

United States had shot itself in the foot with the aid boycott, because, unlike the current military leadership, none of the up-and-coming generals had received training in the United States, and therefore they were largely unknown to the U.S. diplomatic corps. Haseman said that, contrary to Western press accounts of the situation in Indonesia, the current military leadership is showing considerable responsibility and professionalism, and that this is the primary institution that can hold the nation together through the current crisis. Asked by his contacts in Indonesia if the Bush Administration would take a more supportive posture toward their country, Haseman said that there was virtually no chance. In fact, the Bush Administration publicly asserted in February that it was looking to Australia to take the point in regard to the Indonesian crisis.

Further, the Bush Administration, while rushing headlong into provoking war in the Middle East and the Balkans, is also precipitating a confrontation with China and chaos in Indonesia. The new U.S. unilateral belligerence has led even America's closest allies in Europe to publicly warn of the danger of the Bush Administration's recklessness.

In keeping with the new military doctrine being formulated at the White House, Gen. Charles Robertson, Chief of the U.S. Mobility Command, called the situation in Indonesia a "new challenge," and recommended an expanded U.S. military presence in Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, and the Indian Ocean. He also announced that a planned security summit between the United States and Australia has been moved up to late July or early August. At the same time, Singapore and Australia held a Joint Ministerial Meeting, which concluded that Indonesia is their number-one concern for the near term. Singapore Foreign Affairs Minister Professor Jayakumar also reiterated Singapore's earlier offer to the United States to use Singapore as a military base.

The emerging nationalist leaders in Indonesia will require their own international connections to counter this IMF/military campaign against their sovereignty and development. The newly established Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which embraces China, Russia, and four Central Asian nations, is already discussing the possibilities of alliances with the nations of South, Southeast, and East Asia, uniting much of the Eurasian continent for both military and economic development and cooperation. Thai Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh was in China in late June, to discuss precisely that. At the same time, the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, together with China, Japan, and South Korea (ASEAN-Plus-3), are now collaborating in defending their currencies against speculative attacks, and are discussing the formation of an Asian Monetary Fund, independent of the IMF, to finance real development.

While the internal crisis rages within Indonesia, its national leaders are also celebrating the 100th birthday of their great founding father, Sukarno, who was committed to internationalism as a necessary part of true sovereignty—a lesson more true today than ever before.

Thailand Works for Development Across Asia

by Ron Castonguay

Thailand's Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra recently made diplomatic visits to neighboring Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, succeeding in his intent to reduce tensions, and increasing economic cooperation among these nations of continental Southeast Asia. This "engagement" policy with nations often attacked abroad as "human rights violators," represents a clear recognition that only economic development and collaboration can create the conditions required for advances in social justice. Thaksin combined mutually beneficial economic incentives with straightforward, but respectful, diplomatic discussion to accomplish his mission.

Thaksin's visits had a common theme, exemplified by plans for the east-west, cross-Southeast Asia highway, which will run from Da Nang, Vietnam, through Laos and Thailand, to Myanmar's capital, Yangon. His first stop, in Laos, also resulted in agreements on tariff reductions for 40 Laotian products, and he discussed plans for the anti-drug summit of the "Golden Triangle" nations to be hosted soon by China in Kunming. The Thai Prime Minister, however, was not able to satisfy the request for Thailand to purchase more power from a new hydroelectric plant in Laos; Thai electric power consumption is still below the levels of the pre-1997 "boom" period.

A similar but wider range of agreements was made with Cambodia, including tariff reductions on 23 products, common work on border infrastructure, and Thai assistance to remove landmines on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border. Important progress was made in resolving the long-simmering disputes about territorial claims between Cambodia and Thailand in the Gulf of Thailand. Resolution of these claims is expected to lead immediately to cooperative joint exploitation of these waters, both in terms of fisheries and underwater hydrocarbon deposits. Inland, progress was achieved in firming up the development plans for the Mekong Summit (Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam, later China), to improve tourism, and more importantly, infrastructure, on this vast river basin.

Improving Ties With Myanmar

Relations with Thailand's western neighbor, Myanmar, have been extremely strained. Since the administration of Premier Chuan Leekpai, who never deigned, on human rights grounds, to visit Myanmar, Thai-Myanmar relations have

been on a downward course, with nasty exchanges of words and bullets.

Myanmar and Thailand have had disagreements over drug trafficking, border issues, and the Chuan government's support for UN and Western attacks on Myanmar's labor policies. A series of border clashes, mostly along the northern part of the 1,500 mile Thai-Myanmar border, followed. Some clashes were serious enough to cause deaths on both sides.

Certain factions in both countries encouraged the clashes. Thailand's Third Army (North) commander Lt. Gen. Wattanachai Chaimuanwong's provocative words and actions against Myanmar were played up heavily in the anti-Myanmar Thai press. In Myanmar, the situation was far more confused, because the regions in question are not directly controlled by Yangon, but by various ethnic narco-armies, of which the United Wa State Army (UWSA), a main producer of methamphetamines in the Golden Triangle, is the most noteworthy. The Myanmar military junta is accused by its detractors of providing protection for the UWSA.

Soon after taking office, Thai Defense Minister and Deputy Premier Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, who, in a previous incarnation as Prime Minister, was the last to visit Myanmar, attempted to stop the clashes and curtail General Wattanachai's actions and public denunciations against the Myanmar government and military. This took some time, and increasingly strong language from Chavalit, but by mid-May, Wattanachai was publicly indicating regret, and soon thereafter his diatribes disappeared from the press altogether. Simultaneously, Prime Minister Thaksin was cooling down the Thai press and smoothing relations with Myanmar. The process was facilitated by the successful conclusion of Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's mid-May trip to Thailand.

Thus, when Thaksin arrived in Yangon, he received red-carpet treatment, with a 19-gun salute as well. Whereas, months earlier, Thai-Myanmar relations were nearly in a state of undeclared war, Thaksin could, at his departure, pledge: "Not a single gunshot [will] be exchanged between Thai and Burmese forces along the border during [my] tenure as leader"—and be believable. Numerous confidence-building measures were announced during the trip, including the establishment of a Bangkok-Yangon telephone "hot line," the opening of a border crossing from the Myanmar side, and increased anti-drug cooperation, including that envisioned in the Kunming meeting. Yangon tendered an invitation for the Thai King and Queen to visit, an important gesture, because several articles in the Myanmar *New Light* had been taken by Thailand as slandering the 19th-Century Thai Kings Rama IV and Rama V, and thus Thai royalty in general.

Numerous economic measures were announced. As with Laos and Cambodia, the measures focussed on increasing trade by lowering tariffs on Myanmar's products, and building cross-border infrastructure, in this case a road between Tavoy, Myanmar and Kanchanaburi, Thailand, providing an outlet for central Thailand to the Andaman Sea.

Thailand and the Shanghai Process

While Thaksin was completing his trip, Defense Minister Chavalit, accompanied by his chief adviser, Gen. Pat Akkanibut, and several leading businessmen, travelled to China. They were hosted by the Chinese military, but their itinerary included meetings with President Jiang Zemin and Prime Minister Zhu Rongji.

Military and security topics were the main points of discussion, including the U.S. spy plane incident, regional military cooperation, and Bush's National Missile Defense plan. Arrangements were worked on for the repair and maintenance of older Chinese-built weapons in the Thai arsenal. There were no immediate deals for Thai military purchases from China, but Chavalit made a strong statement to the effect that other factors, i.e., economic and political cooperation, were more important than military factors alone in deciding on military purchases.

Before starting his trip, according to the *Bangkok Post*, "General Chavalit said he particularly wanted to speak to the Chinese defense minister about the possibility the new regional grouping [the Shanghai Cooperative Organization] could eventually expand to become a new security bloc." This expanding grouping, including China, Russia, and four of the Central Asia Islamic nations (and, perhaps, later, India), are central to the development of the Eurasian Land-Bridge.

The Chinese thanked Thailand for its stance on such issues as Taiwan and the Falungong cult, congratulated it on its new-found good relations with Myanmar, and, as a parting gesture, promised to send two pandas to Thailand.

Prime Minister Thaksin's diplomatic successes have played well in Thailand, despite the warnings and criticism he received from the press and non-governmental organizations, especially around the Myanmar trip. The Thai population seems pleased to have a government that is trying to actually do something, and is meeting with success.

This is much needed, since the Thai economy is in decline, largely because of the collapse of exports to the United States, Japan, and other advanced sector economies. The successful diplomacy also bolsters Thaksin's chance of obtaining a favorable outcome in his ongoing trial for concealing assets during his short tenure as a junior minister in a previous administration. If convicted, and depending on how the sentence is interpreted, he could be barred from participating in politics for five years. No matter the outcome of the trial (due to end in early July), Thaksin has begun to put together a government that has a purpose, and the beginnings of some momentum in the right direction.

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