

Headline: [Scenes of violence, bloodbath in and around Bangkok's Royal Hotel](#)

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Ben Davies was at Bangkok's Royal Hotel early yesterday morning when Thai troops opened fire on protesters, driving many into the hotel. Here is his eye-witness account.

SHORTLY after 11pm on Monday, hundreds of soldiers stationed behind barricades on Ratchadamnoen Avenue opened fire on a crowd estimated at 150,000, sending tracer bullets through the sky and protesters running for cover.

Scores of wounded protesters were carried into the lobby of the nearby Royal Hotel. A doctor in the Royal Hotel claimed that 10 people were brought in dead. There were reports of many others killed around Democracy Monument.

Protesters responded by driving a gas truck and two oil trucks into the barricade and setting them alight, sending a pillar of black smoke into the sky.

Shortly after midnight, following repeated outbursts of shooting, protesters went on the rampage, ransacking and torching the Public Relations Office of the government and several nearby buildings.

Between 3am and 5am yesterday, there was a lull as protesters, fearful of a bloodbath, left the area. Then shortly after 5am, troops opened fire in front of the Royal Hotel and scores of protesters ran into the hotel. In the hotel, guests hid under beds for fear of bullets coming through the windows.

Soldiers, brandishing machine guns, then entered the hotel, smashing down room doors to round up the frightened protesters who had taken refuge there.

The protesters, hands on their heads, were pushed downstairs. Some were repeatedly kicked or clubbed with the butts of machine guns. I saw one woman who had been heavily clubbed and was motionless carried upstairs again.

Outside the main lobby, male protesters were forced to strip to the waist and their hands were tied behind their backs. Some 50 to 60 troops with machine guns carried out an exhaustive search of the hotel to flush out protesters hiding in cupboards or in the toilets.

More than 700 protesters, many of them women, were then loaded into buses and taken away for interrogation. The soldiers

would not allow the handful of journalists and photographers who had been in the hotel and had seen what had happened to leave, but some managed to sneak out.

Dawn yesterday revealed on Bangkok's Ratchadamnoen Avenue a graveyard of burnt-out vehicles, scattered barbed wire fences and smouldering buildings, evidence of the worst outbreak of violence to have hit Thailand's capital in more than 15 years.

At 9am, fires were still burning opposite the Royal Hotel as soldiers armed with machine guns cordoned off the area. On the ground were blood stains and spent machine gun cartridges.