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## Profile: Kriangsak Chamanon

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# How State Department targeted Thai patriot

by Linda de Hoyos

The appeals court in Bangkok on Feb. 17 finally granted bail to Gen. Kriangsak Chamanon and four other generals on trial on conspiracy charges for the Sept. 9 aborted coup in Thailand. The ruling from the appeals court overturned previous refusals by the courts, under pressure from the government of Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond, to maintain Kriangsak and his high-ranking co-defendants in jail during the trial proceedings.

The appeals court, however, stipulated, that the five have their passports rescinded to ensure their stay in the country; that they not exercise their political influences and be watched 24 hours a day by police from special branch; and they not do anything that might influence the court's decision on the coup.

The release of the five came after a building campaign of pressure against the jailing of Kriangsak, an unprecedented action in itself. In Thailand's coup-fraught postwar history, it is customary for the military to handle discipline for suspected failed coup plotters. In this case, the Kriangsak trial was taken into a civilian court and Kriangsak was summarily jailed, along with four other senior active officers and retired generals.

*EIR* reported, based on sources in Thailand and Washington, that Kriangsak's incarceration was a result of pressure from Henry Kissinger, who reportedly told Prime Minister Prem in New York at the end of September that Kriangsak "is dangerous and should be eliminated." The *EIR* revelations caused a storm in Thailand, and during a November stopover in Bangkok, Kissinger was hounded by the press corps on the issue.

Although Kriangsak himself in October gave credence to the story by referring to it in an interview with *Asia Week*, he has since publicly denied both the *EIR* and *Asia Week* stories. In January, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* also published a report that General Kriangsak was seeking international support for his release, especially from Japan. The General also denied this story.

What is clear, however, is that the retention of Kriangsak, a former prime minister and respected international statesman, became a more untenable proposition. On Feb. 5, a group of parliamentarians from the National Democracy Party, the party Kriangsak founded, asked the court to release him, arguing that article 121 of the Thai constitution states

that parliamentarians cannot be held for prosecution when parliament is in session. Requests by police and other investigative officials to hold MPs in other cases, have always been turned down by the courts.

The prime minister from 1978 to 1980, Kriangsak found himself a target of the same Kissinger-tutored State Department operatives that destabilized the Philippines.

He was prime minister of Thailand, one of the most important logistical bases for the Vietnam War, during the period that Vietnam invaded Cambodia. Throughout his two-years in office, he followed a different foreign policy for ASEAN than that of the Carter administration. In keeping with the policy of strategic withdrawal from the Pacific, under cover of Kissinger's China Card, the United States refused to honor its peace agreements with Vietnam, denying the country development aid and diplomatic relations. The objective was to force conditions of permanent instability in the region, a project made easy by the wild provocations of the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge. In February 1979, the world was brought to the brink of war with Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and China's attempt "to teach Vietnam a lesson."

Kriangsak did not follow the Carter "line." Instead, stating that Thailand would seek its own independent foreign policy, he worked with Foreign Minister Upadit Pachariyangkul to build bridges to the Indochinese countries, particularly Vietnam and Laos. This remained his foreign policy throughout his tenure as chairman of the parliamentary foreign relations committee, and in 1983, Kriangsak headed a parliamentary delegation to Vietnam. The crux of the policy is that Thailand has no real quarrel with its quarreling neighbors, including Vietnam, and that the polarization of the region, encouraged by superpower geopolitical strategies, is detrimental to all the Southeast Asian countries.

Kriangsak also came into office with a list of 14 industrial and infrastructural development projects, the disapproval of the World Bank. A World Bank mission in Thailand in July/August of 1979 demanded that the projects be scrapped, along with low import tariffs on capital goods, because such a policy was capital- and not labor-intensive. The World Bank had only a few months to wait before Prem, defense minister under Kriangsak, had taken over, bringing into the government a whole array of technocrats centered in the National Economic and Social Development Board.

Morton Abramowitz, ambassador to Thailand during Kriangsak's prime ministership, played a key role in Kriangsak's ouster. Only two weeks before Kriangsak lost a vote of confidence in the parliament, he was visited by Abramowitz, Carter Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, and Admiral Robert Long. Abramowitz, now head of Research and Planning at the State Department, is a member of the "208 Committee" that just accomplished the ouster of President Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines and is now working on Panama, Mexico, South Korea, and Indonesia.