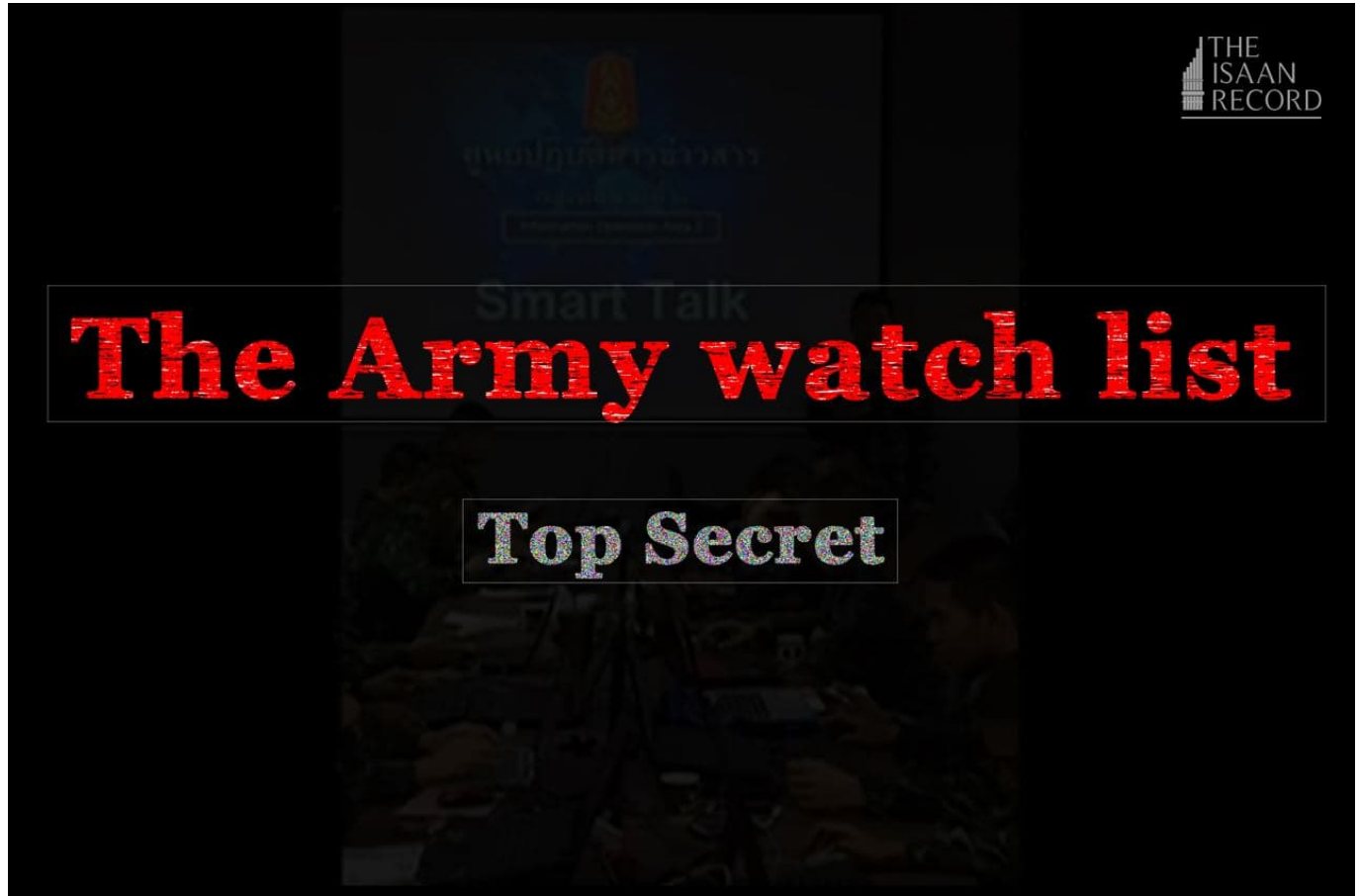


Critics call for end to govt's info warfare against citizens

written by กองบรรณาธิการ | September 5, 2021



The state-run “Information Operations” is an obsolete Cold War legacy that must be put to an end, a prominent writer and academic said Thursday (Sept. 2), after another alleged security watchlist targeting even media and minors emerged in a heated censure debate.

Story by the Isaan Record

Following the revelation by Move Forward MP Nattacha Boonchai-insawat during the no-confidence motion last week, The Isaan Record organized an online panel discussion that included some of those featured in a “watch list” of “threats to state security” - including a high school student. Panellists all concurred that being on the list was an alarming act of intimidation from the authorities who view them as public enemies.

The military’s Information Operations, commonly known among Thais as “IO,” has recently become a focus of public attention and has come under closer scrutiny from opposition MPs. One panellist, Sarinee Achavanuntakul, an independent scholar and social media personality, said that common people and social media companies have also become more aware of it, judging from extensive discussions about it by internet users.

In March, Sarinee went to the Administrative Court with famous TV host Winyu “John” Wongsurawat and iLaw manager Yingcheep Atchanont to file a complaint against the controversial military-led IO campaign. She was later informed by her legal team that the court agreed to hear their case.



Sarinee Achavanuntakul, an independent scholar

She also petitioned Facebook to investigate accounts and pages on its platform that might be involved with IO.

“Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, both widely popular in Thailand, do not tolerate such IO activities,” Sarinee said. “What IO does is considered inauthentic behavior. Facebook and Twitter have also issued a report about how they deal with accounts suspected to have a connection with IO.”

She added that she sent the information presented in opposition MP Nattacha’s parliamentary debate to Facebook, and the company told her it would be taken into account in its investigation. If there’s enough evidence linking any user account or page to such coordinated operations, they will be deleted not only from Facebook but also from Instagram.

“Our main objective in filing suit with the Administrative Court is to have the court issue an order to the army to stop these kinds of operations against the public,” she said.

The public is the enemy

Sarinee said the IO’s efforts show that the military views the public as its enemy, therefore justifying its decision to use public resources to go to war with the people.

Before social media, a similar campaign, called psychological warfare, was used during the Cold War to rally the public against the opposition who would be smeared by extensive propaganda attacks.

“It’s a warfare tactic generated by the mindset of the military. It’s already wrong just to think of the people as the enemy of the nation. The people can never be the enemy of the nation,” she said.

Sarinee said seeing a news outlet like The Isaan Record become a target makes it even more apparent that the masterminds behind the operation cannot not tell right from wrong, as one of media's fundamental roles is to be an agent of checks and balances to the government.

"I'm confident I didn't do anything wrong. The more we are afraid and remain silent, the more successful their operations become. We must realize that it's necessary for us to band together and say that this is wrong," she said.

"So, for what we can do, I'd like to invite the people who've become targets of IO to file a suit with the Administrative Court, or petition the National Human Rights Commission (NHCR)."



"It seems like I've become an enemy of the state; all I've done is ask for change in education." Kwankhao Tangprasert Photo by [Kwankhao Tangprasert](#)

17 years old boy on the watch list

High schooler Kwankhao Tangprasert of the Khon Kaen student association "KKC" said he was shocked to see his name on the list. He questioned why the government felt the need to target him and a few other of his friends and associates, as all of whom are still minors.

"Recently, the Internal Security Operations Command in Khon Kaen went to see two students at their homes, because one of the royals came to the province," the 17-year-old said. "Those two were also in that target list of IO. There have been attack comments on KKC's [Facebook] page as well. We think they came from the IO because they wrote things like *sam keep* or nation haters."

Sam geep, translated literally as "three hoofed," is a derogatory term used to call pro-democracy protesters who flash a three-finger salute from the Hunger Games as a gesture of resistance.

Kwankhao said he became aware of IO last year, but never thought it would have any impact on him beyond social media.

“Now I feel like I’m living in fear, and I’m anxious about what they might do with my name. At home, we started installing security cameras to see if there’s anyone following us,” he said.

“But it doesn’t make me want to stop advocating for causes I care about. Instead I will keep it going because I don’t know how many other minors are in the same situation as I am.”

As to how his life has changed after appearing on the list, Kwankhao said he worries more, such as feeling nervous about whether any university would accept him after graduating from high school.

“I’m more fearful, now that it seems like I’ve become an enemy of the state; all I’ve done is ask for change in education.”

Read Thai version [here](#)