

THE
ROYAL
THAI
MASSACRES
*Bush Complicity in
Drug War Atrocities in Thailand*

Jail Break Press

Takes a Whack at UNHCR, Bangkok Post June 28, 2003) His police forces had bloody clashes with protesters in Hat Yai Sangkhla Province on December 20 2002 over the environmentally disastrous Thai/ Malaysian gas pipeline project leaving over 100 demonstrators injured. He's also encouraged a climate of fear among press and human rights workers who dare to speak out against his policies. Pradit Charoenthaitawee a Thai National Human Rights Commissioner received death threats after speaking out against Thaksin's drug war and was warned by Suranand Vejajiva a ruling party spokesman not to accuse Thaksin of being a dictator. In a March 2003 radio address Thaksin himself claimed Dr. Pradit's comments were "sickening" and that the human rights commissioner was a "nonpatriot" and "whistleblower." (AsiaPacific Human Rights Network, www.hrdc.net/sahrhc) Bad things happen to those who speak the truth.

Accomplice crime in itself and should be investigated by Congress. Attorney General Ashcroft could also do some digging himself to find out if any domestic laws might have been broken, but he might be too busy eagerly studying how the Thaksin regime got away with its drug war massacre to do much probing into White House complicity in the Thaksin atrocities.

Jail Break Press Mission Statement

Jailbreak Press is a group of anti-authoritarians and anarchists of color who believe that our ideas about authority, Justice, and resistance have traditions that are distinct enough from traditional Anarchist views that our words and voices need to be presented independently. For example, we are anti-state, but suspect that communities of color have different experiences with illegitimate authority and, because of that, have different perspectives about how state repression works and what we need to do to win our liberation.

Since the mid-nineties a new generation of anti-authoritarians and anarchists of color have been involved in various projects and networks of communication. But we haven't developed an analysis and critique of traditional Anarchism that goes beyond our desire to flee from meetings at which white males talk too much and we get treated like tokens or ghosts. There are many different anarchisms and people of color come from many different scenes and perspectives. Jailbreak Press seeks to put those different views out and spark dialogue and debate to see where we differ, where we agree, what unites us, and what defines us. We are always looking for more voices to get this party started.

Writings from anarchists and anti-authoritarians of color

According to Thailand's National Human Rights Commission

"On the first day of the "war" four suspects were shot dead, 264 were taken into custody and 727 met amphetamine tablets ... were seized ... On 4 March 2003, nearly a month after the anti-drug operations began; the death toll had exceeded 1,100. Among those killed were an eight-month pregnant woman, a nine-year-old boy and a 75-year-old woman all of whom had been unarmed." (ibid)

Reports of drug suspects who turned themselves into police who were shot in custody or, after going to police in an effort to clear their name from drug blacklists, were shot in the back after leaving police stations, were frequent. Attempts to launch an independent investigation into the 'extra judicial killings' have been thwarted by Thaksin government officials who refuse to provide documents, be interviewed, or testify about the campaign.

The chair of the Commission, Charan Dithapichai has condemned the intransigence and intimidation coming from the Thaksin government but his protests have fallen on deaf ears in Thailand and in the rest of the world.

A deafening silence

It's not as if the Bush Administration didn't know what was going down in Thailand. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights special rapporteur Asma Jahangir expressed "deep concern" about the "extra-judicial executions" in the spring of 2003. Before Prime Minister Thaksin came to the U.S. for the first time as a head of state in June 2003 Human Rights Watch sent the White House a letter detailing the drug war atrocities taking place. The June 911 letter mentioned the over "2000 killings" and quoted Thai government officials including Thaksin himself on the drug crackdown. "In this war drug dealers must die." (Letter to U.S. President George Bush: Press Thaksin on Extrajudicial Executions, Burma. Human Rights Watch June 9, 2003). It also quoted Interior Minister Wan Muhamad Nor Matha referring to the drug crackdown. "They will be put behind bars or even vanish without a trace ... who cares?" (ibid) The Human Rights Watch report politely mentioned that the U.S. reputation may be "sullied by association with a bloody and murderous campaign in the name of the war on drugs" due to our on going anti narcotics training and money to the Thai police. (ibid)

The Bush Administration chose to ignore these letters and other numerous press reports documenting the scope of the Thaksin slaughter in Thailand. In fact after the first phase of the crackdown ended in May Thaksin thought he'd take a vacation to Washington D.C. to meet with Bush and tell him about all the hard work he's been doing fighting drugs. His visit to the U.S. was upgraded from unofficial to "working" in early June by the State Department and the Thai delegation secured a meeting with the

Hauy Khieng Sang natives in the north western region of Thailand marched from their village to Phrao government district offices 300 miles north of Bangkok to perform a cursing ritual on the 70 National Thailand Police Officers who raided their village in May of 2003 and arrested four community leaders on drug trafficking charges. Once the 200 Hauy Khieng Sang inhabitants arrived at the Phrao offices they set up a bamboo table, killed a pig and a few chickens and smeared the blood on two straw effigies representing the drug police. "We want the people in Phrao district to witness our cursing ceremony against the police, who have labeled innocent people as guilty." (Thai Villagers Place Traditional Curse on Thai Police Over Drug War, Agence France Presse May 8, 2003)

The four village leaders are in the company of thousands of dead and imprisoned Thai Landers who've been accused of drug related crimes in a political climate where a government accusation is as good as a guilty verdict.

The village raid was part of a three month Thailand government crackdown on drugs that killed over 2,275 up to mid 2003 (the Thaksin Administration stopped publicizing the number of casualties after Human Rights groups started paying attention to the body count) and incarcerated over 6,700 suspects. (ibid.) The police campaign was largely "extra judicial" meaning cops shot suspects on sight, jailed them without trials and framed many innocents who were on a government "blacklist" of alleged drug traffickers, dealers, and users.

To some who had been following Thailand's human rights record the drug war killings came as some what of a surprise. Thailand had a history of post World War II dictatorships up through the 1990's. But after a deadly 1992 crackdown on pro democracy demonstrators in Bangkok, pressure from human rights advocates lead to the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission and the adoption of the Rome Treaty in October of 2001.

But closer observers were aware of serious and continuing abuses by national police forces in its drug war. According to one June 2002 Amnesty International brief.

Nothing in Thaksin first two years in office approached the level of barbarity of the drug police massacres.

president for June 12. At the meeting the two talked about the war on terrorism and Bush offered to upgrade the formal security relationship with Thailand to “non NATO ally” giving the regime more access to weaponry and capital. (Thaksin in U.S.. Thailand to Become a major non-NATO ally, The Nation (Thailand) June 12, 2003). According to Thai government spokesman Sita Divari Bush also praised Thaksin’s war on drugs claiming he was surprised at Thailand’s success in drug eradication. The spokesmen also noted with pride “the president did not voice his concern or complain about extra-judicial killings and silencing during the three month campaign” in a dig at local press for negative portrayals of the campaign. (ibid) A couple of weeks after the meeting the U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Darryl Johnson presided over a groundbreaking ceremony for the opening of the new International Law Enforcement Academy building in Bangkok to train a new generation of drug warriors for the Royal Thai National Police. “I would like to express my respect and appreciation for the outstanding resourcefulness and support of our Thai colleagues in this joint undertaking ... Together, working through and supporting institutions such as ILEA Bangkok, we can bring about real change and improve the lives of our fellow citizens.”

(Embassy of the United States of America, Press Release June 27, 2003.

Note: Apparently Ambassador Johnson recently chastised the Thaksin Administration for not raining in his drug police and holding them accountable for their murder of suspects. Too little too late.)

Currently estimates are that over 3,000 drug suspects have been killed in Thaksin’s campaign to make Thailand “drug free by December 2nd 2003”, the Birthday of King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Tens of millions of U.S. dollars continue to help fund and train Thai national police forces in their continued crackdown on drug users, traffickers, and dealers. The Bush Administration’s support for the Thaksin regime in the face of this brutal crackdown is an

“The military and army use torture and ill treatment in detention, shortly after arrest, during transport of detainees, and in military drug treatment camps. Poor Thai people, migrants, and members of ethnic groups are particularly vulnerable.” (Thailand: Widespread Use of Torture From Policing to Prisons. Amnesty International Press Release June 11, 2002)

Amnesty went on to describe two Akha tribesmen who were seized by government agents in Chiang Rai Province for opium detoxification. The men were dropped in a ground hole. “Soldiers then poured water, coal, and ashes” on them. Hours later they were questioned, and beaten. One man died from the beatings, the other was hospitalized with a ruptured lung. A year later no investigation had been done. A few years earlier in the Suphanburi Province police were implicated in the deaths of three drug suspects in their custody. No charges were filed by the Attorney General in the deaths. These two examples don’t exhaust the number of cases of drug war police crimes by any stretch.

Throughout the nineties and up to the present the Drug Enforcement Agency has been partners with their Thai counterparts in the drug war. This partnership developed out of U.S. concerns about heroine trafficking in the Golden Triangle in the 1970’s. Since then the U.S. has provided training, intelligence and money to the Thai military and police for drug war interdiction along their northern border with Burma and internal drug enforcement. As the U.S. interdiction budget grew in the late eighties and nineties so did the scope of drug operations in foreign countries. Thailand was no exception. In 1994 the DEA and Thai police started “Operation Tiger Trap” a joint anti narcotics investigation that brought down Yang WanHsuan, a major drug dealer in 2001. U.S. and Thailand government officials started the International Law Enforcement Academy in 1998 to “enhance the effectiveness of regional cooperation against transnational crime in Southeast Asia.” Today the official U.S./ Thailand Embassy web-site states “The U.S. contributed 4.5 million in 1998 and 1999 and now provides over 1.5 million annually in operating funds.” (U.S. Embassy, Bangkok Thailand Narcotics Assistance fact Sheet, www.usa.or.th/service/docs/report/narcotics.pdf)

All of the above was fairly uncontroversial before February of 2003. If the Bush Administration had pulled all of its material support from the Thai police and military after reports of drug blacklists, imprisonment without trials, and mass police killings of drug suspects, the Justice Department would still would be guilty of gross negligence in its failure to heed human rights reports of on going police abuse and demand real reforms before providing them with money and equipment to carry out their repression.

But not only did the Bush Administration continue to fund the Royal Thai police before, during and after its vicious drug war crackdown, it praised the campaign and proceeded to intensify relations with the Thaksin government as the atrocities were being committed by police. It’s fair to ask whether any U.S. resources were used to slaughter thousands of drug suspects and whether this slaughter took place with the aid and approval of the Bush Administration. According to the DEA’s own documents the U. S. has spent tens of millions of dollars training, equipping, and funding domestic Thailand drug enforcement. Its hard to imagine that the Thaksin administration would have had the „intelligence” or the resources to embark on such an ambitious or brutal crackdown without that support.

The Thaksin Record

Prime Minister Thaksin, one of the richest men in Thailand and a former police officer, was elected to office in 2001 as a benevolent populist, tough but fair. His dominance of Thai media made it hard for his opponents to counter this portrayal. But soon after his election he began to show his true colors. He immediately supported and cooperated with the brutal Burmese military government and ramped up the murderous repression of Burmese refugees and migrants along Thailand’s northern border (He’s quoted as saying “they must stay in their places and must be controlled”) (Yumadee Tunyasiri. P.M.