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Illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar are looked after by Thai authorities after being transported off Thai soil. Thailand's army is accused of detaining up to 1,000 immigrants from Myanmar late last year and abandoning them at sea with no food or water.

## Light shed on U.S. complicity in Colombian human rights violations

By John Douglas  
STAFF WRITER

United States government documents show that the U.S. government had knowledge of and remained complicit with the Colombian government's colluding with paramilitary organizations to murder civilians and carry out extra-judicial murders in the early 1990s.

Colombian history has been plagued by complicated politics. At the time, right-wing paramilitary and left-wing guerilla groups like Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) were embroiled in a violent conflict.

U.S. foreign policy towards the Colombian government in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century had been premised on the eradication of drug trafficking domestically and internationally with the War on Drugs. Much of this aid came through military support.

Both Colombia and the United States have named FARC on their list of terrorist organizations.

The Colombian and US governments have blamed drug trafficking on FARC, a proclaimed Marxist-Leninist guerilla organization.

While it is known that FARC has been involved with drug trafficking, it has not been proven that they control the drug trafficking in Colombia.

The Colombian government was the most financially supported government by the United States in the western hemisphere during the early 1990s, until the Clinton administration instituted sanctions against Colombia for violations of human rights.

"This is just another example of the United States dabbling in others' affairs especially when success would mean something different than a capitalist-driven government," said Alyzza Callahan, a peace and conflict studies major.

In 1990, one documented correspondence between the former U.S. ambassador to Colombia, under George H. W. Bush, and the Office of the Secretary of State describes human rights violations carried out by the Colombian military and paramilitary.

"Major Alirio Antonio Urena, the military man who faces charges, personally directed the torture of 11 detainees and their subsequent execution. The killings were carried out by cutting off the limbs and heads of the still-living victims with a chain saw ... many of the victims were apparently suspected of supporting left-wing guerilla groups operating in the area," said the documents.

The CIA released an internal document from 1994 that describes the human rights violations carried out by the Colombian government.

"Colombian security forces continue to employ death squad tactics in their counter-insurgency campaign," said the documents. "The military has a history of assassinating left-wing civilians in guerilla areas, cooperating with narcotics-related paramilitary groups in attacks against suspected guerilla sympathizers, and killing captured combatants."

That same file goes on to say, "Naval intelligence officers allegedly paid to have various union and political leaders, as well as common peasants, murdered."

Another unclassified document written by Myles Frechette, the U.S. ambassador to Colombia in 1994 describes a culture of committing human rights abuses.

"'Body count' mentalities persist, especially among Colombian army officers. Field commanders who cannot show track records of aggressive anti-guerilla activity (wherein the majority of the military's human rights abuses occur) disadvantage themselves at promotion time," the document said.

Robert Duncan, assistant professor of political science, spoke about the U.S. government's prior use of the "body count" mentality.

"The last time the United States utilized the body count method was during Vietnam," said Duncan. "It is a preposterous way of measuring progress."

All primary documents can be found at George Washington University's National Security Archive Web site.

## Thailand accused of shipping Rohingya migrants out to sea

By Thomas Wotherspoon  
STAFF WRITER

Amidst social and economic instability, Thailand is accused of abusing immigrants from Myanmar, also known as Burma.

Thailand's military allegedly towed an estimated 1,000 Rohingya migrants in cramped boats out to sea and abandoning them, with about 550 thought to have drowned.

The Rohingya people are a Muslim ethnic group denied citizenship in their native Burma. Their migration to Thailand is based on the hope of finding asylum in a country known for its open immigration policies.

Thailand has denied the accusations thus far, but has handed responsibility for incoming Rohingya immigrants to the military to police, in an attempt to comply with recent concern from the U.N.

"The militaries are very independent in Southeast Asia," said Associate Professor of Political Science George Guo. "Thailand struggles with political unrest and is vulnerable to ethnic conflicts which they want to avoid."

The Burmese government has gone so far as to claim that the Rohingya are not coming from Burma because they are, in fact, not citizens.

The Rohingya who have reached Thailand thus far have had elements of scarring and bruising that might stem from abuse suffered in Burma. Some argue that the Rohingya deserve status as refugees, which neither Burma nor Thailand is willing to allow.

"Political and economic night-

mares since 1990 inside Myanmar (called Burma by those who oppose the current government) have forced many Burmese refugees into Thailand," said Associate Professor of Religion Eric Mortensen. "But in recent years, under the government of Thaksin (Shinawatra) and his problematic successors, many refugees face vibrant persecution and harassment."

Thaksin, the former prime minister of Thailand, was ousted from office in 2006 to the dismay of the civilian population. On Jan. 31, protestors took to the streets to renew the dialogue concerning the military coup that took Thaksin from office and to demand the resignation of current Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva.

As the political turmoil in Thailand intensifies, the question of how to treat Rohingya migrants becomes more pertinent.

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Mortensen considers it unlikely that Thailand will provide asylum to the Rohingya that continue to arrive, despite wide coverage and deepening international concern.

"Both Thailand and Burma are extremely ethnically diverse, and the ethnic and religious politics of the region are incredibly complex," said Mortenson. "The treatment of the Rohingya is not simply an issue

explicable via attention to national politics."

The question remains throughout this ordeal of whether this calamitous treatment of Rohingya immigrants is going to be solved. Cloud Gamble, a junior who studied abroad in Thailand last fall, witnessed the treatment of Burmese people while abroad.

"The treatment of the Burmese in Thailand is so much different than anything that I've ever seen," said Gamble. "There is almost no interaction between the Thai and Burmese, even in areas bordering Burma."

Despite the Thai government's claim that it has begun investigating the specifics of this incident, some remain skeptical.

"The Thai military is supposedly going to investigate this incident but they're the ones responsible for it. So, I'm not sure we're going

to ever find out what exactly happened," said Gamble.

As more Rohingya refugees continue to surface around the Andaman Sea, the stories of those who survive shed more light on the situation.

For this ethnic minority, a large hope rests upon the intervention of the U.N. and its success in demanding their safety.