

Fake News Storm Clouds Gather Over Southeast Asia

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From Cambodia to Thailand American and European media companies have launched a campaign of disinformation aimed at reversing Washington's waning influence in the region vis-à-vis not only Beijing, but the growing strength of nations the US and Europe once saw as mere geopolitical pawns.

Cambodia Expels US-Run Opposition Party and Media

In Cambodia, articles depicting the government as having trampled free speech and democracy are in direct response to Phnom Penh's decision to disband the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) headed by **Kem Sokha** who now resides in jail. The media storm also follows the Cambodian government's decision to shut down US government funded propaganda networks posing as local, independent news organisations.

This includes Voice of America and Radio Free Asia, both funded and directed out of Washington D.C., not anything resembling independent, local political interests in Cambodia itself.

A good example of this disinformation campaign comes from Voice of America Khmer itself in an article titled, "U.S. Cutting Aid to Cambodia for Recent Democratic Setbacks." The article claims:

In its annual World Report, the rights group said the government, controlled by Prime Minister Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party for more than three decades, disbanded the main opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party, and arrested its leader on questionable treason charges. The dissolution came after a ruling the CNRP was involved in an attempt to overthrow Hun Sen's regime.

However, what VOA calls "questionable treason charges" are never explored further in the article. The charges stem from CNRP leader Kem Sokha himself being caught on video openly admitting to conspiring with the US government to seize power in Cambodia.

ABC Australia in its article, "[Australian speech the key 'treason' evidence against Cambodian opposition leader](#)," would quote Kem Sokha during a speech he gave while in Australia, as saying:

The USA, which has assisted me, has asked me to take the model from Yugoslavia, Serbia, where they were able to change the dictator Milosevic.

I don't just do what I feel, I have experts, university professors in Washington DC, Montreal, Canada hired by the Americans in order to advise me on the strategy to change the leaders.

While Kem Sokha's defenders have claimed his remarks merely meant changing the government through "democratic means" it should be noted that by virtue of admitting one has foreign assistance negates anything democratic about one's means. Democracy is built upon self-determination while Kem Sokha's agenda was clearly being devised and determined in Washington D.C.

It should also be noted that the US intervention Kem Sokha referred to in Serbia was admittedly undemocratic in means as well.

The New York Times in its article, "[Who Really Brought Down Milosevic?](#)," would admit:

American assistance to Otpor and the 18 parties that ultimately ousted Milosevic is still a highly sensitive subject. But Paul B. McCarthy, an official with the Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy, is ready to divulge some details.

The article continues, stating:

"...from August 1999 the dollars started to flow to Otpor pretty significantly." Of the almost \$3 million spent by his group in Serbia since September 1998, he says, "Otpor was certainly the largest recipient." The money went into Otpor accounts outside Serbia. At the same time, McCarthy held a series of meetings with the movement's leaders in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, and in Szeged and Budapest in Hungary. Homen, at 28 one of Otpor's senior members, was one of McCarthy's interlocutors. "We had a lot of financial help from Western nongovernmental organizations," Homen says. "And also some Western governmental organizations."

In today's current climate of "Russian meddling" hysteria, should similar evidence surface that an entire opposition party was funded, organised and meeting with Russian government representatives in the manner Serbia's or indeed, Cambodia's opposition did with Americans, we can only imagine the repercussions.

Yet in the world of US and European "fake news," the public is led to believe Cambodia's government is being unreasonable in disbanding a political party openly admitting to treason and dismantling a foreign propaganda network funded directly by the US government.

"Fake News" Rewrites Thai History

Reading a recent Agence France-Presse (AFP) article regarding Cambodia's neighbour to the west, Thailand, the public would be led to believe despotism is spreading fast across the region.

Titled, "[Dozens of new political parties register in run-up to Thai poll](#)," it claims:

Thailand has been under army rule since a 2014 putsch toppled an elected government and installed the country's most autocratic regime in a generation. The generals have banned all political activity and repeatedly postponed a promised return to democracy.

Just like in US and European disinformation regarding Cambodia, what is omitted is just as important as what the article attempts to claim. The current military-led government in Thailand ousted **Yingluck Shinawatra**, sister of convicted criminal and fugitive **Thaksin Shinawatra**.

Her brother was ousted in a military coup in 2006 after a raft of corruption scandals, abuse of power and a mounting record of human rights abuses. In 2003 alone and over just 90 days, Thaksin Shinawatra would launch a "war on drugs" that would leave some 2,800 dead gunned down in extrajudicial street executions. This alone would make Thaksin Shinawatra the worst human rights abuser in contemporary Thai history.

Human Rights Watch (now also fully engaged in propaganda against the current Thai government) would report in its 2008 statement, "[Thailand's 'war on drugs'](#)," that:

In February 2003, the Thai government, under then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, launched a 'war on drugs', purportedly aimed at the suppression of drug trafficking and the prevention of drug use. In fact, a major outcome of this policy was arbitrary killings. In the first three months of the campaign there were some 2800 extrajudicial killings. In 2007, an official investigation found that more than half of those killed had no connection whatsoever to drugs. Apart from the thousands who lost their lives, thousands more were forced into coercive "treatment" for drug addiction.

Other US and European media organisations would report on his many other abuses, including his muzzling of Thai critics and even the assassination and disappearance of his critics.

The New York Times, for example, in its 2005 article, "[Thaksin accused of 'dirty war' on media](#)," would admit:

Prime Minister Thaksin has an agenda all his own. Although he is the founder of a telecommunications empire and keen to project Thailand as a fast-modernizing part of the global economy, Thaksin has little tolerance of the criticism aired in a free press. His concentrated political power and the considerable resources of his family's commercial empire have been combined to muzzle critics in both the broadcast and print media.

At one point, the New York Times quotes a British writer who compared Thaksin Shinawatra's Thailand to Moscow before the Berlin Wall fell.

AFP, if honest, would at best be able to compare the current government to Shinawatra's previously admitted autocratic streak. Yet AFP in its recent article never mentions Shinawatra's abuses at all.

AFP's supposed "most autocratic regime in a generation" in stark contrast to Shinawatra's regime, has killed no one. Its political bans are aimed solely at Thaksin Shinawatra's

supporters, who with significant US funding as in Cambodia, are attempting to once again take to the streets and lobby for Shinawatra's illegal return to power.

Those arrested by Thailand's current government are solely associated with Thaksin Shinawatra and his still potent political machinery. These facts too are never mentioned by AFP and other US and European media organisations in their portrayal of Thailand as "autocratic."

Western Media's Biggest Opponent is Itself

What's most appalling in regards to AFP's recent dishonesty is that those contradicting its propaganda are not representatives of the current Thai government nor "Russian trolls," but headlines and information published in past years by AFP's own peers across the Western media, with many of these peers now also engaged in disinformation aimed against Thailand side-by-side AFP.

For AFP and other US and European media organisations, their continued perception by the public as reputable news organisations stems solely from the public's ignorance regarding current events and their collective short memory regarding past events. When editors at AFP can publish entire articles their own reports from years ago contradict completely, they illustrate not journalistic integrity, but contempt for the intelligence of their readership and contempt for journalism itself.

How effective the lies regarding Cambodia and Thailand spread by US and European media organisations is debatable. While the US government in particular has invested heavily in indoctrinating local youth, propping up political parties and opposition groups and assailing Southeast Asian leadership who defy US special interests, a look at Southeast Asia's declining economic relationships with the US versus growing ties with the rest of Asia and Eurasia seem to indicate the growing din of propaganda is at least partially related to America's loss of actual influence in the region.

Even local business leaders taking over family fortunes and deeply indoctrinated by Western "values" face a reality in which doing business with the US and Europe will put them at a disadvantage among those who have recognised and adapted to the West's continued decline. Propaganda alone can be a useful tool to augment the designs of powerful special interests, but propaganda cannot fulfil those designs alone.

It can even be argued that Kem Sokha wouldn't be in jail right now and the Shinawatra siblings wouldn't be hiding abroad were Western propaganda sufficiently backed by actual power, or possessed significant power in its own right. The storm clouds of Western "fake news" are gathering over Southeast Asia, but it is a storm of sound and fury signifying nothing?

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