North Korean forces, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolutions 83 and 84 to demand an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of North Korean armed forces from the ROK, (United Nations Security Council, 1950a). Furthermore, Resolution 84 grants the U.S., as the commander of forces, the authority to operate military forces against North Korean troops under the UN flag (United Nations Security Council, 1950b).

Another turning point of the Korean War was China's involvement in November 1950, as the United Nations Command (UNC) forces approached the 38th parallel. To the Chinese government, the presence of U.S. forces in North Korea was perceived as both a threat to national security and an opportunity to foster the anti-U.S. sentiment in the country (Stueck, 1995, pp. 64–65). Meanwhile, in the ROK, Rhee wanted the UNC troops to fight until North Korean forces were defeated and Korea was reunified under his leadership. Nevertheless, despite Rhee's opposition, the Korean War Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953. The agreement specifies military demarcation line and demilitarized zone, prevents both sides from open hostilities, and prohibits entering the air, ground, or sea areas under control of the other (National Archives, 2022).

The April 19 Revolution

During the Rhee regime, the ROK relied heavily on U.S. security and financial support, with aid accounting for 58.4 percent of the budget in 1953 and 38 percent in 1960 (Snyder, 2018, pp. 23–24). In terms of military assistance, after the U.S. and the ROK signed the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1953, the ROK armed forces received several forms of aid in equipment, training, and operational and tactical skills from the U.S. (Han, 1980, p. 1076). Rhee was re-elected for his second and third terms in 1954 and 1956 respectively. However, his government began losing popularity due to corruption scandals and authoritarian rule, along with a growing urban population and increasing literacy among the Korean people (Seth, 2020, pp. 166–167). Furthermore, his controversial victory for a fourth-term presidency in March 1960 contributed to widespread dissatisfaction among students and the public, which later led to his exile to Hawaii in the same year.

The student demonstration against the 1960 election eventually became the national movement against Rhee Syngman and his Liberal Party (Kim, 1996, p. 1187). The demonstration started in February 1960 in Daegu, where students protested against a government order, followed by protests in Masan in March, where citizens found out that their names were missing from the voter registration roster (*ibid.*, p. 1188). Then, in April, as Kim points out, a large number of students gathered in front of government buildings in Seoul, shocking the authorities (*ibid.*, p. 1189). As a result, President Rhee declared martial law and the government decided to oppress students with violence (Lee, 2024). Nevertheless, the protests continued until the U.S. put pressure on Rhee, leading to his resignation on 26 April 1960 before he went to exile in Hawaii (Seth, 2020, p.168). The student movement in April later became one of the memorial days in Korea, known as April 19 Revolution Day (Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs, n.d.).

The Second Republic and the 1961 Military Coup

Following the April 19 Revolution, Rhee's presidency was succeeded by Yun Po-sun. The 1960 constitution was adopted, establishing a parliamentary system in the ROK. The constitution limited the role of the president and transferred power to the prime minister, Chang Myon, marking the beginning of the Second Republic (Seth, 2020, pp. 168–169). According to Choi (1978) due to political turmoil, factionalism within Democratic Party and the parliament, and the government's incompetence in controlling the situation, Chang Myon was eventually

overthrown by Major Gen. Park Chung-hee in the May 16 military Coup in 1961, ending the Second Republic in less than a year (pp. 331–334).

As Han (2013) states, the 1961 military coup indicated that the civilian government had failed to exert power over the armed forces, even though there were news leaks about the coup and the government could have prevented the military intervention before it was carried out (p. 36). Due to the Korean War, the ROK armed forces were trained and modernized by the U.S., which also fostered the ideology of the military as a force for nation-building (ibid., p. 41). Consequently, this belief legitimized its intervention in politics. Additionally, Han points out that the armed forces were also perceived as a social ladder for young men and unemployed men in the ROK, during a time when the nation struggled with poverty and a sluggish economic. Han argues that several factors contributed to Park's success in the 1961 military coup (ibid., 56). According to Han, the first two factors came from within the government due to its failure to restore order after the April 19 Revolution and the factionalism within the ruling Democratic Party, while other forces were from the military itself, as the coup was seen as a means to resolve internal military issues, such as regionalism, factionalism and promotional imbalances (ibid., p. 39, 42, 56). These factors eventually played significant roles in Park's rise to power, from Japan's Manchukuo army to president, before being assassinated by the head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), Kim Jae-Kyu, in 1979.

To sum up, during the First and Second Republics, the military institution was modernized and developed with U.S. support, particularly due to the Korean War and the threat of communism. As a result, the advancement of the armed forces surpassed other civil institutions. Furthermore, political institutions were either suppressed or used as tools to gain domestic support. Moreover, the short period of democratic government was unable to respond to the people's demands, leading political turmoil and public unrest. Consequently, the military was able to escape civilian control and avoid oversight by the civilian government.

The Park Chung-hee Era (1961–1979)

Under the Park regime, he implemented state-led development policies and export-oriented economy, the model was known as 'Miracle on the Han River' (Kim & Sorensen, 2011, p. 13). Shin (2014) argues, during the first phase of export-oriented development, Park took advantage of the large labor force, especially women in rural areas, calling them 'industrial soldiers' and installing pride in workers for being part of state-run cooperations, while also highlighting their

role as good daughters who sacrificed personal pleasures for the country (pp. 32–34). The state-led economic strategy also contributed to the emergence of chaebol (Korean: 재벌), business conglomerates operated by family-run cooperations, such as Hyundai, LG, and Samsung, as the government supported the growth of these companies through protectionism (Seth, 2013, p. 44). As a result, the GDP growth rate increased from 4.2% in 1955-1959 to 6% during 1960-1965, hit double digits at 10.6% between 1966-1970, and grew by around 7% during 1971-1980 (Kim & Sorensen, 2011, p.4). However, Kihl (2004) argues that Park's state-led economic model and 'a wealthy nation with a strong army' hinder democracy as the regime prioritized economic development and the armed forces' capability (p. 71).

In terms of political and CMR sphere, martial law was declared across the country following the coup. Park as the leader of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction (SCNR) became the highest leader of the ROK (Library of Congress, n.d. -c). Chung I. J. (2009) argues that Park personally supported the founding of Hanahoe (Society of One) in 1964 (p. 532), although some sources, such as Lee (2003) and Kwon (2023), state that it was founded in 1963. Hanahoe was an exclusive society and mostly recruited military officers from the Korean Military Academy (KMA) who originated from Park's hometown, Kyongsang Province, through screening and unanimous voting by its members (Kim J. H. 2013, p. 184). Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo were one of the original founders of the faction before it expanded its recruitment, where members of Hanahoe benefited from promotions and assignments.

Kwon (2023) states that Hanahoe was originally a 'bodyguard organization' of Park, under his protection, members of Hanahoe ascended to higher ranks, marking a close tie described as a 'host and its parasite.' The faction was so selective that only 3–4% of the KMA graduated enjoyed those privileges and occupied important positions in the armed forces (Ohn, 2009, p. 503). Furthermore, Chung (2009) states that military officers in Hanahoe had two chains of command, one from the official military command and another from Hanahoe (ibid., p. 533).

Throughout Park's regime, martial law was declared several times in order to regain control and suppress opposition, as evidenced in 1964 to suppress protests against the normalization of diplomatic relations with Japan, or in 1972, when President Park endorsed the Yushin Constitution. The ROK was ruled under Park's authoritarian regime, and the armed forces became his personal political vehicle, even after he transitioned to a civilian president. Kim J. H. (2013) argues that Park politicized the military, turning it into his most reliable power base

and loyal supporters to check, control, and oppress his opponents, as well as taking advantage of factionalism within the ROK military for his personal interests (pp. 168–169). Furthermore, Park strictly controlled the military and monopolized the armed forces, preventing other officers from exploiting fictional rivalries for their personal gain, while purging officers who challenged his leadership (*ibid.*, p. 170). He also employed a divide-and-rule strategy between security institutions, such as used the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) and the Presidential Security Service (PSS) to oversight the Army Security Command (ASC) and the Capital Garrison Command (CGC), while the ASC was watched by the CGC (*ibid.*, p. 171).

Park became the fifth president of the ROK in 1963 through the general election and won his second term in 1967. He sought to extend his presidency by amending the constitution in 1969. Even though the proposal was opposed by the opposition party and the public, the Democratic Republic Party (DRP) was able to pass the 1969 constitutional amendment without the presence of the opposition party, allowing him to run for his third term presidential election (Seth, 2020 p. 200). In October 1972, Park enacted the Yushin (Revitalizing Reform) Constitution (Im, 2013, p. 233), marking the beginning of the Fourth Republic and his fourth term as president. Under the Yushin Constitution, the president would be selected by the National Conference for Unification (NCU), a body appointed by Park himself. Additionally, the constitution granted the power to issue Presidential Emergency Decree in response to national crisis, Park used this power to crack down on activists and outlaw groups that opposed to the Yushin system (Breen, 2010).

The terror created by Park's dictatorship and the Yushin system continued as he was re-elected for his fifth and last term in 1976. The Anti-Yushin Movement began to spread widely in 1974, several demonstrations were being arrested on charges of violating the National Security Law (Library of Congress, n.d. -a). While attempting to suppress the demonstrations through a Presidential Emergency Decree and martial law, he was assassinated in October 1979 by Kim Jae-Kyu, head of the KCIA, ending almost two decades of Park's authoritarian regime, which began with the coup in 1961.

In conclusion, under Park's leadership, his implementation of state-led economic development led to economic growth, the rise of the middle class, the expansion of urban areas, and a high literary rate among the Korean people. Civil society, which had not been as developed as the armed forces during the previous republics, were able to rise and advance under the Park

administration. However, the strength of civil sector during this regime was not enough to shift the ROK to a democratic nation, as the military still held significant power to intervene in politics and execute the coup. Furthermore, Park exploited factionalism within the military to his advantage in order to maintain power. Nevertheless, the transition to democracy and civilian control was approaching, despite being ruled under an authoritarian regime in the Fifth Republic.

The 1979 Coup and the 1980 Kwangju Uprising¹

Following the collapse of Park's regime, Choi Kyu-Hah briefly served as Head of State and Chief Executive, including Commander-in-Chief, after being elected by the National Assembly under the Yushin Constitution. A document from National Security Council (1981) states that Choi Kyu-Hah became Commander-in-Chief by accident, while armed forces remained dependent and fragmented. Furthermore, the paper also points out that Gen. Chun Doo-Hwan, head of Defense Security Command (DSC) and chief investigator of Park's assassination, controlled military and police-related institutions, such as KCIA, National Police, and military intelligence services, and as a result, his close allies were appointed to important command roles, including positions within government administrations.

The 'Seoul Spring' emerged as the public demanded reform and democratization. However, instead of democracy, the ROK once again witnessed a military intervention by Chun Doo-hwan in December 1979, also known as the 12.12 Incident. In this military coup, a faction within the ROK military came into play. As Seth (2020) points out, Chun and his two allies, Roh Tae-woo and Chong Ho-yong, were in the same class at the Korean Military Academy (KMA) and were from the Taegu-Kyongsang region, the same region as Park Chung-hee, their faction was known as 'the T-K faction', and in order to consolidate their power, the T-K faction began arresting and purging military officers from other factions after the coup (pp. 206–207). The public's response to the military coup and martial law was a demonstration. In Kwangju, the armed forces used violence against protesters, leading to civilian casualties, the number of Kwangju fatalities remains unknown to this day (Library of Congress, n.d. -b). This bloodshed incident became a stigma for Chun and everyone involved throughout their lifetimes.

¹ The 1980 Kwangju Uprising, also known as the Kwangju Massacre or the Gwangju Uprising and Massacre.

The Fifth Republic (1980-1988) and The June Democratic Uprising (1987)²

After the 1979 coup and Choi's resignation in August 1980, power was transferred to retired officer Chun Doo-hwan through the indirect presidential election held later that year. Cho J. K. (2001) argues that the military coup in the ROK followed a distinctive pattern, where the coup leaders, after executing the coup, would assume civilian leadership positions, claim that their regime was not a military one, and depend on personalized power to administer affairs (p. 126). Furthermore, Cho points out that this pattern made the ROK military regime more civilian in nature than those in Latin America.

Following the 1980 election, Chun Doo-hwan, a new elected president, declared martial law and ruled the ROK with a military dictatorship. The media, both domestic and foreign, were strictly controlled, and used as a political tool to mobilize support and distract attention from politics (Kwak, 2012, pp. 16–21). Despite protests being suppressed through the use of violence during the Chun administration, mass protests against Chun's regime continued in Seoul and other major cities, with an estimate 1.8 million participates in 33 cities on June 26, 1987, demanding a new constitution and democratization (Cho J. E., 2024, p. 1). The study conducted by Saxer (2004) argues that a group of military officers opposed the use of force against political opponents and also opposed those who wanted to remain in power (p. 388). Saxer states that the armed forces as an institution did not carry out the coups in 1961 or 1980, as they were executed by high-ranking officers within the military (ibid., p. 388).

In the same year, Roh Tae-woo was selected as Chun's successor in the upcoming presidential election, increasing public discontent with the regime (Cha & Smith, 2021). After three weeks of national wide protests, Roh announced the 'June 29 Declaration', which included a new constitution and a direct presidential election (Lee, 2012). Tantisunthorn (2016) argues that the political turning point of the ROK was the 1987 Uprising, as demonstrations took place across the country, demanding constitutional amendment (p. 2). Kim (2000) argues that, due to protests and social movement formed an alliance with the opposition, the ruling government were forced to yield to the demonstrators' demands (pp. 92–93). In the December 1987 election, Roh Tae-woo was elected through a direct presidential system after a long military dictatorship,

² The June Democratic Uprising, also known as the June Democratic Struggle, the June Democracy Movement or the June Uprising.

marking the beginning of the Sixth Republic and the start of democratic government in the ROK.

In summary, the end of Fifth Republic marked the beginning of the transformation towards democracy. The civil sectors were able to gain momentum in democratization, and the armed forces were no longer the solely institution dominating politics. Their roles in intervening in domestic politics decreased, allowing other sectors to flourish, especially democratic institutions. Additionally, a change in attitude within the military began to emerge. Despite his background and personal connections with military, Roh Tae-woo was elected by the people and came to power through a democratic election. The rise of Roh Tae-woo, the beginning of the Sixth Republic, and the Kim Young-sam administration, especially in CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian supremacy spheres will be discussed in details in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: CMR, Democratic Consolidation and Civilian Control in the Sixth Republic

The previous chapter provides the political history of the ROK, from the end of the Japanese annexation to the fall of the Fifth Republic. This chapter will investigate reforms in transitional periods from the June 29 Declaration in 1987 to the end of Kim Young-sam administration in 1997. The study aims to examine how CMR and democratic consolidation have developed over time, and how it affected civilian control in the ROK. The period of the study focuses on the Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam administrations, as there were crucial phases in implementing civilian control over the armed forces in the ROK.

This paper argues that Roh Tae-woo was a crucial figure in shifting CMR in the ROK, the tasks that his successor, President Kim Young-sam continued to carry out.

The June 29 Declaration³

Prior to the 1987 direct presidential election took place, one of Roh's promises in the June 29 Declaration was to rapidly amend the constitution to implement a direct presidential election system that would guarantee fairness and justice in the election (Bedeski, 1994, p. 169). Strnad (2010) argues that the June 29 Declaration was Chun Doo-Hwan's idea (pp. 206–207). Strnad refers to Chun's memoirs, which suggest that the declaration aimed to improve Roh's public image, as he had been involved in the suppression of the Kwangju Uprising, and to increase Roh's public support when he later became Chun's successor as the presidential candidate of the Democratic Justice Party (DJP). Strnad also points out that Chun sought to resolve the demonstrations against his regime through the declaration, including to ensure the victory of Roh and the DJP, as the opposition would not be able to send a single candidate to compete with the DJP and Roh (*ibid.*, p. 207). Therefore, the declaration was an intentional strategy by Chun to safeguard the continuation of the T-K faction's power.

According to Han (1988), the ruling party and his opponents was surprised by Roh's June 29 declaration, as it comprised all demands from the opposition, including the release of political

³ The declaration consists of eight points as follows: 1) Rapid constitutional amendment for a direct presidential election 2) New presidential election regulations for fairness and justice 3) Individuals convicted of crimes related to politics would be pardoned and released 4) Basic human rights would be guaranteed 5) The withdrawal of press restrictions to create freedom of the press 6) Restoring the autonomy of all sectors, including universities 7) The guarantee of political activities 8) Campaigns against corruption and criminal activities on a national scale

prisoners, such as Kim Dae-Jung, and guarantee basic human rights (pp. 54–55). Kim Dae-Jung later became an adversary to Roh in the presidential election, along with Kim Young-sam, and Kim Jong-Pil. This paper outlines that, whether the declaration originated from Chun or Roh, his speculation that the opposition would not have been able to agree on a single candidate was correct. This factor contributed to the victory of Roh in the presidential election was the regional rivalry between opposition leaders Kim Dae-jung from Jeolla Province and Kim Young-sam from Gyeongsang Province, which caused the votes to scatter among the candidates.

The terms and conditions of the declaration were accepted by both President Chun and the opposition, who agreed to Roh's demand as a means to peacefully transfer power to democratic government, which led to the amendment of the constitution. Bedeski (1994) argues that the significance of Roh's June 29 declaration was that it guaranteed liberalization and civilian control over the military (p. 37).

The 9th Constitutional Amendment

This study suggests that the 9th constitutional amendment, which is also the current constitution of the ROK, helped prevent the dictatorship, promoted democracy and human rights, strengthened civilian control over the armed forces, and most importantly, limited the military's intervention in politics.

Before 1987, the country had been governed under an authoritarian or military authoritarian regime, especially during Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan. After the new constitution was enacted, the ROK has never experienced authoritarian regime again. Huq & Ginsburg (2018) argue that, the three essential characteristics of constitutional liberal democracy are free and fair periodic elections, the rights to speech and association, and the stability of the rule of law (p. 87). According to the current constitution, both National Assembly and direct presidential elections are guaranteed under Article 41 and 67 respectively. Furthermore, Article 70 stipulates one-term limit (five years) on presidency and the president shall not be re-elected. These articles prevent the continuation of an authoritarian regime, as seen during the administrations of Rhee Syngman and Park Chung-hee, when the constitutions allowed presidents to run for consecutive terms. Bedeski (1994) states that under the leadership of Roh, several undemocratic laws were reformed and liberalized (p. 41). For example, in media landscape, a Licensing system, which allowed only one newspaper in each province, was eradicated, the Broadcast Law was enacted and radio was able to broadcast news reporting (Kwak, 2012, pp. 32–35). These laws promoted

freedom of media, which is crucial in a democracy, as they allowed the media to act as a watchdog in society.

The Armed Forces and Human Rights

Concerning the promotion of democracy and human rights, the current constitution also guarantees essential elements of human rights, and this paper will adopt the human rights framework outlined by the UN and the Commission on Human Rights in 2002⁴ (The United Nations, n.d.). The crucial principles of human rights consisted of 10 principles. For example, in the constitution, Article 8 guarantees the plurality of political parties and the participation of citizens in political activities, Article 10 states that the State has a duty to affirm and guarantee the fundamental and inviolable human rights of individuals, Article 41 confirms the periodic election of the National Assembly, and Article 67 guarantees equal and direct presidential elections.

Therefore, the study suggests that the 9th constitutional amendment shifted CMR in the ROK, as the nation moved towards democracy, there was a strong sense of protecting individuals' rights. Additionally, Choe (2024) states that the ROK military was perceived as 'agents of terror and violence' during the 1970s and 1980s, they have been trying to improve their image and gain public trust after their history of bloodshed. As a result, the military carefully calculates the consequences of their operations, evaluating whether they could damage the armed forces' image among citizens, as they aim to be perceived as a shield of human rights in society.

Checks and Balances

The constitutional reforms in 1987 attempted to establish checks and balances, control the armed forces' intervention in politics, and strengthen civilian control over the military.

First of all, to implement checks and balances system, sovereign power is separated into the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, preventing any one of the branches from

⁴ The Human Rights normative framework involves 10 key elements as follows: 1) Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms 2) Freedom of association 3) Freedom of expression and opinion 4) Access to power and its exercise in accordance with the rule of law 5) The holding of periodic free and fair elections by universal suffrage and by secret ballot as the expression of the will of the people 6) A pluralistic system of political parties and organizations 7) The separation of powers 8) The independence of the judiciary 9) Transparency and accountability in public administration 10) Free, independent and pluralistic media

dominating or being under the control of the military. Under the constitution, the National Assembly has the constitutional power to conduct investigations of state matters, as stated in Article 61. Moreover, Article 62 stipulates that the Prime Minister, members of the State Council or government delegates may require to attend meetings of the National Assembly to answer inquiries. Additionally, Article 63 outlines that the National Assembly holds the power to recommend the removal of the PM or a member of the State Council. These articles guarantee that the legislative branch has the power to oversee the executive branch, preventing the increase of power. Park Y. H. (n.d.) argues that the ROK legislative division has the authority to regulate both the executive and judicial divisions, as the National Assembly has the power to formulate laws, while the executive and judicial are responsible for carrying out and applying laws.

According to Saxer (2002), as the 9th constitution was formulated amidst negotiations between the old regime and its rivals, it shifted the dynamics of the three branches of the government, reintroduced local autonomy, and expanded civil and political rights (p. 67). Saxer argues that the constitution constraints the president's power, such as Article 70 limits the term of office of the president to five years, and Article 77, even though the constitution grants the president the authority to declare martial law, the president must notify the National Assembly, otherwise the declaration will no longer be effective (ibid., p. 67). Once martial law is requested to be lifted by the National Assembly, the president must act according to its decision (Article 77 (5)). Article 77 strengthens the legislative branch's control over the executive and limits the president's power in the use of martial law.

Strnad (2010) shares a similar thought to Park Y. H. and Saxer. Strnad argues that a constitution empowers the legislative branch, a power that was diminished during the Park and Chun administrations. Under a new constitution, Strnad points out that the National Assembly has the authority to investigate government officers, approve and audit national budget and government agencies expenditures, impeach government and judicial officers, dismiss martial law declared by the president, and contrary to the previous republic, the president does not power to dissolve the National Assembly (pp. 211–212).

On the other hand, the ROK constitution has been criticized for granting extensive power to the president. Kim S. H. (2017) argues that the constitution lacks an adequate mechanism for checking the president's power, which could lead to an abuse of power or the 'imperial

presidency' through the National Assembly, as the constitution grants the president the power to appoint the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the president of the Constitutional Court with the approval of the National Assembly (Article 104 and 111). While, Article 98 of the constitution states that the chairman of the Board of Audit and Inspection (BAI) shall be appointed by the president, with the consent of the National Assembly.

However, the attempt to implement checks and balances is evident in a new constitution. To guarantee that every branch exercises its power and carries out its duties according to the constitutional manuscript, Article 65 states that the civilian leader, high-ranking civilian political leaders, and other public officers can be impeached for violations of the constitution or other laws. Furthermore, Kim N. Y. (2017) argues that BAI and its audit and inspection processes are designed to strengthen citizens' participation as citizens are able to provide feedback to BAI, contributing to democratic consolidation, protection of human rights, and increase civic engagement in public concern (p. 161).

Civilian Control

To establish democratic consolidation and civilian control, Article 5 (2) stipulates that the Armed Forces shall be charged with the sacred mission of national security and the defense of the land and their political neutrality shall be maintained. This article limits the duty of the military to national security-related missions, which are the key tasks of the armed forces, and the constitution also highlights that the military must maintain its neutrality in politics. Thus, the constitution prevents the military from taking on roles unrelated to national security, such as a political or economic actor. Furthermore, the constitution emphasizes that the civilian leader has power to oversee and exert authority over the military, as stipulates in Article 66 and 74 that the president shall be the Head of State and the Head of the Executive Branch and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

By granting the civilian leader to exercise power over the armed forces, the constitution guarantees a direct control and prevents the military officers from carrying out undemocratic activities against the government. Article 86 and 87 prevent military officers from being appointed as Prime Minister and a member of State Council, unless they have retired from their duties. This helps prevent the military from dominating the government and exerting its power in politics. Furthermore, to strengthen civilian control over the armed forces, the constitution

under Article 88 also grants authority to the State Council to oversee military-related affairs, including the appointment of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Chief of Staff of each armed service, and Article 91 grants the president the authority to be in charge of the National Security Council's meetings. Consequently, strengthening civilian control over military-related matters.

In summary, the 9th Constitutional Amendment not only helped advance democratization in the ROK, but also promoted human rights, which previously violated under military dictatorships and are core to democratic principles, increased the legislative branch's power, strengthened the checks and balances system, reduced opportunities for the armed forces' intervention in politics, limited the military's role to the national security sphere, and urged the armed forces to maintain political neutrality. Nevertheless, the amendment faced criticism on the president's authority or 'imperial presidency, which could lead to the ineffectiveness of checks and balances. However, the constitution provided the democratic foundation by guaranteeing civilian control over the armed forces and fostering democratic development in the ROK, including offering good training in negotiation and compromise for politicians.

Roh Tae-woo (1988–1993)

The outcome of the 1987 presidential election were the result of the June 29 Declaration, advanced social movement, the upcoming 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, the competition between Roh and the three Kims (Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung, and Kim Jong-pil), and regionalism (Lee and Campbell, 1994, p. 43; Kihl, 2004, p. 87; Strnad, 2010, pp. 207–209; Seth, 2020, pp. 209–212). Lee K. H. (2017) argues that the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games indirectly contributed to democratization in the ROK (p. 207). The government and the Olympic committee aimed to promote the country's development and capabilities on a global scale. As a result, it helped to create a democratic atmosphere in the ROK (ibid., p. 209). Lee & Campbell (1994) argue that, due to Roh's connection with Chun, his involvement with the Kwangju Uprising, and his previous military posts, he was perceived as a politically suspect individual (p. 42). On the other hand, he was praised as 'a bridge between authoritarianism and democracy' (Choe, 2021) and his commitment to democratization was praised from both in the ROK and abroad (Kihl, 2004, p. 92).

Ohn (2009) argues that, the Sixth Republic was the turning point for CMR in the ROK, not only was it established under a new democratic constitution, but the neutrality and mission of the

armed forces were also addressed in the constitution. Ohn argues that the military's attempt to rebuild the public trust was evidenced in the 1988 Defense White Book, as it states that the armed forces would democratize their institution by maintaining political neutrality, operating with transparent administration, and eliminating conflict elements within the armed forces (p. 504).

Military Reshuffle

After Roh became the president of the ROK, he sought to distance himself from the Fifth Republic and his predecessor, Chun Doo-Hwan, and his presidency was marked as 'an era of ordinary people' (Lee and Campbell, 1994, p. 44; Saxer, 2002, pp. 77–78; Seth, 2020, p. 212). His government consisted of people with diplomatic and academic backgrounds, the generals and commanders who had connection with the old republic were asked to leave their posts and be replaced (Saxer, 2002, p. 95, 124). According to Cho J. K. (2001), Roh's military reform aimed at transferring the leadership of the armed forces from Chun to him (p. 134). This explained why many high-ranking officers with close ties to the previous regime were dismissed and replaced by Roh's allies. When the Army Chief of Staff, Park Hee-do, publicly threatened against Kim Dae-jung if he won the presidential election in 1987, he was replaced by a more progressive officer and Roh's friend, Lee Hong-ku. Furthermore, after Park Hee-do's statement, the Defense Minister, Chung Ho-yong, stated that the statement was personal opinion and not an official statement from the military (Saxer, 2002, p. 123).

In addition to the dismissal of Park Hee-do, Roh attempted to shift the military's loyalty to him, including the removal of Min Pyong-ton, who criticized his Nordpolitik (the Northern Policy), the reshuffling of high-ranking positions, including three-star and four-star generals, who had close connections to Chun in the armed forces, and the consolidation of power through regionalism, the KMA graduates from his hometown of North Kyongsang province were promoted to general positions (Strnad, 2010, pp. 221–222). Kim Y. M. (2004) argues that Roh recognized changes in society and understood that the authoritarian regime would not be possible, and as a result, Roh sought to gain political support through democratic reforms, including securing his control over the armed forces through reshuffling key positions within the military (p. 128). By replacing high-ranking command positions and removing politicized officers in the armed forces, Kim argues that these shifted CMR in the country, the military officers perceived that the armed forces intervention in politics would be intolerable and the

cause of military political dissatisfaction, such as tension between age, rank and promotions were dissolved (*ibid.*, pp. 128–129).

Kihl (2004) argues that Roh had solved the Praetorian problem, where the armed forces had excessive dominance in politics, by imposing control on the military factionalism and urging the armed forces to remain neutral in politics and maintain its professionalism (p. 92). Cho (2001) argues that Roh's military reshuffle contributed to the depoliticization of the armed forces, placing them under the control of the elected president (p. 138).

In contrast, Chung (2009) argues that although Roh tried to initiate military reforms, his reshuffle did not eliminate favoritism that caused officers to become politicized and Hanahoe, the main faction in the establishment of the Fifth Republic remained untouched (p. 540). However, the attempt to exert civilian control over the military was shown in limiting the armed forces operations in the civilian sphere, reducing the privilege of the military officers, and conducting investigations into officers who threatened democratic values. During his presidency, the Army Intelligence Command (AIC) threatened a journalist who criticized the armed forces culture, choosing transparency over the protection of the AIC, Roh ordered an investigation into the incident, and ordering the Defense Security Command (DSC) to reduce its agents and cease its operations in civilian surveillance (*ibid.*, p. 540). Furthermore, Roh also made armed forces budget available, and published a Defense White Paper for the first time in twenty years (*ibid.*, p. 541).

Military Professionalization

Although the ROK military had not yet been fully under civilian control, it had been civilianized to some degree (Saxer, 2002, pp. 121–122). Saxer states that, the coup leaders, Park and Chun, were soon assumed to be elected presidents after the military coups, and even through the armed forces remained a significant actor in politics, they increased their professionalization in their role in defending the nation against external threats. Saxer's view on the generals turning into civilian leaders is similar to Cho J. K.'s (2001) the pattern of military coup in the ROK, which is discussed in the Fifth Republic (1980-1988) and The June Democratic Uprising (1987).

Kihl (2004) proposed a similar concept, called the 'soldiers-turned-politicians.' Kihl argues that the soldiers-turned-politicians were motivated by the ideas of modernization, which helped advance the nation's industrialization and development, shifting the ROK from a poor country

to a wealthy nation during the Park administrations (p. 71). Under the Third to Fifth Republic, the soldiers-turned-politicians were able to successfully accomplish their modernization and industrialization goals, but they lacked legitimate justification for govern the country (ibid., p. 71). During the Park and Chun regimes, this lack of democratic legitimacy negatively affected the regimes, while it had a positive impact during the Roh government (ibid., 71).

Apart from replacing officers in command positions, Roh also initiated structural reforms in the military by proposing a new defense plan aimed at increasing the armed forces' capabilities, including establishing democratic consolidation within the military.

The 818 Defense Plan

The plan was proposed in 1990 in response to the U.S. plan to reduce its troops in South Korea. It aimed to increase the military efficiency, as well as strengthen the civilian control over the defense forces (Yonhap News Agency, 1990). By establishing a unified command of the ROK armed forces, instead of having each individual service control them separately (Chun, 2017). Both Chun and Kim & Kuehn (2022) argue that the plan raised concerns among the military, particularly the Navy and the Air Force. According to Chun, the Navy and the Air Force argued that a single command was not necessary, as many countries could carry out joint operations without a unified command, and a newly appointed Defense Chief of Staff might lack naval and air operations experience. Meanwhile, Kim & Kuehn argue that the plan would increase Army dominance over the Navy and the Air Force branches and maintain Hanahoe control over the armed forces (p. 883).

In contrast to Chun and Kim & Kuehn, Cho (2001) argues that the 818 Defense Plan received positive feedback from the three military services. Cho states that the armed forces perceived that a unified command of the ROK military would increase its efficiency in encountering North Korean troops instead of the three separate services command (p. 127). Additionally, Cho points out that the plan provided an incentive for the military to accept the civilian control over the military, as military leaders, especially the Army Chief of Staff, were ambitious to become the first Defense Chief-of-Staff.

Nevertheless, Kim & Kuehn and Cho suggest that the plan was strongly opposed by the opposition and the legislative branch. The opposition argued that the plan could decrease civilian control over the armed forces while increasing military independence, as it concentrated

power in one single officer. Additionally, this reform could have constraints on the unfolding democratization policies, as evidenced in Spain, where a unified command benefitted the military by allowing the three services to have a unified stance that was absent prior to the establishment of a single command. Kim & Kuehn point out that due to the fear of consolidation of power within the military, the National Assembly amended the Armed Forces Organization Act to enact a dualized command, where the JCS is responsible for operational command and military administrative control is under command of each individual service (p. 883). Consequently, the original plan did not pass the National Assembly as it was dominated by the opposition party.

Nevertheless, after the merger of three political parties in 1990; Roh's Democratic Justice Party (DJP), Kim Young-sam's Reunification Democratic Party (RDP), and Kim Jong-pil's New Democratic Republic Party (NDRP), the ruling party, Democratic Liberal Party (DLP) was able to push the reform through the National Assembly. Strnad (2010) argues that the reform was perceived as the modernization of the ROK military, as it increased the armed forces expenditure, which was welcomed by high-ranking officers and helped increase Roh's leadership within the military, including mobilizing loyalty from Chun to Roh (p. 221).

Changes in Society

As the Roh administration was the first democratically elected, it became more sensitive to public opinion and the country's economic performance in exchange for its political support, compared to previous authoritarian regimes. The result of the 1988 legislative elections led to constraints on the ruling party (DJP), as it was the first time opposition parties held a majority of seats in the National Assembly. During the election campaigns, President Roh tried to mobilize the ruling party's political support through continuous democratic and economic development efforts, while opposition parties criticized the DJP for its close ties with the Chun government. Kim H. N. (1989) states that these scenarios made the election another competition between Roh and the three Kims (p. 484). Kim argues that the result of the 13th National Assembly election provided a positive indication for political development in the ROK and a good test of President Roh and his government's popularity, including helping advance democratization in the ROK (ibid., p. 494).

From the March First Movement in 1919 to June Democratic Movement in 1987, social movements in the ROK were the driving force behind the nation's independence and

democracy. Kim H. K. (2001) argues that the June Uprising was a turning point in the democratization process and the growth of social movements led to democratic consolidation in the country (p. 230). In the Sixth Republic, civil society became more involved in domestic politics, while political sectors, such as the government and political parties, including the press became more open to public participations (Shin J. W., 2020, pp. 247–248). Shin (2020) marks distinctive characteristics of demonstrations in the ROK, stating that massive-scale protests are organized frequently within a brief period of time and swiftly impact government decisions and power dynamics at the national level (*ibid.*, p. 254). This paper argues that the increased engagement of social movements in politics was the result of industrialization, which contributed to the growth of educated individuals, particularly as employees in advanced technology industries. Economic growth also led to the expansion of the middle class and the development of urban areas. Due to economic development, the armed forces were no longer the only advanced institutions in the society. Civil institutions, which had once been suppressed by the military, became stronger and more active in participating in politics.

Koo (1991) argues that the expansion of the middle class in the ROK was a crucial factor in the country's democratic transitions, the media even called the victory of June Democratic Uprising as a 'middle class revolution' (p. 491). Similar to Koo, Huntington (1991) argues that that a nation's wealth and democracy are relatively correlated (p. 60). Democratic transitions tend to occur in nations whose economic development has reached a middle level. According to Huntington, those transitions are unlikely in poor countries, while wealthy countries are most likely to have democracy (pp. 60–61). Huntington describes the wave of democratizations as a series of transitions from nondemocratic to democratic governments that occur in a certain time period and each wave influencing small number of countries (*ibid.*, p. 15). Furthermore, Huntington argues that the democratic transition in the ROK was part of the 'third wave', in which an authoritarian regime transforms to a democratic state after the failure of previous efforts (*ibid.*, p. 42).

Another factor that led to the decline of the military's dominance in the society and helped prevent the abuse of national security was the initiative of Nordpolitik or the Northern Policy. The Policy was originally introduced by Park Chung-hee before being continued under the Chun and Roh administrations (Chung, 1991, p. 151). The core of the policy was to normalize relations with communist states, particularly the Soviet Union and the PRC, which also helped improve inter-Korean relations. Consequently, the military could no longer use anti-

communism to justify its operations, such as during the Chun administration, the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) spread rumors about North Korea to legitimize its involvement in politics (Seo, 2018, p. 454).

To sum up, the Sixth Republic, established through negotiations and compromise between the ruling party and the opposition, marked the first direct presidential election, which was considered a fair election. Even though president Roh was a candidate from the old military regime, one could not argue that he lacked the political legitimacy justification to become the president of the ROK. President Roh was a bridge to democratization and his efforts to promote democracy and establish civilian control over the military provided a strong foundation for his successor to continue the reforms. During his administration, the armed forces were unlikely to execute another potentially military coup, as they sought to withdraw from politics and return to the barracks. It was the period that the military found a new identity within a democratic society, as a guardian of liberal democracy and human rights, rather than an authoritarian force. Experts from academic and professional backgrounds were appointed to government positions, while military institutions were directed to limit their operations within national security sphere and reduce their number of agents. Although Roh was being criticized that his military reforms did not eliminate the culture of the armed forces and the persistence of favoritism, democratic consolidation in nature is a process that requires time, rather than a finished product, and it is unlikely to achieve within one presidency.

Changes in society also played a role in civilian control, as the public became more active in examining the government. The wave of democratizations had arrived and the people of the ROK seized the opportunity to ensure the country would never revert back to an authoritarian regime.

Kim Young-sam (1993–1998)

Kihl (2004) argues that the ROK democratization process began with the announcement of the June 29 Declaration and Roh's democratic reforms, and was completed when Kim Young-sam rose to power as the first civilian president in the 1993 election (p. 75). While Im (2004) argues that the outcome of the 1997 presidential election, with Kim Dae-jung was elected president, marked a turning point in democratic consolidation, as power was transferred to the opposition party for the first time in 50 years (p. 185).

According to Lee (1993), Roh was indecisive in nominating his successor, Kim had to go through negotiations with Roh in order to secure the presidential nomination from the ruling party, the DLP⁵. Meanwhile, although Roh had established military reforms throughout his presidency, the armed forces remained independent of civilian control. Saxer (2002) states that, following Roh's resignation from the ruling party, the Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP)⁶ announced that it would maintain its political neutrality in the presidential election (pp. 127). However, the factor that led to the ANSP's statement was politically motivated. Saxer argues that the public might have voted for candidates from opposition parties if the ANSP had publicly favored Kim Young-sam over his opponents (such as, Kim Dae-jung, Chung Ju-yung, and Park Chan-jong) (Saxer, 2002, p. 128).

Lee (1993) states that, even though there were independent candidates running for the president, only the two Kims and Park dominated the campaign. Kim Dae-jung criticized Kim Young-sam for merging his political party (RDP) with the ruling party (DJP) in 1990, while Kim Young-sam criticized Kim Dae-jung for concealing his true intentions (Lee, 1993, p. 36). On the other hand, Chung Ju-yung, founder of Hyundai, due to his dissatisfaction with the country's economic performance during the Roh administration, found the Unification People's Party (UPP) to run in the 1992 election. Saxer (2002, p. 121) argues that this incident marked a shift in the relationship between the state and the Chaebol. During Park's presidency, big conglomerates like Hyundai, Samsung, and LG were dependent on the state for their growth and financial assistance. As these companies continued to grow and were capable of competing in an international level, they no longer relied on the state for benefits and advancement.

Apart from civil society, the Chaebol was another factor that contributed to democratic consolidation, as these conglomerates perceived that the democratic government was essential for the country's development and economic progress (Seth, 2020, p. 216). Lee (1993, p. 39) presents a political perspective on the Chaebol's direct political participation, stating that the

⁵ In January 1990, Kim Young-sam's Reunification Democratic Party (RDP) merged with Roh Tae-woo's Democratic Justice Party (DJP) and Kim Jong-pil's New Democratic Republic Party (NDRP) to form Democratic Liberal Party (DLP), leaving Kim Dae-jung's Party for Peace and Democracy (PPD) as an opposition party.

⁶ The Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP), originally known as the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), the name was changed in 1981 during the Chun administration. The ANSP became involved in domestic politics, participating in government and ruling party meetings. It was accused of interfering with the 1987 presidential election by supporting Kim Dae-jung to split the opposition vote and increase the prospects of Roh Tae-woo. The organization was renamed the National Intelligence Service (NIS) during Kim Dae-jung's presidency in 1999.

armed forces, which had previously been perceived as a threat to democracy, no longer pose such threat, in contrast, the public concern grew that the Chaebol's wealth would be used to buy votes.

United States Embassy (1993) in the ROK reported that in Kim's inauguration speech, the president's 'New Korea' would prioritize the elimination of corruption, while other two priorities were the revitalization of the economic and the enhancement of national discipline. Furthermore, the same report states that the vision of a society under a New Korea would be a just and mature democratic society with a higher life quality and respect for the dignity of the people. In his speech, president Kim Young-sam also directly invited Kim Il-sung, president of the DPRK, to discuss reconciliation and reunification, as the end of the Cold War brought new opportunities for peace and cooperation (United States Embassy, 1993). Additionally, president Kim called his government 'a government by the people and of the people of this land' (Journal of Democracy, 1993).

As the first civilian president in 30 years, Kim Young-sam gave hope of democratic consolidation. However, it also raised concerns about whether he could effectively establish civilian control over the armed forces, which had been independent for more than three decades. The following section will discuss the political and military reforms introduced during Kim's presidency and their impacted on CMR, democratic consolidation, as well as civilian control over the military.

A New Korea

The newly elected president, Kim Young-sam began his era with a focus on transparency to combat corruption. Soon after the inauguration ceremony, Kim not only made his financial assets public but also encouraged other ministers, members of the National Assembly, and high-ranking government officers, to do the same (Lee & Sohn, 1994). Additionally, apart from submitting his financial statement, Kim also stated that he would not accept any financial support during his presidency (Kwak, 2012, p. 39). Due to the financial statements, the public found that many ministers and high-ranking bureaucrats were too wealthy, which led to the resignation and dismissal of those involved (Lee & Sohn, 1994, p. 3). Cha (1993) argues that Kim's financial disclosure did not address the cause of the corruption and by making financial assets public, it could become a norm for officers to cleanse themselves and their assets of illegal sources (p. 857).

President Kim continued to fulfill his commitment to eliminate corruption. Following the financial statement disclosure, Kim introduced a 'real-name' financial system, in which the real names of the individuals had to be used in every financial transaction and property ownership, making it more difficult for politicians, high-ranking government officers, and the wealthy to conceal unlawful assets and properties. Kwak (2012) points out that the real-name system was originally discussed during the Roh administration, but the government did not enact it due to the fear of political backfire and economic impacts (p. 39).

The real-name system was under criticism for being politically motivated, as it revealed assets under the ownership of former rulers, including Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, who had previously used 'fake' names to hide their wealth, while businesses, especially small and medium scales, complained that the real-name system jeopardized their businesses, as their loans relied on those money (Lee & Sohn, 1994).

Consolidating Civilian Control

With the aim of imposing civilian control over the military, president Kim introduced reforms to strengthen both democratic consolidation and civilian supremacy, which affected the CMR in the ROK. Kim's vision of a New Korea also applied to the military institution. Beginning with the battle with corruption within the armed forces, Kim (1998) states that under Kim's administration military officers in the Fifth Republic were charged with corruption, insurrection, and rebellion (p. 115). The corruption within the military revealed when the wife of retired navy captain requested a refund of 100 million won from a former navy chief when her husband did not get the promotion, and with the government focus on combating corruption, she sought help from the government to get her money back (Lee & Sohn, 1994). This incident led to investigation, and according to Lee & Sohn (1994), thirteen generals were arrested. Apart from the promotion bribery, further investigations in other sections were conducted leading to the prosecution and arrest of additional corrupt officers (Lee & Sohn, 1994).

Barany (2012) argues that before carrying out the military reforms, President Kim discussed the plans with dominant high-ranking generals and received positive feedback, and later those generals became Kim's reform supporters, helping to reduce tension caused by the reforms (p. 10). Kim initiated military structural reforms by reorganizing the armed forces' organizations. Previously, the Defense Security Command (DSC) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) directly reported to the president, under Kim's government, they were ordered to report to the

defense minister and the post of commander of the DSC was downgraded from lieutenant-general to major-general (Saxer, 2002, p. 162).

Furthermore, during the Kim administration, the first civilian was appointed as head of the National Assembly's defense committee in 1993, president Kim also presented civilian specialists in the Ministry of National Defense (MND), established the National Security Council (NSC), and increased the transparency of the MND by ordering it to publish defense white papers (Kuehn, 2016, pp. 16). Aside from reorganizing the DSC, the Military Security Command (MSC) was also restructured. Once again that Kim downgraded the commander's rank, head of MSC's rank was reduced from a three-star to a two-star general, the organization was downside and reorganized, and the MSC's civilian surveillance agency was closed (*ibid.*, pp. 19–20). Another attempt to depoliticize the military agency and strengthen civilian supremacy during the Kim administration was the revision of the Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP) Act in 1994 (Seo, 2018, pp. 455–456). A new act limited the ANSP's power to investigate crimes and prohibited it from engaging in domestic politics, including allowing the National Assembly to oversee the agency.

In addition to reorganizing the armed forces agencies, Kim also improved the armed forces accountability and transparency. Choi (1998) argues that during Kim's administration, the civilian leader gained supremacy over the armed forces, making them more accountable and transparent by restoring an audit system and having the Board of Audit and Inspection (BAI) supervise military planning and decision-making processes (p. 192–193). On the other hand, Cho (2010) argues that Kim's military reforms created a new faction within the military, where loyalty was transferred to Kim and the reforms did not display the principles of professionalism (p. 147).

To prevent any military intervention in politics, the punishment and prosecution of wrongdoing officers are essential in establishing political norms and principles within the military. Diamond (1999) argues that “prosecution for the past crime is a noble and profoundly democratic goal, encompassing basic notions of accountability and lawfulness” (p. 114). Therefore, the punishment of former coup leaders is a democratic method of ensuring accountability, within the legal framework. Furthermore, it could set a standard for other officers, showing them that there will be consequences of their actions, and such actions will not be forgiven and forgotten in a democratic society. Originally, Kim did not seek to prosecute the two former presidents,

Chun and Roh, his rejected the investigations into them in 1993 and 1994 (Saxer, 2002, p. 163–164). However, Kihl (2004) argues that due to his personal political scandals and economic performance, Kim had no choice but to investigate the cases of the two former presidents (p. 128). During his presidency, Roh admitted that he collected around 500 billion won in government funds, Kim Young-sam was accused of receiving direct money from Roh, although Kim denied this allegation, only a few believed him (Yoon, 1996, pp. 517–518). As Chun and Roh were charged with bribery, Kim enacted a special law to prosecute those involved in the 1979 coup and the 1980 Kwangju Uprising.

Kim (1998) argues that the prosecution of Chun and Roh was to turn public dissatisfaction towards the two former presidents, while allowing Kim to distance himself from his former allies and the DLP, as well as mobilize personal political support (p. 115). Meanwhile, although the arrest of Chun and Roh did not receive a negative reaction from the military, which indicated that Kim had effectively established civilian control over the armed forces, it raised concerns about the executive's power over the judicial branch (Saxer, 2002, p. 164). As there was a rumor that the Constitutional Court would rule against the prosecution of the former presidents and those involved in the 1980 Kwangju Uprising.

Hanahoe (Society of One)

Hanahoe had been the most dominant faction in the military since the Chun administration. Following Park's assassination, Hanahoe member Chun Doo-Hwan executed a coup and rose to power as the president in the Fifth Republic. Chun's successor, Roh Tae-woo, the following president in the Sixth Republic, was also a key member in Hanahoe, before he was elected in 1988.

As discussed in Chapter 4, The Park Chung-hee Era (1961–1979), Hanahoe members had an advantage in promotions and ascended to higher ranks. Under newly elected president Kim, members of Hanahoe in command positions, including political military officers, such as Kim Jin-young, the Army-Chief-of-Staff, and Seo Wan-su, the Defense Security Commander, were dismissed in two weeks after Kim became the president (Yoon, 1996). Further from removing Kim Jin-young and Seo Wan-su, president Kim also dismissed and forced the retirement of 70 officers and 40 generals during his five-year presidential term (Lee, 2003). The dismissal of Hanahoe members led to a vacuum in the leadership positions, which were filled by non-Hanahoe military officers, who had been excluded by Hanahoe faction (Kim, 1998, p. 114).

Kim argues that these newly appointed non-Hanahoe officers were an ideal group to effectively establish civilian control, as they directly benefited from the civilian government and their career advancement was linked to the democratic system (ibid., pp. 114–115). Consequently, they became key supporters of Kim's military reforms.

According to Yoon (1996), Kim directly ordered the exclusion of Hanahoe members from high-ranking promotions, including the assignment of command roles for units above from regiment. Kwon (2023) states that apart from purging Hanahoe members, Kim also regulated the faction and investigated those involved in wrongdoing and corruption, especially those connected to the Yulgok Project. The project was initiated in 1974 during president Park's administration, with the aim of modernizing the military and increase the armed forces operations (Choi, 1998, p. 182). However, the project became a source of bribery and corruption. In 1993, the National Assembly, as the administrator of the project, set up a committee for inspection and audit, exposing the abuse and wrongdoing of officers (ibid., p. 189), which led to the removal of several military officers during president Kim's administration. However, Kim's purge and exclusion of Hanahoe members were criticized, as not all Hanahoe members were driven by political ambition or relied on their connection with the faction to get promotions.

Lee (2003) argues that many members of Hanahoe were promoted based on their performance, especially those members who joined after 1973, they chose to be part of the faction because they were patriotic and wanted to serve the country. Hanahoe consisted of KMA graduates who were the top of their class, thus their skills and abilities were outstanding compared to other officers. As a result, they were able to secure promotions based on their merits and capabilities. According to Lee (2003), members who joined after 1973 would simply have dinner with a superior, rather than participating in ritual activities like their predecessors. Lee (2003) states that out of 300 members, 240-250 left the military, and the lowest rank held by the remaining was lieutenant colonel. Non-Hanahoe officers, on the other hand, supported president Kim's effort to dismiss Hanahoe members from high-ranking positions, block Hanahoe from being promoted, and prosecute two former presidents, Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, on charges of human rights violations (Kim I., 2013).

In conclusion, the shift in CMR and civilian control was significant during the first civilian president, Kim Young-sam. The military not only tolerant of a series of military reforms but also did not express negative reactions when the government decided to prosecute Chun and

Roh. The dissolution of Hanahoe also marked a turning point in democratic consolidation, given that the faction had been dominant in both the military and politics during previous presidents, Chun and Roh. Most importantly, the government established a norm for the punishment of military coups, making any recurrence of military intervention in politics unlikely.

In the next chapter, Thai politics will be examined, aiming to provide background and history on democratic development, CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian control, for a comprehensive understanding of its political sphere and challenges.

Chapter 6: Thai Politics

Although the study does not directly compare ROK and Thai politics, this chapter provides background on Thai politics based on primary and secondary in Thai-language sources, offering a deeper understanding of political development, which will be used to answer the third research question, concerning the implication of the ROK's experience for Thailand's democratic consolidation and civilian supremacy. This chapter is divided into four sections; the Siamese Revolution; the vicious circle; the monarchy and Thai politics; and current Thai politics. Each section aims to provide background on the evolution and challenges in Thai politics.

According to Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2560 (2017), Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, where the king is both the Head of State (Section 2) and the Head of the Thai Armed Forces (Section 8). The Prime Minister (PM) is appointed from an individual who is approved by the House of Representative (Section 158). The PM and the Council of Ministers are responsible for administrating the state affairs (Section 158).

Thailand has faced several transformations and challenges, including the Siamese revolution, constitutional amendments, and military coups. Despite having democracy for almost 100 years, the country still struggles to implement democratic consolidation and civilian control. The 2014 military coup is an excellent indicator that the country has a long way to go in consolidating and establishing civilian supremacy.

The Siamese Revolution⁷

The revolution on 24 June 1932, marked the end of the absolute monarchy and the beginning of the constitutional monarchy. HM King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) was the last absolute king of Siam and the first king under the democratic constitution. The revolution led by Khana

⁷ The original members included: 1) Pridi Banomyong 2) Lt.Gen. Prayoon Pamornmontri 3) Lt. Plaek Khittasangkha 4) SubLt. Tatsanai Mitphakdi 5) Tua Laphanukrom 6) Jaroen Singhaseni 7) Naep Phahonyothin Khana Ratsadon determined to achieve six principles, which included: 1) To maintain the supreme power of the Thai people 2) To maintain national security 3) To maintain the economic welfare of the Thai people in accordance with the National Economic Project 4) To protect the equality of Thai people 5) To maintain people's rights and liberties that are not inconsistent with any of the above-mentioned principles 6) To provide public education for all citizens

Ratsadon (the People's Party), a political group, which later became a political party, consisted of army personnel, navy officers, and civilians, who had studied in Western institutions.

For almost 15 years, Khana Ratsadon had influence in Thai politics, until the 1947 military coup, which led by Field Marshal Phin Choonhavan (Kiatsarapipob, 2020). The influence of the Khana Ratsadon and CMR were also addressed in an interview with the Thai scholar. The interviewee stated that after the constitutional parliament was introduced in Siam, the military and civilian groups were considerably equal. Following the 1947 coup, the armed forces began to dominate politics, shifting CMR in the country.

The Debate Around Khana Ratsadon

The debate over the 1932 revolution continues to this day, particularly concerning whether Siam was ready for the new system of government. De Lapomarede (1934) states that while the 'Tai' royal family did not oppose the idea of democracy and a constitutional government, they believed that it would be a long process and Siamese was not yet ready for a revolution (p. 254). Ferrara (2012) shares a similar view to De Lapomarede, arguing that the elite undermined both democracy and Khana Ratsadon. Ferrara states that King Prajadhipok successfully portrayed Khana Ratsadon as communist and positioned the monarchy as an 'extra-constitutional force,' a role that the monarchy played repeatedly during the Rama IX reign (p. 7).

Meanwhile, Subrahmanyam (2020) investigates the 1932 revolution through a historical perspective. The author points out that the negative narrative of Khana Ratsadon began after the 1947 coup, when the royalists formed an alliance with a new generation of military officers who did not adopt a democratic perspective (p. 82). Khana Ratsadon was criticized for betraying the monarchy, while the king was portrayed as a democratic figure as the king was selected based on the Dhammaraja (the righteous king) (ibid., p. 83).



Figure 1: King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) granted the Constitution on 10 December 1932
 Source: Virunhok, Meka. https://www.silpa-mag.com/this-day-in-history/article_4732

On the other hand, scholars (Kongkirati, 2017; Petchlertanan, 2022) argue that both domestic and international factors contributed to the Siamese Revolution. Domestic factors, such as centralized power and absolute monarchy were unable to respond to the changes in society; the spread of democracy led Siamese people to question class inequality and traditional ideologies that concentrated on birthright and merit; the rise of new middle class, Western-educated students, merchants, and journalists. While external factors that contributed to the revolution, such as the global economic crisis in 1929–1932, and the collapse of absolute monarchies in China (1911), Russia (1917), Germany (1918), and Austria-Hungary (1918), where revolutions overthrown the monarchy and adopted new form of governance, such as the establishment of republic in China, Germany, Austria, and Hungary, and a socialist state in Russia.

This paper argues that the 1932 revolution was inevitable as it was driven by societal changes both domestically and internationally. However, the failure of Thai democracy came from the old elites and a new group of the armed forces, who viewed democracy as a threat to their status quo.

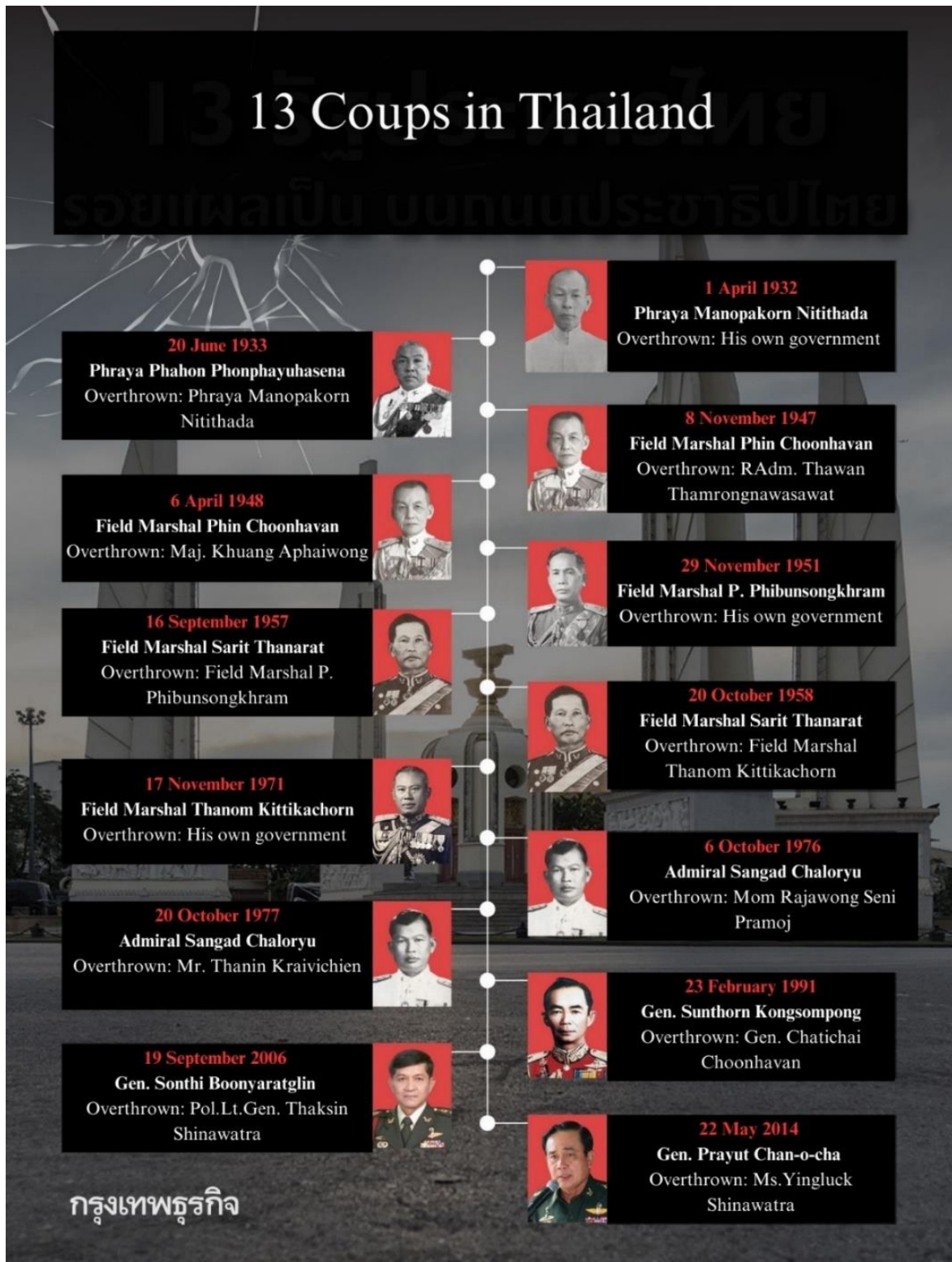
The Vicious Circle

This section will discuss only three coups that affected CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian control, which are the first coup in 1932, the third coup in 1947, and the recent coup in 2014. The 1932 coup represented a clash between royalists and Khana Ratsadon. While the 1947 coup not only shifted the relationship between the armed forces and civilians but also

reflected the royalists' victory over the People's Party. Additionally, it significantly increased the monarchy's role in Thai politics. Lastly, the 2014 coup indicated the failure of democratic consolidation and civilian supremacy.

Petchlertanan (2021) proposes the 'vicious circle' model, arguing that military intervention is used as a political tool to restore elites' upper hand and several military coups have contributed to the pattern. According to Petchlertanan, the vicious circle model begins with the armed forces executing a coup, then to remain in power, they will exercise their authority through orders issued by the leader of the coup, without enacting a temporary constitution. This is followed by a long and delayed process of drafting constitution, which allows them to stay in power until a new constitution is passed through a referendum, a referendum with strict regulations that do not allow any opposing opinions. The new constitution is written in favor of the armed forces, ensuring their power and presence in the government. This unfair and unjust regulations weaken a civilian government, even if they win the election, they will not be able to remain in power for the long term. As a result of this vicious circle, the nation has had 13 coups (see figure 2) and 20 constitutions, where the provisional constitution declared on 27 June 1932, being regarded as the first Thai Constitution and the current constitution coming into effective on 6 April 2017.

Figure 2: 13 Coups in Thailand



Source: <https://www.bangkokbiznews.com/politics/897979>

The First Coup

After the 1932 revolution, the nation had its first prime minister, its first parliament, as well as its first coup. On 1 April 1933, less than a year after the first constitution was implemented, Phraya Manopakorn Nitithada, the first prime minister who appointed by Khana Ratsadon, carried out a 'silent coup' (Chaovaluksakul & Prachayakul, 2018, p. 25) by enforcing a royal decree. He then, closed the section of the House of Representatives until a new one would organize, while he remained as prime minister. According to Petchlertanan (2021), Phraya Manopakorn Nitithada was able to control both the executive and judicial branches, making him the first authoritarian leader in the country. This period of governance came to know as 'Monocracy' (Petchlertanan 2021).

The first coup carried out by the royalists, who dissented the economic project, proposed by Pridi Banomyong. His economic plan was perceived as a communist ideology (Pridi Banomyong Institute, 2023). The coup was done without violent. However, the material presented in this study suggests that it reflected a class conflict remains present in politics.

The 1947 Coup

The 1947 coup marked the end of Khana Ratsadon (Chaovaluksakul & Prachayakul, 2018, p. 26; Chaiching, 2020, p. 59), established the military intervention model (Eawsakul, 2023), and marked the beginning of military-industrial complex (Chawalasilp, 2023), as well as the return of the royalists (BBC News Thai, 2017). Furthermore, according to the interview with a Thai scholar, it shifted the CMR in Thai politics.

The coup took place in the evening of 7 November to the morning of 8 November 1947 under the leadership of Field Marshal Phin Choonhavan. The group who called themselves 'Khana Rathaprahan' (Coup Group) (Subrahmanyam, 2020, p. 82) overthrew the five-month-old government of RAdm. Thawan Thamrongnawasawat. According to Khana Rathaprahan, the coup was justified due to the government's incompetence in managing the economy, its inability to explain the death of King Rama VIII, and its failure to show respect and neglect the armed forces (Samianakkanee, 2024).

The Consequences

The consequences of the 1947 coup led to the exile of the members of Khana Ratsadon, such as Pridi Banomyong, and RAdm. Thawan Thamrongnawasawat, ending the political power of Khana Ratsadon and returning power to the armed forces. Moreover, the coup leaders also established a coup model (Eawsakul, 2023), where after the coup, a coup representative would be sent to inform the king. This practice has been followed by every coup leader since from the third coup, up to the recent coup in 2014. Kotamee (2021) also points out that the ‘pretexts’ of the 1947 coup, such as the claim that coup was carried out in the nation’s interest, not for any particular group; a new government would be formed in accordance with the principles of nation, religion, and monarchy; and it was done for the well-being of Thai people, have been used by every coup leader subsequently.

Chawalasilp (2023) argues that the coup introduced a new role for the military, making it another economic actor in society. He points out that both internal and external factors contributed to the rise of military-industrial complex. During the Cold War, the U.S. implemented a containment policy to counter with the Soviet Union (Office of the Historian, n.d.), and it used aid as a political tool instead of army forces (National Museum of American Diplomacy, n.d.). Thailand, as one of the U.S. allies in Southeast Asia, received aid in the form of funds, as well as military training, weapons and psychological warfare. As a result of these close military relationships, Thailand became part of the liberal and communist rivalry, involving in the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Pawakapan (2021) argues that without military assistance from the US, the Royal Thai Army would not have been developed or modernized (p. 22). Chawalasilp (2023) states that military officers took advantage of funds, founding companies to receive commissions before passing the projects to other companies. Additionally, due to the expansion of capitalism, he points out that military-industrial complex expanded to private sections, military personnel becoming more involved by serving as board-members in private companies, such as banks, hotels, and sugar companies.

As the government enacted intensive anti-communist policies, Chawalasilp (2023) points out that Thai-Chinese businesspersons began to feel pressure and became targets of both U.S. policy towards Thailand and the Thai government. Therefore, to ensure their safety in the domestic and international political climate, they turned to the police for protection by inviting police personnel to serve as board directors or members, as well as offering shadow stocks, in

return for the Thai-Chinese businesspersons' survival. Eventually, these practices expanded to military officers.

Even though, the coup group carried out the action by force, Chaiching (2020) argues that they could not have succeeded without support from royalists, particularly Prince Rangsit Prayurasakdi, one of the regents of Thailand, who was the only regent to sign the approval of the 1947 constitution after the coup, while Phraya Manawaratchasewi refused to do the same (Chaiching, 2020, p. 60). Moreover, a new constitution significantly increased the monarchy's power. It was the first time that the phrase "Thailand adopts a democratic regime of government with the King as the Head of State" was written in the constitution. It also stipulated that the king held the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Armed Forces. Additionally, the constitution also allowed the king to appoint the senators and all members of the Privy Council (*ibid.*, p. 68), who acted as advisors to the Monarchy.

After Field Marshal Phin Choonhavan succeeded in carrying out the coup in 1947, power was returned to the military, and a massive purge of Khana Ratsadon took place. The old government, as well as its institutions and the House of Representatives, was dissolved to make way for new institutions and representatives in accordance with a new constitution. Pawakapan (2023, September 24) argues that whenever the armed forces hold power in politics, they implement their authority through regulations and laws, which prevent democratic consolidation and civilian control over the armed forces, making it an 'independent state.' Additionally, the author points out that just the Conscription Act alone involves multiple and interconnected laws, thus amending one section of the act may require revisions to other related articles. As a result, any civilian government proposing military reform or law amendment related to the armed forces would experience challenges both from the military itself and from the legislation process.

Pawakapan (2023, July 10) points out that since the 1947 coup, military governments have ruled the country for a longer period than civilian governments. This study argues that, in terms of the CMR and civilian control from 1947 to 2014, the military has remained a dominant actor in politics and civilian governments were unable to establish civilian control over the armed forces. As a result, the country experienced political instability, as evidenced by 10 other coups. The factors that contributed to this political instability included the Cold War, anti-communist policies, attempts to maintain power among senior military personnel, and conflicts between

the monarchy, the army, and the governments, as well as the internal conflicts with the military and between the army and the police. These factors allowed the armed forces to gain significant power and prevented civilian governments from exercising their power over the army. For example, Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkhram carried out the coup in 1951 to overthrow his own government as the royalists gained significant power in the parliament through the 1949 constitution (Eawsakul, 2023). Another example is the 1957 coup, under the leadership of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, one of the factors that led to the coup was the conflict between the armed forces and the police (Chaiching, 2020, pp. 139–141).

After the end of the Cold War, the pretexts, such as misconduct, abuse of power, corruption and threats to the monarchy were used to justify coups. For example, in the 1991 coup, led by Gen. Sunthorn Kongsompong, claims of corruption, abuse of power, and information distortion aiming at overthrowing the monarchy were used to legitimize the coup. Another example is the 2006 coup under the leadership of Gen. Sonthi Boonyaratglin, similar justifications were used to legitimize the military intervention. Moreover, for civilian governments during this period, being the election winner did not guarantee their safety from a coup. For example, the Khuang Aphaiwong Administrative won the election in 1948 but was in power for less than five months before being ousted by Field Marshal Phin Choonhavan in the same year. Another example is the Thaksin Shinawatra administrative, Thaksin was re-elected as PM for a second term in 2005, and was overthrown in 2006, under the leadership of Gen. Sonthi Boonyaratglin. Additionally, although the 1973 uprising ended the military regime, it lasted for only a short period as the coup took place again in 1976 after the 6 October massacre. Therefore, the armed forces were able to intervene in politics throughout the period from 1947 to 2014.

In sum, the 1947 coup marked the end of Khana Ratsadon and its intention to maintain the supreme power of the Thai people. It also established models of practice and pretexts for the future coup leaders to follow. Additionally, it marked a rise of the Thai military's involvement in business, in which military personnel serving as board members in private companies and engaging in business sectors, as well as the return of the monarchy after it was removed from politics following the 1932 revolution. Most importantly, the study suggests that it marked the shift of the CMR, where the military exercised authority over the government and its laws. The civilian governments were unable to implement democratic consolidation, as they lasted only for a short period of time, before they were overthrown again by a coup.

The 2014 Coup

In 2011, Thailand's first female PM, Yingluck Shinawatra, rose to power. She is a sister of former PM Thaksin Shinawatra⁸. Several articles (The101World, 2014; Nanuam, 2021; Pawakapan, 2021, p. 120; Eawsakul, 2023) suggest that the 2014 coup was a continuation of the 2006 coup, as the 2006 coup failed to eliminate Thaksin's network. Additionally, authors (Eawsakul, 2023; The101World, 2014) also point out that both coups were carried out to ensure the elites' dominance and guarantee the smooth transition of the monarchy.

The 2014 coup began with the declaration of martial law on 20 May 2014 by Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha, who was the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Army at the time. According to Announcement of the Royal Thai Army on the Enforcement of Martial Law No.1/2557 (2014), martial law was declared to ensure effective maintenance of peace and order, in response to several political protest groups in Bangkok and its surrounding (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022, November 30).

The paper suggests that the 2014 coup indicated the conflicts between the monarchy and Thaksin's network, the dominance of the armed forces in Thai politics, the ties between the monarchy and the military, as well as the use of pretext to justify the coup, the pattern that had been followed since the 1947 coup. It also demonstrated that civilian control had never been successfully imposed on the armed forces, making it to remain an independent state within the country. Consequently, democratization in Thailand has consistently been jeopardized since civilian supremacy has never been fully established.

⁸ Thaksin Shinawatra was a successful businessman in telecommunications industry. Under his administration (2001–2006), he formed strong alliances with private business sectors as well as with officers from the armed forces and the police (Patmanand, 2014, p. 196). His networks and popularity were viewed as threats to the monarchy, as the 2006 coup leader, Gen. Sonthi Boonyaratglin, stated that political activities led to several challenges in the country, including insults to the monarchy (Eawsakul, 2023). Nevertheless, after the coup, his networks remained unbroken, as evidenced by the subsequent governments, including the Samak Sundaravej Administration (2008), the Somchai Wongsawat Administration (2008), and the Yingluck Shinawatra Administration (2011–2014).

The Monarchy and Thai politics

The main discussion in this section includes the tripartite alliance and network monarchy to capture the relationship between the monarchy and active political actors, as well as its impact on CMR, civilian consolidation, and civilian control.

Tripartite

During the Cold War, the communist insurgency and the ‘tripartite’ alliance, which consisted of the military, the monarchy and the US, went hand in hand with the US psychological warfare (Chaiching, 2020, p. 258; Pawakapan, 2021, p. 20). According to Chaiching (2020), the monarchy was part of the US psychological strategy to block the expansion of communism in Thailand, particularly in the countryside (Chaiching, 2020, pp. 162–163). While Pawakapan (2021) states that the late King Bhumibol (Rama IX) was the crucial figure in anti-communist strategy, and royal project developments were a part of the political operations in fighting against communism (Pawakapan, 2021, p. 22). As a result, the strategies led to the political dominance of the monarchy and the royalists, weakening the government’s authority. In 1955, the success of the royal visit project made the monarchy the core of Thai traditions (Chaiching, 2020, p. 166).

Network Monarchy

To ensure that democracy development complied with conservatism, the monarchy would exercise authority through agencies. McCargo (2005) argues that the monarchy intervenes in politics through the “network monarchy”, in which the king and his allies formed a para-political institution (McCargo, 2005, p. 500). Hewison (1997) also states that this network spreads throughout every section to promote the power of the monarchy and establish legitimacy for anyone who associates with it (Hewison, 1997, pp. 502–503).

While Chambers & Waitoolkiat (2016) describe the relationship between the monarchy and the armed forces as a ‘parallel state,’ and use the term a ‘monarchised military’ to define this relationship (Chambers & Waitoolkiat, 2016, p. 426). The monarchised military differs from Hewison’s network monarchy in that the monarchy cooperates with the military to advance each other political and economic interests and the armed forces relies on ‘royalism to maintain or extend their power’ (ibid., pp. 426–428).

This study suggests that the monarchy exerts authority through agencies, which encompass the police, the military, the judicial system, and the state's bureaucracy, to maintain and advance its political power. The most crucial agency in the system was Prem Tinsulanonda (1920–2019), the former PM (1980–1988) and head of King Bhumibol's Privy Council (1998–2016, 2016–2019). Chachavalpongpun & Kurlantzick (2019) argue that Prem continued Sarit's work in promoting the monarchy's role in politics and played a significant role in shifting the monarchy's power, making it a dominant actor over the military. Pawakapan (2021) points out that during the Cold War, he expanded the role of the armed forces into the civilian sphere, with the longer-term objective of consolidating the king as the head of state, involving all branches of the military in internal security operations, which had been militarized, through their civil affairs departments, and using them to oppress political opposition (Pawakapan, 2021, pp. 59–61).

Monarchization

In the reign of current King Vajiralongkorn (Rama X), Treesuwan (2024) states that the relationship between the monarchy and the military has become more direct and closer, as evidenced by the establishment of 'Monarchization' (the creation of Royal Soldier), which is being implemented in a systematic manner. Personnel close to the monarchy are being positioned in every military branch, which also encompasses the police. This study highlights that the monarchy is able to exercise authority through its legally legitimate network. Furthermore, laws have been used to strengthen the role and authority of the monarchy, as well as the influence of the armed forces in politics, which will be discussed in the following section.

In sum, during the Cold War, the role of monarchy was promoted as part of the US psychological strategy to combat the expansion of communism, using the king as the leading political actor, while the military played a significant role in the use of force. Following the end of the Cold War, the form of the network monarchy had expanded to include every sector, while maintaining its objective of the monarch as the head of state. Therefore, the monarchy's role weakens democratic consolidation, undermines democratization, and overall worsens the CMR.

Current Thai politics

This section will focus on Thai politics after the 2014 coup, the military reforms, especially the Defense Ministry Administration Act (2008), and the use of the Criminal Code, Section 112 or Lèse-Majesté Law.

Thai Politics after the 2014 Coup

After the 2014 coup, the NCPO (the National Council for Peace and Order) held supreme authority from 2014 to 2019, with Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha serving as the leader. Gen. Prayut later served as PM until 2023. Following his resignation in 2023, he was appointed as a privy councilor by King Vajiralongkorn (Rama X). According to the interview, this appointment was a reward for transferring two army units, Bangkok-based 1st and 11th Infantry Regiments, to the direct command of the king in 2019.

The result of the 2023 general election challenged the monarchy and the military status quo, as the Move Forward Party (MFP), led by Pita Limjaroenrat, won the election. The MFP's campaign during the election focused on the three Ds: demilitarize, demonopolize and decentralize (CNN, video, 2023). Its campaigns also included proposals to amend Section 112, which was later perceived as an attempt to overthrow the monarchy by the Constitutional Court. As a result, the MFP was dissolved in 2024, and its members were banned from politics for ten years.

Before the MFP was dissolved, its attempt to form a coalition government was blocked by the Senators, who, under the transitional provisions of Section 272 in the current constitution B.C. 2560 (2017), had the power to approve the PM. This section reflected how the NCPO used the law as a tool to suppress and prevent political opponents from holding power, ensuring that its successor would dominate politics, as the 12th Senate were appointed by the 2014 coup council. Additionally, the transitional provisions stipulated that the 12th Senate would serve for five years, and their term just expired in 2024, meaning new senators no longer had the power to approve the PM. Moreover, the newly endorsed 200 senators, elected from among individuals, were criticized for lacking independence and having close connections with political parties, particularly the Bhumjaithai Party, the largest coalition partner in the government (Wongchaum & Thepgumpanat, 2024).

The Return of Thaksin

The current PM, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, the daughter of former PM Thaksin Shinawatra, was appointed in 2024. However, this study suggests that the presence of Thaksin's network did not imply that the 2014 coup was a failure. On the other hand, it indicated the continued dominance of the monarchy and the growing influence of military control in Thai politics.

Under the leadership of Paetongtarn from the Pheu Thai Party, the three largest parties in coalition government consist of the Bhumjaithai Party (a conservative-royalist party), the United Thai Nation Party (a conservative-royalist party, with Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha as a former member), and the Democrat Party (a conservative-royalist party, founded by Khuang Aphaiwong). With conservative-royalist parties occupying the government, along with senators, the parliament often align with the interests of the armed forces to strengthen its position in politics. For example, following the strong opposition to military reforms, the Pheu Thai Party decided to withdraw a proposed bill to amend the Defense Ministry Administration Act. The bill was opposed by both the military and the military faction in ruling coalition parties, including the Bhumjaithai Party, United Thai Nation Party, and opposition party, the Palang Pracharath.

Since 2006, Thaksin Shinawatra was charged in a total of 31 cases, 11 were related to Section 112. However, Thaksin's Section 112 cases were politicized by royalists and the NCPO. According to BBC News Thai, the unusual aspect of Thaksin's Section 112 cases was that the prosecutors publicly announced that the charges would be filed, and even after the decision to file charges was made, there was still a request for an appeal for justice (BBC News Thai, 2014, June 17). This procedure rarely occurs in other cases. Therefore, this study suggests that the return of Thaksin Shinawatra was the result of negotiations with the monarchy and the former NCPO group, as reflected in the coalition government and Thaksin's Section 112 cases.

Military Reforms

Pawakapan (2023, September 24) argues that the military's missions in the 1947 constitution have become a model for subsequent constitutions. The mission expanded to include extensive internal affairs, such as engaging in combat or warfare, protecting the monarchy, suppressing rebellion and unrest, maintaining national security, and contributing to national development.

Additionally, secondary legislation, such as the Defense Ministry Administration Act B.C. 2551 (2008), Section 8 stipulates the missions of the Ministry of Defense, which include protecting national sovereignty and the monarchy, maintaining national security against both internal and external threats, suppressing rebellion and unrest, contributing to national development, responding to national disasters, and conducting research on the defense industry. The bill also grants the Defense Committee the authority to appoint senior military officers under Article 25. However, the committee is dominated by military personnel, with only two representatives from the government, while six members are from the armed forces. The bill was enacted during the Gen. Surayud Chulanont administration, who was appointed PM by the 2006 coup leader, Gen. Sonthi Boonyaratglin. Gen. Surayud Chulanont is currently president of the Privy Council.

According to iLaw (2024), there have been three attempts to amend the bill since the beginning of the 26th the House of Representative in 2023. The first amendment draft was proposed by the People's Party (the successor of the MFP), it aimed at democratic consolidation and civilian control, modernizing and making the armed forces more transparent (Secretariat of The House of Representatives, n.d. -b). However, the draft was rejected by the cabinet, and feedback from the Ministry of Defense on the draft was that by reducing the council's role to an advisory council might result in a lack of thorough consideration by the Minister of Defense, as it shifts the responsibility solely onto the Minister of Defense (Isra News, 2024).

The second attempt was proposed by the Ministry of Defense itself. The primary concern in this draft focuses on the structural changes within the Defense Council, while the responsibilities and duties remain the same (Central Legal System, n.d.). Moreover, the draft includes a mechanism to prevent the military coups, while other sections relatively unchanged.

The third draft was proposed by the Pheu Thai Party in 2024. This draft would empower the PM and the Cabinet to reshuffle personnel at the General level, instead of leaving this power to the military-dominated council (Secretariat of The House of Representatives, n.d. -a). However, after receiving an opposition from the military and the military faction in ruling coalition parties, the draft was withdrawn, while it was under a public hearing process.

A Coup as a Rebellion

Section 49 in the constitution B.C. 2560 (2017) stipulates that no person shall exercise the right to overthrow the democratic government. Under the Thai Criminal Code B.C. 2499 (1956), Section 113, states that a person who uses force or threaten to use force to overthrow or change the constitution is guilty of rebellion and shall be punished with death or life imprisonment.

This study suggests that even though the law stipulates that a coup is a rebellion, with execution as the maximum punishment, no coup leaders in the history of 13 coup have been sentenced. Instead, due to the Thai court's judgment, a coup leader is considered to have sovereignty (Samudavanija, 2023), meaning they hold the supreme authority in the country to manage state affairs. As a result, there has been no legal prosecution against the coup leaders. According to Thai Lawyers for Human Right (TLHR) (2018), four attempts have been made to file lawsuits against individuals involved in the 1971, 2006, 2014, and, 2018 coups, sequentially. Each time, the court either dismissed or did not accept lawsuits, claiming that individuals were not affected parties, thus did not have the legal right to file lawsuits, or the orders from the coup leaders were legitimized under the constitutions. Additionally, 11 out of 23 amnesty laws have been issued to remove charges from the coup leaders (iLaw, 2021, September 27). Thus, coup leaders have never been charged under Criminal Code law.

Section 112 or Lèse-Majesté Law

The ongoing lawfare, particularly the use of the Criminal Code, Section 112 to suppress political opposition has been increasing since the military coup (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017; iLaw, 2021, May 11; BBC News Thai, 2024, February 22; Kurlantzick, 2024). The evolution of Section 112 can be tracked back to the period before the Siamese Revolution. However, in this study, the main focus will be solely on the changes on lese-majeste law in 1956 and the use of Section 112 after the 2014 coup.

Following the 1947 coup, the royalists gained significant power in parliament. Even though there were attempts to regain power by Field Marshal Phin in 1948 and Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkhram in 1951, the monarchy and royalists still dominated politics. In 1956, the parliament amended the monarchy-related law in the Criminal Code, changing Section 98 to Section 112, and categorizing the offence of insulting or defaming the monarchy under the

national security section, making the charge of Section 112 a serious crime that cannot be compromised (iLaw, 2021, October 5). The penalty was tightened in 1976 to imprisonment for three to fifteen years, and it has continued to apply to present day.

Streckfuss (1995) argues that the use of the lese-majeste law is closely tied to military dominance in Thai politics (p. 472). He also points out that, in order to justify coups and suppress political demonstrations, the armed forces utilized the monarchy's sacred and national identity status to intervene and exert their power in politics (ibid., pp. 446–448).

The problem of Section 112 is that the law does not stipulate who can file a report for a violation of Section 112 with the police, meaning anyone can file a complaint against anyone, and the police must carry out an investigation since it is under the national security section and cannot be compromised. The MFP's proposal was to remove this ambiguity, by specifying that only the Bureau of the Royal Household would have the legal right to file a complaint with the police, as well as, reduce the punishment and exempt individuals from penalties if they had acted for the benefit of the nation (Treesuwan, 2022).

Two efforts to amend Section 112 from both the public and political sectors in 2021 were dismissed, under the argument that under the Constitution, Section 6, the king shall be enthroned in a position of revered worship and shall not be violated. No person shall expose the King to any sort of accusation or action (Prachatai, 2023). The argument indicated that even the demands to amend Section 112 were considered a violation of the king, meaning any proposal to amend the law could lead to charges under Section 112. McCargo (2014) argues that the Thai judiciary has formed a close connection with the monarchy to preserve the elites' dominance and interests (p. 419).

In summary, looking back at the Siamese Revolution to the latest coup, it is obvious that the elites and their network have always hindered the country's development of political progress and democratic participation. While Khana Ratsadon might have reached an agreement with conservatives and managed to form the first government under a constitutional monarchy, the royalists' aim did not comply with the democratic principles. As a result, the first coup occurred after a few months of the revolution. Following the 1947 coup, Khana Ratsadon was purged from politics, and conservatives rose to power. Since then, they have been able to construct the political climate to serve their dominance and interests. The start of the Cold War strengthened

the monarchy's power, with support from the U.S. and the military. The end of the Cold War did not end the relationship between the monarchy and the armed forces. Instead, they strengthened and deepened their connection into the network monarchy, forming the vicious circle to maintain their control through laws and regulations.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Following the democratic transition in the Sixth Republic, the ROK left behind its authoritarian-military regimes. The two military coups and the hardships during those times have become a nightmare of the past, that the older generation hopes the younger generation will never have to experience. Yet, the debate over the ROK's democratic consolidation and civilian control remains ongoing. Scholars such as Croissant (2004, p. 358) and Hahm (2008, p. 129) argue that democracy in the ROK is considered consolidated. On the other hand, Im (2004, p. 180) and Heo (2013, p. 573) argue that democracy in the ROK remains problematic and is not fully consolidated. Nevertheless, this study argues that following democratic transition and military reforms, the ROK demonstrates characteristics of democratic consolidation and civilian control. Importantly, the return of an authoritarian regime, with military officers seizing power is unlikely. The armed forces no longer pose a threat to the civilian government or principles of democracy. Instead, they act as guardians of democracy and human rights, while serving as protectors of national security against external threats, as evidenced during the 2024 martial law crisis. To prevent clashes with civilians and potential human rights violations, the commander of the 1st Airborne Brigade ordered his troops to avoid contact with demonstrators (Chan, 2025).

The following section will discuss and analyze the study, as well as address the research questions. The first question relates to the impact of the 9th constitutional amendment in 1987 on democratic consolidation and civilian supremacy. The constitution which was formulated through negotiation and compromise between the ruling government and the opposition, provided a legal framework for establishing democratic consolidation and civilian control, helping to improve CMR by strengthening civilian supremacy, empowering the executive branch, limiting the military's intervention in politics and preventing military dominance in politics. A new constitution shifted the armed forces' role from supporting authoritarian regimes to protecting the principles of democracy and human rights. As the study demonstrates the nation with low civilian supremacy, violence against human rights by the military is most likely. On the contrary, the nation with a high level of civilian control, the armed forces are less likely to violate human rights. As the ROK began to foster human rights values due to democratization, the role of the military was also impacted by this process, shifting its position in a democratic society to a guardian of democracy and human rights. Furthermore, the armed forces' operation and expenditure were overseen, which reducing opportunities for their

intervention in politics, limiting their role to the national security sphere, and mandating them maintain political neutrality. As a result, the elected governments were able to establish civilian supremacy, preventing the military from executing a coup.

The second question concerns to military reforms during the Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam administrations and their impact on CMR. The reforms began with the Declaration of June 29, leading to the constitutional amendment and the establishment of a transition period. Because the declaration was based on negotiations and compromise between the old regime and opposition, it guaranteed democratic consolidation and civilian supremacy. Following the June 29 Declaration was the amendment of the constitution, the new constitution ensured civilian control, reduced opportunities for the armed forces' intervention in politics, limited the military's role to the national security sphere, and focused on maintaining the political neutrality of the armed forces, providing a solid foundation for implementing civilian supremacy and shifting CMR in the country.

Military reforms under presidents Roh and Kim displayed both similarities and differences. The similarities in military reforms focused on the reshuffling of high-ranking officers, especially in command positions. Both presidents replaced officers who were appointed by the previous administration with officers who demonstrated loyalty to them. Roh replaced Chun's appointed officers with his own allies, while Kim, who replaced Roh's appointed officers with non-Hanahoe officers who had been overlooked during the Chun and Roh administrations. Although, the approaches were identical, there were distinctions in the results. Due to Roh's background, even though he distanced himself from his predecessor, he was actually one of the officers. His military reshuffle was equivalent to shifting loyalty from one military leader to another. Nevertheless, as the one who proposed the June 29 Declaration and the first directly elected president to run in a free and fair election, he and his fellow officers presented a moderate group within the military. On the other hand, as the first civilian president in 30 years, Kim's reshuffle meant that the armed forces accepted civilian supremacy over the military. His strategy of appointing previously non-privileged officers, making his military reforms received a positive reaction from the military.

The differences between Roh's and Kim's military reforms lay in structural changes. While Roh emphasized reorganizing military personal. Kim went further by implementing reforms in operational and instructional spheres. Firstly, the dissolution of the Hanahoe faction, including

excluded members of Hanahoe from high-ranking promotion and substituted them with non-Hanahoe members. As the most dominant faction within the military during the Fifth Republic, its ending led to a new era in the armed forces. It unlocked new opportunities for officers who willing to adopt the concept of democratic consolidation, making them civilian government subject, who would guard democracy. Secondly, president Kim reduced the rank of commanders in military institutions. This was significant because it changed hierarchical structure and as closely tied with authority within the military. Thirdly, civilian surveillance operations were terminated during the Kim administration. Therefore, there were extensive structural and operational changes compared to the Roh administration.

The fact that elected governments could implement military reforms indicated that civilians were able to exert their authority over the armed forces. The government as its supervisor was capable of overseeing military's administration, expenditures, and operations. This shifted CMR in the way that the officers were required to operate in accordance with democratic principles.

With regards to the third question, the specific insights Thailand can gain from the ROK, especially in relation to civil-military relations CMR and civilian control. While the research does not present a direct comparison between the ROK and Thailand in terms of CMR and civilian control, it offers valuable understanding and insights into the individual systems of the two countries. In order to shift the dynamics between the civilian and the military sectors, the missions of the Ministry of Defense must be reevaluated. While the ROK faces clear national security threats, such as communism during the First to Fifth Republics or the DPRK since the establishment of the ROK, these threats are mostly from external actors. In contrast, research argues that the majority of Thailand's national security risks come from internal actors, particularly democratic or political movements which will be discussed below.

The monarchy and the national security are two connected matters. As a result, any political activities or proposals, such as the campaigns to amend Section 112, which are perceived as threats to the monarchy will also be perceived as threats to national security. Nevertheless, these two topics should be considered as separate matters and the state's survivability should not depend on a single institution. If the existence of the state is tied to a single institution, that state would face a long-term stability risk. Furthermore, Section 112, concerning the defamation of the monarchy must be reviewed. In the recent case, an American scholar, Paul Chamber, was

arrested under section 112 after the military filed a complaint against him (BBC News, 2025, April 4). Even though Thai prosecutors dropped the case the following month (Tan, 2025), the incident reflected how the monarchy and national security were linked and how the armed forces used Section 112 to violate freedom of speech. Any law that limits human rights should be amended and any movements regarding the monarchy should not be perceived as a national security threat as under principles of democracy, freedom of expression is protected.

Additionally, the power of the monarchy must be checked. Transparency and checks and balances system are key principles of democracy. Nevertheless, when it comes to the monarchy-related issue, these principles are often disregarded or weakened. The king can intervene politics through his 'network monarchy', which is integrated into the armed forces, governmental bureaucracies, judicial system, and private sectors. These networks weaken democracy, leading to unconsolidated and problematic political system. When the status quo is challenged, the armed forces would use a threat to the monarchy as their pretext for intervening in politics, and following the coup, the transitional government would form to allow the same group of conservatives to regain control. Therefore, in theory, Thailand is a democratic nation, yet, in practice, it falls somewhere between an absolute monarchy and an oligarchy, where the monarchy holds invisible supreme power and the same group of elites takes turn severing as the head of the government.

In the ROK, two former coup leaders, Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, were arrested and prosecuted. While in Thailand, former coup leaders not only escaped prosecution but some also were appointed as members of the king's Privy Council. Therefore, to establish political norms and principles of democratic within the military, the prosecution of past coups is necessary and their assets and financial statements should be disclosed to the public. An amnesty for coup leaders will only initiate a potential military coup, continuing a 'vicious circle' in politics.

While the constitution of the ROK limits the military tasks to solely national security-related matter. The Thai armed forces' missions consist of a wide range of responsibilities, including protecting national sovereignty and the monarchy, maintaining national security against both internal and external threats, suppressing rebellion and unrest. Some of these tasks also extend into civilian spheres, such as contributing to national development and responding to national disasters. However, the tasks of the armed forces should be limited solely to a national security-related matter. A broad range of missions may provide opportunities for the military to

intervene in politics as well as civilian affairs. Therefore, to prevent such outcomes, a reevaluation of the armed forces' roles and responsibilities is necessary as the shift in responsibilities will impact on how the military perceives itself in a democratic society.

In president Kim's New Korea plan, corruption and transparency were key priorities, these principles also applied to the armed forces, leading to the purge of corrupt officers and the publication of the Defense White paper. The Thai military remains as an 'independent state' therefore, the civilian government is unable to oversee its expenditure and operations. Any requests for the disclosure of military information are rejected on the grounds of national security concerns. Furthermore, the Thai armed forces are one of the economic actors in the system, allowing them to be involve in profit-driven businesses, which are irrelevant to the military's tasks and might lead to corruption and misconduct within the armed forces.

Reshuffling commander positions was a crucial strategy that both Roh and Kim applied for establishing democratic consolidation and civilian supremacy. In Thailand, due to its structural obstruction, the Defense Committee is dominated by officers, rather than civilian representatives. As a result, civilians are unable to exercise authority or shift officers' loyalty to the civilian government. Moreover, the ROK armed forces consist of different actions, and the coups were carried out by one faction within the military, not by an institution. Instead, during the announcement of the 2014 coup, sitting next to Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha, the coup leader, were the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, Air Force, Police, along with a high-ranking officer. This indicated that the coup was carried out as an 'institution', therefore it can be argued that the Thai military is more united and homogenous compared to the ROK.

To sum up, CMR, the consolidation of democracy, and civilian control are interconnected, with each impacting the others in the process. A process that required compromises and negotiations from all involved parties. The ROK has demonstrated that the transition to democracy and the establishment of civilian supremacy are possible and essential for ensuring political stability. Although the country faced the 2024 martial law crisis, it proved that a political crisis could be resolved through democratic means and the use of armed forces in intervention in civilian politics was unnecessary. The ROK's experience in establishing civilian supremacy is valuable case study for Thailand. Not only because both countries faced similar military interventions, but also because there is a hope for Thailand to follow a similar path to implement democratic consolidation and civilian control.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian supremacy are essential for ensuring democratic stability. Each factor is interconnected and impacts the others. The ROK is an interesting case for studying the development of CMR, as the country transitioned from an authoritarian regime to a democratic nation, and the way the first two presidents of the Sixth Republic implemented reforms to establish democratic consolidation and civilian control over the armed forces, making a military coup unlikely. This is a value prospect for countries that still struggle with democratic consolidation and face challenges in establishing civilian supremacy, such as Thailand.

The 9th constitutional amendment provided a legal foundation for shifting and implementing CMR, democratic consolidation and civilian control. Consequently, the military reforms during Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam's presidencies were able to carry out to achieve these goals. Lastly, the insights for Thailand on CMR, democratic consolidation, and civilian supremacy is that the mission of the Ministry of Defense must be reevaluated, and importantly, the monarchy and national security should be separated.

For future research, examining informal relations between individuals could offer valuable insights, especially during the June 29 Declaration, as it was the outcome of negotiations and compromises between the ruling government and the opposition.

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During the preparation of this paper, AI tools and Google translate were used for grammar correction, proofreading, and translating. I carried out the final review, editing and revisions to my own preferences, and I take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

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Appendixes

Interview questions and transcript

Note:

1. The Q&A section began at [0:04:36]. I have also marked it in the transcript.
2. I have added explanations of political incidents, the full official names of the figures mentioned during the interview, and contextual clarifications in the translated transcript for better understanding. All explanations will be enclosed in [].
3. I used Google Translate and AI tools to assist with the translation, I carried out the final check and edited some texts for a better translation.

Interview questions:

1. Army's roles in politics – How does the military perceive its responsibility and role in the context of Thai politics?
2. Power relations - Objective Civilian Control
 - 2.1 What are the challenges of military reform faces by political groups?
 - 2.2 What factors prevent democratic consolidation over the military or hinder military reform?
3. The armed forces and the concept of Military Professionalism: Can the Thai army reduce its intervention in politics?
4. What will the future direction of relations be between the defense forces, politics, and Thai society?
5. The relationship between the monarchy and the military.

Interview transcript:

[0:04:36]

I: Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Ratchada Wannawit, and today I would like to interview you for my master's degree research. The topic is Democratic Consolidation and Civil-Military Relations: Insight from South Korea's Experience and Prospect for Thailand. It is quite a long title. The main focus of my study is the military and its relationship with politics. Therefore, I would like to ask you: How does the military perceive itself, its responsibility and role in the context of Thai politics?

A: They perceive themselves in an unusual way. They see themselves as a protector, or something similar, rather than a tool of the government, which is what they should be. To be honest, they have never been successful in overseas battles, they have always lost. So, they turn to fight with the people because of their misperceptions. They see themselves very wrongly. Most of their ideas are driven by a hunger of power, and use it to justify their actions, passing

the ideas down from generation to generation. You have probably heard the saying, right? You graduated from CRMA [the Chulachomkiao Royal Military Academy], so you can do anything.

I: You can be a prime minister.

A: CRMA alumni have produced most of prime minister in Thailand. They have already said that, no matter where a prime minister graduates from. The military still produced most of them. CRMA still produced most of prime ministers.

I: When the armed forces have played a significant role in Thai politics? Since the Siamese Revolution, or since the time we suppressed communism?

A: For deeper details. The military's involvement in Thai politics dates back to the reign of King Rama VI. During his reign, the soldiers were his older brothers and younger brothers, such as Krom Luang Nakhon Chaisi [Field Marshal Prince Chirapravati Voradej] and Krom Luang Phitsanulok [Chakrabongse Bhuvanath]. They did not fully get along with King Rama VI. In response, King Rama VI established the Wild Tiger Corps, providing them with weapons, equipment, and all sorts of resources. They were much better equipped than the regular soldiers, which led to many conflicts. There was an incident when King Rama VI's page had a quarrel with soldiers, while King Rama VI was still a crown prince at the time. King Rama VI was so angry that he ordered them to be struck with a cane as punishment. Although the caning law has since been abolished, he insisted that if they were not caned, he would resign as crown prince. During his reign, there was also the Mor Leng Rebellion [Palace Revolt of 1912]. However, the rebels were caught first, imprisoned, and later pardoned.

I: During the reign of King Rama V, there were efforts to reform the country. King Rama V sent soldiers and his children to study abroad, particularly in military schools. Was there any effort to adopt the perception of professional soldiers or promote civilian status within the military?

A: Do not forget that at that time, Thailand was an absolute monarchy. As a result, the king's children, who had studied military affairs, eventually returned to command the army. There likely were not any professional soldiers at that time.

I: In the present era, we have a constitution and a democratic form of governance with civilian control over the military. There have been attempts by civilian governments to exert control over the military, including efforts to place civilians in positions within the Ministry of Defense. However, these reforms have not been successful, and we have yet to see significant changes in the military or the Ministry of Defense in Thailand. I would like to understand what prevents the political side from having authority over the military, and why military reform is so difficult in Thailand.

A: Since 1932, when the Siamese Revolution took place, civilians managed the military well. Civilians and the military were considered equal, until the coup in 1947, when the military took control. After the coup, they arrested Pridi Banomyong. Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram became the Commander-in-chief. This marked the beginning of a shift, with military power increasing and the military gaining more influence, including through laws favoring the military. The real turning point began with the 1947 coup, when the army started intervening in politics. The military had representation in every ministry because, in case of war, if they captured territories, they needed to set up a military government. However, despite this, they never won a war.

(The recording paused temporarily. The Q&A resumed at 0:16:27.)

A:)continued) The establishment of a military government granted numerous privileges to the military through laws, giving them significant authority. This also included military properties that the People's Parties are now trying to reclaim for the people. The privileges began with Field Marshal P. Pibulsongkram seizing power. In reality, it was Field Marshal Phin who first seized power and invited Field Marshal P. in 1947. Field Marshal P. then held power for about 10 years, followed by Field Marshal Sarit, who took over. From there, military power expanded significantly. After a brief pause, following the events of 14 October 1973⁹, came the 6 October incident¹⁰. After October 6, the Reform Committee increased the penalties under Section 112. Essentially, the law was used to further empower the military, placing them above other civil servants, starting from 1947.

⁹ The 14th October 1973 incident, also known as the 14 October 1973 Thai uprising.

One of the largest political demonstrations in Thailand, an event also marked a rise of university students as a political force. Contributing factors that led to the incident included demonstrators' demand for the release of 13 activists who had been arrested while calling for a new constitution. These activists, who were students, professors, and politicians, were charged with illegal actions, undermining state security, treason, and communist activities. The demonstration began on October 9th with a peaceful protest at Thammasat University, but was violently suppressed on 14-15 October, leading to an uprising in Bangkok and the provinces. The incident ended the Thanom-Phrapha-Narong regime, who later were forced to exile.

¹⁰ The 6th October 1976 incident, also known as Oct.6 massacre.

On 19 September 1976, Thanom who had been exiled in the US, returned to Thailand as a novice monk, claiming that he had no desire for power and wanted to visit his father, who was ill and near death. The public did not believe his claim and protested against his return. The speculation proved true, as Thanom disrobed the following year and demanded that the government to return his assets seized from him. However, the protest was oppressed with violent, on 24 September, two activists were hanged while they were posting notices protested against Thanom's return. On 4 October, university students staged a mock hanging to protest the incident. On the next day, Dao Siam, a right-wing newspaper, accused the students of insulting the Crown Prince and attempting to overthrow the monarchy. These accusations mobilized the village scout and other right-wing groups to surround Thammasat University, where thousands of students gathering in protest. On 6 October, armed troops violently suppressed the demonstrators on charges of threatening national security. Admiral Sangad Chaloryu used the massacre as claims to carry out a coup in 1976.

I: Is it possible for the political groups to reform the laws and reduce the power and role of the military in politics? Since the military has used the law to increase its power, can the law be used to reverse that?

A: They have tried, but still have not succeeded. Take the law to abolish conscription, for example—bringing in thousands of people each year for free labor. It is been ineffective. Currently, it is in the worst state possible. As you may already know, corruption is rampant. Once the military enlists recruits, they send them home and keep the money as a primary source of income. There is plenty of evidence of fraud involving new recruits. Most of the recruits, they apply to join the six-month program to avoid full military service, and this happens to everyone. After the initial training, they are sent home [leaving their military ATM cards with the commander], and the money is funneled through the ATM system. Currently, a soldier's monthly salary is about 10,000 baht [approximately 260 EUR], and for a whole company or battalion, that adds up. On top of that, there are allowances for meals, and the whole system is draining resources.

I: I have seen posts on Facebook where people say their salary is this much, but after deductions for this and that, they are left with only a few hundred. Some are even left with just tens of baht.

A: Having deductions is still better. Most of the time, it has taken entirely. What they are talking about shows that at least they still have something left after deductions. But there are many people who get absolutely nothing, zero baht, and that is the majority.

I: For parties like the Move Forward Party or the People's Party [the Move Forward Party was disbanded by the Constitutional Court of Thailand in 2024. Later, it succeeded by the People's Party], whenever there is a law related to the military, the feedback they usually get is mostly negative. Whether it is the law to abolish conscription or the law to return military land to the people. I see that the military is protective of its power, or maybe they still want to be part of politics. They do not actually want to leave or become professional soldiers.

A: Of course, 100%. And these people will have the mindset that the appropriateness and correctness of being a soldier has to be like this. So, there is no way around it, because they are constantly demanding gratitude. My daughter is in the Military Affairs Committee, and the things they say are ridiculous, claiming they fight for the nation. But I have not seen them fighting anyone. And in the three southern provinces [The Southern Thailand Insurgency is an ongoing conflict since the early 2000s], there is widespread corruption. They register the officers' names, but the actual soldiers are in Bangkok. The ones who are actually on duty are just low-ranking soldiers. I think it is really bad, and I criticize everything about it. But the truth is, I have many friends who are soldiers."

I: Is there a mindset that they want to see soldiers as professional soldiers within the military?

A: There might be a few, but it is very rare. If they speak up, they will get in trouble. There might be some, though.

I: Do we have to wait for a while before they realize their role in politics or where they stand in Thai society?

A: Probably not. It is probably only the law that can fix it. Because right now, it is a lot. Whatever they are called, they will not allow it, will not disclose anything. There are no details about horse racing tracks, golf courses, or any other fields [The Thai Military also an economy actor, as they have several businesses, from golf courses to convention centers, under their name] How much revenue is there? What is the situation? And does it go to the treasury or not?

I: Let me talk about Mr. Phumtham [Phumtham Wechayachai], the Minister of Defense. He is a former member of the October Revolution and was once a member of the Communist Party of Thailand. Now that he is in charge of the military, he says he wants to see the military as professional soldiers and that there should no longer be any coups in the military's history. Do you think Mr. Phumtham will be able to reform or bring about change in the military?

A: No, he cannot do it because the structure in the Ministry of Defense is already rigid. For example, promotions or transfers of the officers require a committee. The committee is made up of the Chief Supreme Command of each military branch and the Minister of Defense. When voting, they use a majority vote. There is no way to change it; it is approximately 8:1. [According to Article 25 of the 2008 National Defense Act, the power to appoint senior military officers lies with the Defense Committee, which consists of the Minister of Defense, Deputy Minister of Defense, the Commander-in-Chief, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, the Permanent Secretary for Defense, and the Chief of the Personnel Office. Therefore, two representatives of the committee are from the government, while six members come from the military.]

I: It is difficult. It is hard to get them to vote on our side.

A: It is the hardest.

I: If that is the case, the future of Thai politics looks very bleak.

A: I am happy that there is the People's Party, the Future Forward Party, because it is the first time. Have you ever thought or dreamed that a political party would not buy votes or pay money and still get elected? If this can continue, they will be able to do a lot more good things. And they do not just accept things easily either

I: Yes, they are fighting. They are fighting really hard.

A: I have hope. I remain hopeful. I have been hoping since 1972.

I: But, this is personal. I am really devastated that they won the election but did not become the government. Then the party got dissolved, and the party leader was banned from politics. The party members were also banned from politics. I feel really sad about this, and I feel like Thai politics is going in circles again, with the Senate [The Move Forward Party won the general election in 2023. However, due its political campaign regarding the monarchy, the party was opposed by conservative Senate in forming the government.]

A: But those types of people are all going to die soon. You have to understand that the younger generation must have the same mindset as you, and they will have to govern the country going forward. So, there is a way. In the past, I still had hope, but I could not see a way. Until the Future Forward Party came up. At first, I did not really understand it, but later, when it became the Move Forward Party, it proved itself by winning the election without paying a single baht. How is that even possible? So, we now have the tools. We have the tools. I have hope, a lot of hope. And I really hope that I do not die before I see it, but I suspect I will probably die before that.

I: No, I am concerned. I am really concerned. If they want to politically attack the People's Party, I am afraid it will get dissolved again. But...

A: Let them dissolve the party, let them dissolve it. We will just get more campaign staff. They [the People's Party] do not back down.

I: I hope they fight until they become the government. I also hope that, on that day, I will be proud to say, "We have made it to this point."

A: I also hope I will be around to share that pride with you.

I: Teacher, may I ask a quick question about the monarchy and the military? Is it convenient to answer?

A: Go ahead.

I: In the most recent case, where King Rama X appointed General Prayut as a Privy Councilor what is your opinion on this matter?

A: It is a normal thing. It is a reward. It is a reward because, during the Prayut Administration, he placed two military units—RAB 1 and RAB 11 [Bangkok-based 1st and 11th Infantry Regiments]—under the King's command. These are very important units that have consistently been involved in seizing power. The most important thing is the transfer of the Crown Property, which belongs to the state, to King Rama X. Therefore, it is a reward that is appropriate. It has already been done. The Move Forward Party is the only party that opposes both issues.

I: I feel speechless. As a Thai person and someone who follows politics, seeing someone who has carried out a coup become a Privy Councillor makes me feel uneasy. But...

A: There are many, not just this one [Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha]. Several others, including Dapong [Gen. Dapong Ratanasuwan], have also carried out coups. How could they do it if he was not okay?

I: There were signals, right?

A: What signal? It might have been an order.

I: Oh, an order. In that case, military reform just becomes even harder.

A: It is not that hard, because soon enough, these people will all be gone. No one can stay forever. The children of these dictators will not want any part of it.

I: But we still see

A: The successors, the inheritors...

I: Yes, that is what I am afraid of. I am afraid of the continued inheritance of power.

A: They might feel ashamed and fearful.

I: But we have never seen the leader of a coup being sent to prison or prosecuted like in South Korea. They arrest coup leaders and take them to court, but we have never seen anything like that here in Thailand.

A: We use the law because we seize power and issue amnesty laws every time. So, what are the consequences? Amnesty requires someone to sign it. Who signs it? [His Majesty the King].

I: But I think these matters should not be granted amnesty. We should have the ability to take action retroactively.

A: Right now, it is a lawfare. It's been going on for a long time. We cannot do what South Korea did because there is an amnesty law. Once amnesty is granted, what can be done?

I: We can only just watch them and do nothing.

A: We just have to wait for nature to punish them

I: But it takes a long time for us to see nature punish them.

A: Be patient. How long do you think it takes? I have seen it happen a lot, and it is real punishment.

I: We just wait for the time and remain hopeful for Thai politics.

(The interview ended at 0:35:37)