

His majesty bhumibol adulyadej history essay



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Introduction

This report adopts a deductive approach of research for dissecting the leadership of His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej, ruling king of Thailand. This report will attempt to critically evaluate the leadership style of His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej in consonance with the theory of Charismatic leadership.

Phra Worawongse Ther Phra Ong Chao Bhumibol Adulyadej, popularly known as His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej, is the ruling monarch of Thailand since 1946. His Majesty was born at the Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the United States on 5 December 1927 to Mahidol Adulyadej and Mom Sangwal (Suvit Wimuttanon, 2001). He had brief visits to the country of Thailand and did most part of his schooling from Switzerland. He studied political science and law to make himself more adept for the position of a monarch and better governance. He ascended the throne of king of Thailand after the death of his brother, King Ananda Mahidol, on 9 June 1946 (Suvit Wimuttanon, 2001). His formal coronation was accomplished on 5th May 1950, which is still celebrated as the coronation day in Thailand with a public holiday declared on that day (Suvit Wimuttanon, 2001). Bhumibol has completed almost 64 years in monarchy and has been bestowed with the distinction of being the longest reigning monarch in Thai history. Bhumibol has been a witness and active participant to the changing political scenario of the country since his coronation; he has been a witness to over 15 coups, 16 constitutions, and 27 changes of prime ministers (Soravij Bhirom Bhakdi, 2006). He has been instrumental in averting a couple of coups in 1981 and 1985 and always been a supporter of peace in his country. He is a revered figure in the country of Thailand and a

respected figure in world politics. His influence over the affairs and life of the country can be gauged from the fact that his ill health casts aspersions over the financial markets of the country (Paul M. Handley, 2006). Although criticism of Bhumibol is objected upon in the constitution, there have been appreciation and criticism coming his way equally from the different factions in the world for his meditative skills and leadership style. The choice of His Majesty Bhumibol for this study on leadership style has been made because of his abilities of establishing himself as an undisputed leader of masses and conducting as an able monarch for a period of 64 years. Another aspect of his multi-faceted leadership style has been his abilities to mediate and argue for the peace with. His style of leadership can't be scanned with the frame of one particular theory of leadership as it has been a combination of many, but Charismatic theory of leadership would be coming closest to his actual style of leadership. Charismatic leadership basically involves the ability to get people to want to change, to improve beyond the regular and to be led (John Hall, Shannon Johnson, Allen Wysocki, and Karl Kepner, 2008). The transformational leaders are capable of moving the followers beyond self-interest, enchanting others with the inherent charisma and are always intellectual stimulating (Bass, 1998).

Context and Background

His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej was born in a royal family; he was a born leader and a well educated and read one. He studied law and political science in Switzerland. He spent his initial years in Switzerland and France and finally came to Thailand to ascend to the throne after the sudden death of his brother (Suvit Wimuttanon, 2001). Although he has made significant

contributions to the political scenario of Thailand within the last 64 years, the early years of his reign he acted little more than a ceremonial figure. This was the time of military government of Dictator Plaek Pibulsonggram which has rendered no powers and authority for the monarch (Suvit Wimuttanon, 2001). The general parliamentary elections were held in early 1957 and just six months after that in August 1957, Field Marshal Pibulsonggram and his government was accused by General Sarit Dhanarajata of lèse majesté following its objectionable conduct of the 2, 500th anniversary celebration of Buddhism in Thailand (Suvit Wimuttanon, 2001). Although Pibulsonggram tried to win the support of Bhumibol for his government but was advised to keep repudiate the post in order to avoid a coup, but the Field Marshal refused to resign. The power was seized by that every evening by Sarit Dhanarajata and within a couple of hours martial law was imposed by Bhumibol throughout the Kingdom (Dr. Evans Grant, 1998). A royal command was also issued by Bhumibol which corroborated the appointment of Sarit as “ Military Defender of the Capital” (Suvit Wimuttanon, 2001). With charismatic persona and leading abilities his command was obeyed across the kingdom and the people accepted Sarit Dhanarajata as the new chief. During the dictatorship of Sarit the monarchy got an opportunity to get revitalized and Bhumibol got an opportunity to showcase his leading and reforming capabilities. Bhumibol started attending public functions and ceremonies. He started touring the provinces for getting in touch with his people and patronized development projects for the country. Although Sarit enjoyed a close association with the king, it couldn't last longer due to sudden death of Sarit in 1963. Bhumibol had again to come to fore at the political landscape, he appointed Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn as the

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premier to take over the responsibilities (Dr. Evans Grant, 1998). This was a time when the clamour for democracy was rising higher in the country. There were violent protests staged by the pro-democracy demonstrators all across the Thailand leading to deaths. Bhumibol welcomed all the warring factions inside his Chitralada Palace and had a special audience with the student's leaders (Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, 1995). His charisma was potent enough to put the protests to rest and he used his wisdom order the replacement of Thanom by appointment of the Thammasat University Rector Sanya Dharmasakti as the new Prime Minister. The king ordered the exile of Thanom to Singapore and then to US but the return of Thanom and his ordination in the role of a novice monk at Wat Bowonniwet in 1976 triggered a renewed conflict, which culminated in the 6 October 1976 Massacre at Thammasat University by royalist paramilitary forces (Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, 1995). This ensuing chaos fuelled the aspirations of conspirators and granted them an opportunity to stage a coup. This entire episode led to a turbulent phase in the political conditions of the country and saw the coming and going to many military and political leaders to the premiership.

Bhumibol himself was unhappy with the tumultuous developments placed in the geography of Thailand, he even refused to endorse or support the military coups attempted in 1981 (popularly known as the April Fool's Day coup) and also attempted in 1985 (popularly known as the Share Rebellion) (Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, 1995). The denial of Bhumibol regarding the attempted coups couldn't stop the forces loyal to the government from victory with the use of some violence. The wave of subsequent coups forced the formation of a perception regarding Bhumibol that there had been a factor of misjudgment regarding the Thai society and questions were raised

regarding his credibility as an impartial mediator trying to break the impasse between various political and military factions within the country (Paul M. Handley, 2006).

The year 1992 was a watershed year for Thailand as it was harbinger of democracy within the country. Bhumibol played a very significant role in establishment of the democratic system in the country. The backdrop started with a coup which took place on 23 February 1991 marking the return military dictatorship in Thailand. General elections were held in the year 1992, General Suchinda Kraprayoon who was a leader of the coup group, was invited by all the majority parties to ascend to the post of the Prime Minister of the country (Paul M. Handley, 2006). This decision attracted much of controversy and much dissent among the people which finally escalated in the form of demonstrations held across the country leading to deaths of a large number of populations. The deaths were primarily due to the military which was brought in to control the protesters. The ensuing clashes with the protestors of police and military forces became critical as violence and riot erupted and spread across in many areas of the capital (Paul M. Handley, 2006).

The fear of a never ending civil war was looming large over the nation and forced Bhumibol to intervene amongst thick of the things. Bhumibol made a strategic move and summoned the warring factions for discussions among a live audience. Suchinda and retired Major General Chamlong Srimuang, the leader of the pro-democracy movement, were invited to a televised audience for discussions where Bhumibol urged them to find a peaceful resolution to ensuing crisis (Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, 1995). Since the entire crisis was <https://assignbuster.com/his-majesty-bhumibol-adulyadej-history-essay/>

at its own height, the sight of leaders from the two warring factions appearing together on their knees before the king (as was the royal protocol) cooled the nerves of the common man. It went a long way in making a strong statement before the nation regarding the focus of the king and finally led to Suchinda's resignation within no time. The crisis crippling the nation was so acute that it was amongst the fewest of the occasions when Bhumibol made an intervention directly and publicly in any political conflict. This whole episode was followed by general elections which established the foundations of a civilian government in the country (Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, 1995).

The king has been keeping a distance from the active politics of the country until and unless serious interventions are required from his sides. The legislative elections of April 2006 were marred with serious controversies and Bhumibol was petitioned regarding appointment of a replacement prime minister and cabinet during the period of elections for a fair and clean election to be held. These demands of royal intervention were severely criticized across the public media and Bhumibol was quick to refute the demand (Worranaree Kosajan, 2006). This tumult led to boycotting of the elections by a critical mass of population. During the course of six months there were rounds of allegations and clarifications regarding the anomalies in the elections held and the rigging that has been done by the victorious party. During the May of 2006 a prominent newspaper of the country named Manager Daily revealed the secrets of the " Finland Plot", alleging that Thaksin (the victorious leader in boycotted elections) colluded with the former members of the Communist Party of Thailand for overthrowing the

king of Thailand and planning to seize control of the nation (Kate McGeown, 2006). Although, no strong evidence could ever be produced for verification of the existence of such a plot.

These situations were an ideal bed of conduction of a military coup, the same happened in the evening of 19 September, when the Thai military successfully overthrew the government formed by Thaksin and the control of Bangkok (the Thai capital) was seized in a bloodless coup (Kate McGeown, 2006). The new establishment under the leadership of Sonthi Boonyaratglin, the then Commander of the Army, pledged its loyalty to Bhumibol and declared the martial law across the country. This coup was endorsed by Bhumibol and then only the protests from the people of the country stopped. There were disputes among the Thai analysts and international media regarding the role of the king in the recently concluded coup. The speculations were rife that the king was aware of the coup in advance and had given his consent for the same as well.

Key Capabilities and Analysis

Although due to the protocols of Thailand and the various laws preventing the criticism of the king or his actions and policies, but the different sections of history have portrayed his majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej differently. He has been mostly painted as a royal and benign monarch who always strategized for bringing peace to the country but he has been criticized in the international media and among the coterie Thai analysts for his support of umpteen coups and attempts to destabilize the government. But he has always been appreciated by the observers for having been a monarch and a leader of supreme capabilities who led from the front whenever the need

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arose and always managed the show well. Bhumibol has been a key witness to the disturbing political uncertainty and used his skillful repertoire of political understanding to withstand and cope with an era of frequent power changes.

His charisma and charm has been par excellence and has helped him in win many hearts and improve millions of lives across Thailand. There are evidences galore to deduct that Bhumibol's approach to leadership was close to the Charismatic theory of leadership where transformational abilities and charm are the sub-dimensions (B. M. Bass, 1998). The process of transforming the followers and making the members of the organization elevate from an existing present level towards some futuristic and aspirational state or idealized goal or radical reform is Charismatic leadership. (Jay A. Conger, Rabindra N. Kanungo and Associates, 2006). Charismatic leaders are always a class apart in their approach to leadership from the consensual leaders and the directive leaders. The abilities to use their personal power are somewhere manifested in the vision of elitism and idealization that they possess (Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink, 2003). The entrepreneurial advocacy which they always promote for bringing about a radical transformation, along with the superior depth of their knowledge and expertise makes them get accepted as a power leader among followers. The charismatic leaders are always promoters of change and call forth performances which are beyond expectations by making others feel proud about their work and duties, communication of personal respect, helping the person move forward in the direction of creative thinking and above all inspiring to achieve beyond obvious (B. M. Bass, 1998). The charismatic

leadership basically stands on the relationship between the leader and the follower and the relationship is established by (Mattei Dogan, 2007)

(a) Establishing a close relationship between the self-esteem of the follower and the goals and visions of the leader- It would basically involve gaining the confidence of the sub-ordinates and associates regarding the plans of attaining the goal to finally achieve an outcome shaped in the vision initially. Bhumibol always has this trust from his associates and followers who were of believe that the vision and the goals of the king would always be for the betterment of the entire population of Thailand and would lead to national prosperity.

(b) An internalization of the visions and goals of the leader- It basically taps on those attributes of the personality of the leader which motivates the followers and associates to commit themselves better and more vigorously towards attainment of the final goal and accomplishment of the vision. Bhumibol always motivated his followers and junta by projecting himself away from the day to day political affairs but he always ensured that the public of Thailand always believed that they had the patronage of the king.

(c) A strong commitment to the goals and vision of the leader- It is about steadfast believe in the capabilities of a leader and contribute to the development of faith and dedication among the associates. The leader makes them challenge the normal practices by promoting a vision and set of goals and fosters the commitment of his followers towards it. There are strong evidences suggesting that Bhumibol always fostered this commitment

of people in his visions and ideal and what better proof of the concept can be other than the 64 years of reign in Thailand.

(d) A willingness to go beyond their self interest for the sake of the followers- Individual consideration should be negligible in the charismatic leaders and there should be a strong willingness to be exhibited regarding sacrificing their own self interests for the benefits of the followers and associates.

Bhumibol could well usurp the powers and modify the constitution in order to have all the powers vested in himself for governing the country instead of making it move on the path of democracy. He controlled the army being the supreme commander but never let it participate in any coup for assuming powers, as he always believed that democracy in the nation is going to foster development and bring peace.

The popularity of the Thai king can be gauged from the fact that even the citizens of Thailand won't be able to recall the name of a Thai prime minister but Bhumibol is renowned worldwide and worshiped across the country. The king of Thailand has been rated as a modern monarch and has always been much more progressive than his many governments and has successfully guided them towards development. Bhumibol takes up frequent sojourn across the country including the remote areas and minority tribes. This is done by him to maintain personal contact with his followers and public (Keith Adam, 1990). More than 2000 projects for development and welfare of the common public has been started and completed with the aim of improving the economic and social welfare.

Conclusion

This brief study of the life and leadership style of Bhumibol Adulyadej makes us believe that his vision of Thailand has been based on a concrete base of ideologies of a democratic and sovereign nationhood. He has been a witness to the tumultuous transformation of the nation from dictatorship to democracy. The direction and zeal displayed by the king himself corroborates the leadership characteristics of a charismatic leader and potent mind. His charisma and valour helped him to establish governments which worked for the interest of the people and never surmounted him. The timing of the ascending to the throne and the social context of Thailand was very crucial for the charismatic style of leadership to succeed in the country. He shaped the aspiration of the nation for attainment of democracy and sustainable governance instead of the fickle dictatorship. He was very capable of realizing this aspiration and succeeded to a great extent with the end of era of dictatorship and beginning of democracy. He has been able to command respect and confidence of not only his followers but also the dictators and rulers of the country who always genuflected before him and believed in his leadership. He has been equally successful as an international political figure by representing the interests of Thailand at the global forums. His leadership style seems close to the charismatic theory of leadership and the way he leveraged his charisma and motivating skills in establishing and continuing his reign over Thailand for 64 years is exemplary.