
Thailand

State Dept. tries to overturn election

by Linda de Hoyos

Relations between the United States and one of its staunchest allies, Thailand, have been thrown into a new crisis by the results of parliamentary elections held there March 22. The polls were the delivery of a promise for civilian elections made in February 1990, when leaders of the Thai military overthrew the government of Chatichai Choonhavan in a bloodless coup.

Although the military National Peacekeeping Council quickly installed a civilian government to administer the country, the coup caused the United States to sever all aid, including military funds, to Thailand until the country returned to a formal democracy. On March 23, the State Department noted its satisfaction with the elections and said it hoped to resume aid to Thailand quickly. "Thailand is a mutual security treaty partner with which we have a very long and friendly relationship," said State Department spokesman Margaret Tutwiler.

Within two days, the United States had seized upon a new issue. On March 25, Tutwiler said that the newly appointed Thai prime minister, Narong Wongwan, had been denied a visa in July 1991 because he was believed to be an "illicit trafficker in a controlled substance, or is or has been a known assister" in drug trafficking. The U.S. embassy and Drug Enforcement Agency offices in Thailand have refused to give details of the allegations.

Narong is the candidate of the Samakkhi Tham party, the party of the military, which won the largest number of seats in the elections. Also in the government coalition are the Chart Thai party of the ousted Chatchai Choonhavan; the Prachakorn Party; and the Social Action Party.

Thailand reacts

The U.S. charge created an uproar in Thailand. Narong challenged the U.S. government to prove its charges. "I completely deny this allegation," Narong said at a news conference. "I will continue to lead the process of forming the government." Tutwiler's statement, Narong said, represented "interference in Thai internal affairs. I and my family have done nothing involving drug trafficking." Narong cited statements by Deputy Prime Minister Pao Sarasin and leading anti-drug official Gen. Chavalit Yodmanee saying they had

no evidence of his involvement in drug trafficking.

A deputy leader of the Samakkhi Tham party was even more direct. "Thailand is not a slave of the United States," said MP Pinit-Chantaraviboon. "Now Thailand is being bullied by the United States. All the media and the Thai people should come out to defend their country."

The next day, 20 representatives of the National Labor Congress went to the U.S. embassy to protest Washington's provocations. The unionists, members of the only confederation not run by the AFL-CIO in Thailand, presented embassy officials with an open letter demanding that the U.S. government present hard evidence of the charge against Narong, and if true, then Thai authorities will arrest him. Otherwise, the United States should send the Thai people a letter of apology.

Secondly, the letter pointed out, the United States is responsible for cleaning up its own drug mafia. The presentation by union leader Chin Taplee and adviser Pakdee Tanapura was featured prominently in the news media.

The game

The Thai military, not Narong himself, is the target of the United States. The military is the primary institution in the country, and many of Thailand's politicians and business leaders are retired generals or officers. In the same way that the State Department has targeted the militaries of Ibero-America as an obstacle to the dissolution of the concept of national sovereignty, so the U.S. has been launching operations against the Thai military for the last few years. A lobby in the United States led by Sen. Daniel P. Moynihan (D-N.Y.) has been protesting alleged Thai links to the military junta, the Slorc, which runs Burma. In 1988, the *Washington Post* surfaced a scandal charging that the Thai military was siphoning off U.S. funds for the Cambodian resistance.

In addition, the United States had been quite comfortable with the current civilian regime of Prime Minister Anan Panyarachoon, who regularly meets with Henry Kissinger whenever he visits the United States. With Anan still at the helm, the Thai foreign ministry responded to the Tutwiler claim by saying that it was a "private matter" between Narong and Washington. When this statement created a national scandal, Anan adjusted his administration's position, saying, "I believe Narong is innocent, but it is a question of interpretation of certain documents. The U.S. allegations are no affront to Thai sovereignty." He said that the U.S. government was under no obligation to hand over evidence to Thailand.

Under Anan's tenure, Thailand has been flooded with non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—most of them headquartered outside the country—whose chief organizing obsessions are "corruption" and "the environment." The Anan government dished out 6 billion Thai baht to the NGOs to create PollWatch, a "clean election committee." Despite their efforts and the attempts to forge an anti-military coalition, the military has been able to form a government. The Tutwiler charges were the response to the military's success.