

## The fight against terrorism and the mutation of democracy in Thailand

Susanne Feske, Siwach Pholpai

### Summary

Grey Area Phenomena, as mentioned in Sebastian Hiltner's article, pose a serious challenge to the foundation and the security of a nation state. They not only threaten a country's stability, but they also threaten the cohesiveness of the political system. In most cases consolidated democracies are resilient enough to absorb these threats, but for unconsolidated democracies the government's involvement in the fight against terrorism puts a country's democratization process at risk. Particularly proactive and pre-emptive strategies undermine the country's newly achieved democratic norms and rules. In some cases the government might be inclined to authoritarian structures. In some cases the fight against terrorism might even be instrumentalized for legitimizing the government's authoritarian measures. Thailand is a case in point. In this article we argue that for Thailand as an unconsolidated democracy the fight against separatist and terrorists in the Southern provinces has caused a transformation both in government and civil society which are closely related. The fight against terrorism increases the gap between the two major ethnic groups – Muslims and Buddhists – which in turn lead to a destabilization of Thai society. The fight against terrorism de-legitimizes the government which, as a consequence, returns to authoritarian structures.

Manuscript received on 2008-07-02 and accepted on 2008-09-04  
Keywords: Thailand, Democracy, Transformation, Terrorism

### 1 Thailand's road to democracy

Compared to other states in the region, Thailand has a long history of democracy since the country changed from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy in 1932. But the democratization process has not always been straight forward. It had many interruptions and setbacks: such as the „Day of the Great Tragedy“ on October 14, 1973,<sup>1</sup> the incident on October 16, 1976,<sup>2</sup> and the so called „May Massacre

---

Special thanks to Sebastian Hiltner and Kristin Twilfer for their kind support.

<sup>1</sup> Clark D. Neher, *Political Succession in Thailand*, (University of California Press: Asian Survey, Vol. 32, No.7, Jul., 1992), page 589.

<sup>2</sup> Written by Charnvit Kasetsiri and with English summary by Benedict Anderson, *October 14, 1973 Student Uprising in Thailand*, (Bangkok: Thammasat University Archives (หอจดหมายเหตุธรรมศาสตร์)), page 37.