EXPOSED: US Lobbyists Behind Thai "Opposition"

Documents have surfaced exposing US corporate lobbying behind one of Thailand’s supposed “pro-democracy” opposition parties, Future Forward Party (FFP).

Future Forward, headed by union-busting nepotist billionaire Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, was revealed to be aided by US-based corporate lobbying firm, APCO Worldwide.

Who are These Lobbyists?

APCO Worldwide, in turn, is directed by representatives of not only the US government itself, but some of the largest and most corrupt US corporations. These include Alcoa, Xerox, Dow, Cargill, Standard Charted Bank, Boeing, GE, Procter & Gamble, Morgan Chase, Nike, Starbucks, NBC, CNN and Goldman Sachs.

In addition to representatives of weapon manufacturers, banks, corporate media and abusive agricultural giants, there are also intelligence officers, former US ambassadors and various government officials working mainly for Republican presidents (Ronald Reagan and George Bush) serving on APCO’s international advisory council.

This is despite APCO’s deliberately dishonest attempts to pose as a liberal/progressive organisation.

The disturbing convergence of overreaching, abusive special interests represented by APCO’s advisory council is in
fact a reoccurring theme across US lobbying firms, many of which are just as inclined to function as "handlers" of foreign political figures as they are hired lobbyists for them.

Thailand-based English newspaper The Nation in its article, "Govt to probe Thanathorn's hiring of US lobbyists," would report:

Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan said today (September 27) the government will probe the leader of Future Forward Party Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit for hiring American lobbyists under contract to allegedly discredit the Thai government through political activities.

Thanathorn and FFP's defence is that the hiring was "in line with US law," apparently disinterested in how his activities may have been "out of line with Thai law," Thanathorn being a member of parliament in Thailand, not the US.

Considering who APCO really represents and the immense conflict of interest that arises, a serious question of who Thanathorn really works for must be asked.

Of lesser importance, perhaps, is the questioning of Thanathorn's self-proclaimed "popularity." If his "popularity" is simply the result of a billionaire hiring lobbyists, yet another facet of Thanathorn's fraudulent political activity is revealed.

A History of US Lobbying for US-backed Opposition

Thanathorn's predecessor, billionaire and now fugitive Thaksin Shinawatra, is likewise buttressed by significant US lobbying. Since his ouster in 2006, Thaksin has received lobbying services from Edelman, Baker Botts, Barbour Griffith & Rogers, Kobre & Kim and Amsterdam & Peroff.

Through Edelman, Thaksin received backing from Kenneth Adelman who concurrently served on the Freedom House board of trustees whose reports predictably cast Thailand in a negative light for its military's removal of Thaksin from power. Freedom House's parent organisation, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), still to this day funds various anti-government fronts in Thailand.

Such fronts have since supplied Thanathorn's Future Forward Party with founding members including Nalutporn Krairiksh who still concurrently works at NED-funded media platform, Prachatai.

Thaksin's ties to George Bush Jr. and his eagerness to serve US interests during his time in power from 2001-2006 (e.g. sending Thai troops to Iraq, hosting CIA rendition facilities, attempts to pass a US-Thai FTA without parliamentary approval) makes it no surprise that Baker Botts would later lobby for Thaksin. Baker Botts was founded by James Baker, former Chief of Staff and Secretary of State under George Bush as well as Secretary of the Treasury under Ronald Reagan.

This massive lobbying manifested far beyond the token fees Thaksin was documented to have paid each firm. The entirety of US, European, Canadian and Australian media has been turned against Thailand ever since.

This media support includes concerted efforts to spin, defend or deny Thaksin's repeated attempts to destabilise and overthrow Thailand's current political order including through several episodes of violent riots, organised terrorism and one episode of armed insurrection and nationwide arson in 2010 leaving nearly 100 dead.

This support for Thaksin and his political proxies has seamlessly transitioned into support for Thanathorn and his political affiliates, many of which are drawn from Thaksin's fading political network.

Western embassies have also been directly involved in this support, with embassy representatives regularly accompanying Thanathorn, his party members and proxies posing as "activists" when summoned by police for their various criminal acts.

Revelations that Thanathorn is now retaining lobbying assistance from a similar circle of US special interests is yet further evidence that Thanathorn is merely a continuation of not only Thaksin's political ambitions, but the foreign interests that underpin and ultimately direct them.

Thanathorn's few concrete political stances are built firmly on a foundation for pro-Western policies and an eagerness to undo recent and significant ties built between Bangkok and Beijing.
This includes Thanathorn's ambitions to cancel an already-under-construction joint Thai-Chinese high speed rail system, his proposed cancellation of Thai-Chinese defence deals and his plans to cripple Thailand's sovereign institutions in favour of Western-sponsored institutions.

**Confronting Overt Foreign Meddling & Sedition**

Considering how the US has undeniably cultivated proxies in other nations for the explicit purpose of taking power after violence, terrorism and economic warfare removes a sovereign government from office, these most recent revelations of further ties between Thanathorn and these very same US interests involved in destabilising/destroying other nations cannot be taken lightly.

Thailand's current political order is, however, patient. It has weathered years of US efforts to destabilise the nation and assert US special interests over Thailand’s sovereignty. Thailand has done this without further provoking the US or needlessly escalating political tensions within the country.

In a global context, Thailand’s efforts to strengthen its economic and political sovereignty as well as its partnerships with other emerging global powers helps erode Washington's previously uncontested primacy over regions like Asia. In the long-term this will undermine the very source of power that cultivates subversive proxies like Thaksin and Thanathorn.

What has worked domestically and what will continue to work is further efforts to expose Thanathorn, Future Forward, the network of fronts posing as “nongovernmental organisations” supporting them and the danger they pose to Thailand, its political and economic stability today as well as its future tomorrow. Education is fundamental to teaching young Thais how geopolitics, economics and power really works versus the intentionally dishonest notions Thaksin, Thanathorn and Future Forward use to market themselves to the public.

Thailand may also consider investing in a network of alternative media platforms to combat the flood of disinformation and propaganda resulting from Thanathorn and Thaksin's ties to US lobbyists and their army of massive corporate media operations. Thailand may also consider following the example of nations like Russia, China and now even Vietnam who have or are developing alternatives to US-based social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and Google's YouTube.

The US has long used these social media platforms as a vector for political interference abroad. By replacing these networks with domestic alternatives, Thailand will not only reclaim its information space from malign foreign interests and enhance national security, it will also enhance the Thai economy by retaining profits that would otherwise be siphoned off to Silicon Valley.

Considering the spanning nature of US meddling worldwide, Thailand still faces a long and arduous battle to, at the very least, neutralise threats like Thanathorn and Future Forward, if not permanently uproot them. What is promising is that Thanathorn's political "rise" has been anemic relative to Thaksin's in 2001. The US and its ability to meddle worldwide is in decline and will only decline further in the future. It not a matter of if but when US meddling in nations like Thailand is no longer feasible. The only question is how much damage will be done until that day comes.

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