

U.S.-Southeast Asia Relations:
**Southeast Asia Solidifies Antiterrorism Support,
Lobbies For Postwar Iraq Reconstruction**

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The past quarter has witnessed growing antiterrorist cooperation by the core ASEAN states (Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand) with the United States to apprehend the Bali bombers and others bent on attacking Western interests. Although Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand were reticent about supporting the U.S. war in Iraq because of concern about the political backlash from their own Muslim populations, these states as well as Singapore and the Philippines – openly enthusiastic about Washington’s quick Iraq victory – are looking beyond the war to economic reconstruction opportunities there. American plans to reduce and reposition forces in the Pacific may have a Philippine component if Manila agrees to prepositioning military supplies there. The United States also expressed concern over Indonesia’s military assault on Aceh province, Cambodian violence against Thai residents, and Burma’s crackdown on the pro-democracy opposition.

Antiterrorist Cooperation in the Philippines

Controversy surrounds the joint Philippine-U.S. *Balikatan 03* military exercises undertaken this year in Luzon and still in the planning stages for Mindanao. While the Luzon exercises near the former Clark Air Base went off smoothly, plans for the southern Philippines have yet to be implemented. The United States seemed to want to alter the “terms of reference” for the exercise to a “joint operation” that would take place in the Sulu archipelago, home to the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group against which last year’s *Balikatan 02* had also been directed. The problem is that a “joint operation” would seem to allow U.S. forces a combat role that they did not have in 2002 and which would also violate the Philippine constitution’s prohibition against foreign combat operations on Philippine territory. In late April, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo settled the issue by insisting that U.S. forces in the Sulu islands would once again engage exclusively in training Philippine forces and in civic action projects that had been very well received by the local population last year in Basilan.

Adding to Philippine-U.S. controversy was an early May statement by U.S. Ambassador Francis Ricciardone that the United States was considering classifying the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) a terrorist group if it continues violent acts against civilians in the south. At the same time, the U.S. ambassador held out the prospect of economic aid to MILF-dominated areas if the MILF “chooses to have peace in these areas ...” A number of Philippine senators objected to the ambassador’s statement, noting that it could pave the way for “full-scale U.S. involvement” in the government’s war against the MILF. Nevertheless, the Arroyo government is laying the groundwork for a terrorist declaration against the MILF by revealing documents captured from the rebels’ Buliok complex in February 2003 that belied the group’s claim that it had no links with Abu Sayyaf, Jemaah Islamiyah, or al-Qaeda. Recovered documents, according to the Philippine government, also confirmed plans to conduct bombing operations throughout the south. The MILF responded to these revelations by warning the United States not to assist Philippine troops in their fight against the insurgents. So long as U.S. forces refrained from combat, the MILF would cause them no harm. Given the uncertainty surrounding the Philippine government-MILF relationship, *Balikatan 03* has been postponed until the end of this year.

What most worries U.S. officials is that camps in MILF-controlled parts of the southern Philippines provide explosives training to Jemaah Islamiyah recruits from throughout Southeast Asia. According to Philippine intelligence, instructors are Indonesians and Arabs as well as Filipinos.

The most important U.S. reward for the Arroyo government’s staunch support in the U.S. war on terrorism and its war in Iraq was a substantial new military and economic aid program announced during the Philippine president’s May 19 meeting with President Bush in the White House. The U.S. will provide \$100 million in new military assistance and has designated the Philippines a “major non-NATO ally,” the first Asian developing state to attain that status. The designation puts the Philippines in the same category as Australia, Egypt, and Israel with respect to U.S. military ties and provides greater access to American defense equipment – currently in desperately short supply in the Philippines.

In recognition of ongoing negotiations between Manila and the MILF, despite the latter’s apparent attacks against civilian infrastructure in the south, the Bush administration authorized \$30 million in development assistance and support to the peace process with the MILF in Mindanao. While development assistance was the “carrot” in the U.S. aid package, there was also a substantial “stick” for the Philippine Armed Forces in a \$30 million grant for counterterrorism training and 30 new military helicopters to be added to the 15 currently operational. The entire Philippine military wish list was not met, however, for no C-130 transport aircraft were included, though only two are currently flying. The armed forces also need fast patrol boats to guard the country’s maritime borders and improved communications.

On a more somber note, corruption in the Philippine armed forces was alleged by American missionary Gracia Burnham, who was rescued after more than a year in Abu Sayyaf captivity during a shootout between Philippine troops and the kidnappers. Mrs.

Burnham was wounded and her husband killed along with a Filipina nurse in the firefight. Although ransom had been paid for the Burnhams, they were not released, according to Mrs. Burnham, because a Philippine general demanded a 50 percent cut. These allegations appear in a new book by Burnham titled, "My Enemies." The original rationale for U.S. military training of Philippine forces in Basilan last year was to aid in the Burnhams' rescue. In response, the Philippine government has inaugurated a formal investigation of Burnham's allegations with the assistance of U.S. authorities, though no admission of corruption has occurred.

Philippine and Thailand Eager for Iraq Reconstruction Contracts

Unsurprisingly, the Philippines expects to reap some Iraq reconstruction benefits from its early, strong endorsement of the U.S. war to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Less predictable, however, is Thailand's bid for Iraq reconstruction given Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's refusal to support publicly the U.S. Iraq intervention. Philippine President Arroyo has offered to send a 500-person team of military and police peacekeepers, medical workers, and engineers. Foreign Secretary Blase Ople displayed grander ambitions by stating that the Philippines hoped for 100,000 jobs in Iraq's reconstruction. Manila expects that the Philippine humanitarian contingent will be funded by the United States.

Filipino companies and the government have been lobbying the lead U.S. corporation for Iraq reconstruction, Bechtel, which may ultimately be responsible for a U.S. AID contract approaching \$20 billion. Bechtel anticipates subcontracting 75 percent of the reconstruction work, and Filipino representatives are emphasizing that they have a well-educated, low cost English-speaking labor force that has worked around the world with U.S. companies.

Thailand has also been invited to U.S. and British reconstruction briefings. Companies in the food, construction, furniture, and architecture industries are particularly interested. A Thai trade official stated that his country's ability to supply a variety of construction and electrical materials would be quite competitive. Thailand is setting up a task force in the United States and Kuwait to seek reconstruction opportunities.

Singapore's reward for supporting the U.S. war in Iraq is in the realm of military equipment and a new free trade agreement. The latter was initialed during Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's early May visit to Washington. The military reward is permission for the island republic to arm its home-based F-16s with radar-guided medium-range AMRAAM missiles, the first such to be deployed in the region. Although Malaysia and Thailand also have AMRAAMs in their inventories, they are kept in storage in the United States under U.S. guidelines. Malaysia criticized the U.S. Iraq intervention, while Thailand was neutral. By contrast, Singapore made available KC-135 tankers to refuel American aircraft flying from the U.S. mainland to a staging base in Diego Garcia.

Thailand: Military Exercises and the War on Terror and Crime

This year's *Cobra Gold* joint exercise (May 16-29), which included 7,600 U.S. and 500 Thai soldiers, as well as a smaller number from Singapore for the second time, was also attended by observers from 11 states, among them China and Vietnam. All participants and observers were screened for SARS on arrival. For the second year in a row, *Cobra Gold-2003* included an antiterrorist component. The tripartite exercise was followed a month later by a Thai-U.S. naval maneuver – the annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness Training (CARAT) – which involved 1,500 U.S. sailors and marines and 1,700 Thais. The annual bilateral U.S. CARAT exercises are also held with Brunei, Singapore, and Malaysia. Training covers maneuvering, communications, gunnery, diving and salvage, and amphibious operations.

There is also speculation that the United States has approached Thailand about the possibility of locating a “forward positioning” site in the country as part of a general repositioning plan for U.S. forces in the Pacific. The site would be primarily for logistics where equipment would be stored for regional operations. Currently, in Southeast Asia, only the Philippines has provided this type of facility. As yet, no official U.S. request has been made to Thailand.

Tension in U.S.-Thai relations also surfaced this past quarter as Washington expressed “serious concern” over the Thaksin government’s brutal crackdown on drug dealers throughout the country. Over 2,000 people were killed (allegedly by police) between February and April in what appear to have been summary executions. The United States has provided \$3 million to aid Thailand in its fight against drug trafficking. However, U.S. law provides that assistance be suspended if a country is found to be systematically violating human rights. Both international and local human rights NGOs have accused the Thai government of sanctioning the extrajudicial killings.

Thailand appears to have become more deeply involved in the U.S. war on terror, though Prime Minister Thaksin prefers to maintain a low profile on this issue. According to U.S. officials cited in *The New York Times* on June 8, Thaksin has allowed the CIA to interrogate suspected members of al-Qaeda in secure locations, and Thailand has let the U.S. Air Force use Thai bases for both its Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Utapao Air Base served as a transit point for both engagements.

Because Thailand has been a meeting place for Southeast Asian terrorists and an easy place to acquire false documents, the United States, Australia, and several other countries have placed law enforcement agents at Bangkok’s international airport looking for people traveling under false documents. Over 200 false passports are seized each week. In a mid-June visit to Washington, the Thai prime minister for the first time publicly declared that Thailand is an ally in the worldwide campaign against terror.

The focus of Thai antiterrorist attention is the south where Muslims are in the majority and have close relations with co-religionists in northern Malaysia. In June, two Thai Muslims were arrested in a province bordering Malaysia, who allegedly admitted

planning attacks on embassies in Bangkok, including that of the United States. After a long period of denial, the Thai government now acknowledges the presence of Jemaah Islamiyah members in its territory. Defense Minister Thanarak Isarangura, accompanying the prime minister to Washington in mid-June, stated that Thailand is ready to cooperate with the U.S. antiterror campaign. Moreover, Malaysia and Singapore have joined Thailand in an operation to apprehend some 29 members of Jemaah Islamiyah believed to be posing as Islamic religious teachers in the southern Thai border provinces. However, many Thai Muslims in the south believe the crackdown is a frameup designed to curry favor with the United States.

ASEAN and ARF Grapple with Terrorism and other Concerns

From June 16-19, the ASEAN foreign ministers, their dialogue partners, and members of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) met in Phnom Penh, focusing on regional progress with respect to the war on terrorism. Secretary of State Colin Powell represented the United States. The ASEAN foreign ministers concluded their discussions with a commitment to greater cooperation among law enforcement agencies to implement regional agreements already reached on the war on terrorism. ASEAN ministers also revealed that they and the United States would soon endorse a five-point counterterrorist plan that could involve U.S. assistance in safeguarding shipping in the Malacca Strait, including the sharing of intelligence information. Along the same lines, the ministers welcomed the establishment of a Southeast Asia Regional Center for Counter-Terrorism in Kuala Lumpur. The Center will be funded by the United States but administered entirely by Southeast Asian states.

Both ASEAN and the ARF expressed concern over the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi by Burmese authorities and urged her immediate release. On North Korea, the ARF supported the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and prodded North Korea to resume cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency and reverse its decision to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The ARF also adopted a statement on “Cooperation Against Piracy and Other Threats to Maritime Security” that linked piracy to transnational organized crime. In addition to encouraging anti-piracy exercises among the littoral states of East Asia, the statement endorsed the International Maritime Bureau proposals that prescribe traffic lanes for large supertankers to be escorted by coast guard or navy vessels upon the agreement of all ARF members.

Indonesia: Human Rights, Antiterrorism, Aceh Dominate Agenda

This past quarter U.S.-Indonesian relations displayed both cooperation and consternation. After considerable political pressure from Washington and Canberra, a military court convicted seven members of Indonesia’s elite Special Forces for the torture and murder of Theys Eluay, the leader of a non-violent campaign for independence for Irian Jaya (Papua). The convictions were a rare instance of soldiers being held accountable for human rights abuses, but the maximum sentence of only 3.5 years

brought immediate criticism from human rights groups. A combination of praise and frustration can also be found in Secretary Powell's positive assessment of Indonesia's moves against terrorism represented in the trial of alleged Jemaah Islamiyah leader Abu Bakar Bashir. In recognition of Indonesia's crackdown on Jemaah Islamiyah and President Megawati Sukarnoputri's moderate stance on the U.S. war in Iraq, the United States permitted families of American diplomats to return to the country. While the Indonesian president and foreign minister condemned the U.S. invasion of Iraq, they declared that the American action was not a war on Islam.

The Bush administration has been trying to find ways to restore financial aid to the Indonesian military which lost that assistance in the 1990s because of human rights abuses in East Timor. While Congress had approved a small training program via the U.S. International Military and Education Training Program (IMET), it has been suspended until the FBI determines whether the Indonesian military was involved in an attack last August that killed two Americans and an Indonesian in Papua province. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz stated in late May that the future of military relations between the two countries depended on a satisfactory investigation of and resolution to the Freeport killings. Although FBI officials have visited Papua on several occasions, they have been frustrated by lack of cooperation from the Indonesian authorities, suggesting a coverup of the military's culpability.

Adding to these difficulties has been the Indonesian army's offensive into the rebellious northern Sumatra province of Aceh, launched in mid-May. Approximately 40,000 soldiers have deployed in the province to confront an estimated 3,000 guerrillas who have been fighting sporadically for independence for nearly 30 years. Rich in minerals and natural gas, one of the major grievances of the rebels is what they regard as an unfair distribution of the province's wealth by the central government.

Indonesian officials have used the U.S. invasion of Iraq and its general war on terrorism to justify the Aceh invasion as a campaign to crush a terrorist movement. The United States and other countries had brokered talks between the rebel organization GAM and the Indonesian government in Tokyo that failed. Jakarta is counting on general international support for its territorial integrity, and the United States has backed Indonesia's position, though the State Department also regretted that neither the rebels nor the government did more to avoid war in the Tokyo talks. Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz, a former U.S. ambassador to Indonesia, warned the Indonesian army that its war on the Aceh rebels could not be won militarily. He also urged Jakarta to permit human rights monitors into the province, a prospect resisted by the military. By late June, however, the civilian government authorized human rights representatives to go into Aceh provided they registered with the government.

Meanwhile, these frictions between the United States and Indonesia have led the latter to look elsewhere for military supplies. In late April, Jakarta decided to purchase Su-27 and Su-30 combat aircraft as well as Mi-35 helicopters from Russia, partly because they would reduce Indonesia's dependence on the United States.

Cambodia and Burma Draw U.S. Ire

Although the United States maintains diplomatic relations with both Cambodia and Burma, it has treated their authoritarian corrupt governments as semi-pariahs. In May, the State Department issued a report condemning the rise in politically motivated violence in Cambodia, specifically Phnom Penh's instigation of anti-Thai violence in the capital the preceding January. The Thai embassy was razed, and the ambassador and his staff had to flee to neighboring diplomatic establishments. Thai businesses were also torched and looted. While Cambodia subsequently paid damages to Thailand and official relations between the neighbors have been restored, the U.S. report labeled the January events as a cynical manipulation of Cambodian nationalist sentiments for domestic political purposes.

To their credit, Cambodian authorities, on information from U.S. officials, closed a Saudi-funded religious school and arrested three foreigners for international terrorism and membership in Jemaah Islamiyah. The arrests occurred two weeks before the annual ASEAN gathering, this year in Phnom Penh, which Secretary Powell would be attending. The arrests were Cambodia's way of demonstrating its commitment to security for the conference.

Once again Burma embarrassed ASEAN and infuriated the United States and other countries by arresting Nobel laureate and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi while her convoy was traveling in northern Burma. Military-backed thugs attacked the pro-democracy leader and her supporters inflicting a number of casualties before the military detained her. Breaking with its previous hands-off policy toward Burma's domestic politics, ASEAN publicly chastised the military junta for its crackdown on dissent and detention of Mrs. Suu Kyi, labeling the developments, "a setback not just for Myanmar [Burma] but also for ASEAN." Secretary Powell, at the ASEAN meeting, called for Mrs. Suu Kyi's release and accused the junta of violating "the fundamental rights of its citizens with impunity" as well as "international human rights obligations."

Conclusion

U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia encompasses several dimensions. The top priority is continued antiterrorist cooperation through military assistance to the Philippines and law enforcement support to other members of ASEAN. On the economic dimension, the United States signed a free trade accord with Singapore this quarter, possibly a precursor to similar trade pacts with Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The Singapore agreement was praised by the city-state's prime minister as a means of insuring that the United States remains embedded economically in Southeast Asia and provides a counterweight to China's surging economic heft in the region. Finally, in what may be a portent for the region's future, ASEAN's new leader for 2003-2004, Indonesia, released a position paper calling on the group to create a formal security community to combat terrorism, train peacekeepers, and arrange for regular meetings of the region's police and defense ministers. This proposal will undoubtedly be welcomed by the U.S.

Chronology of U.S.-Southeast Asia Relations April-June 2003

April 1, 2003: Waves of demonstrations against the U.S. war in Iraq occur in major cities throughout Indonesia, calling for a boycott of American products, severance of diplomatic relations, and that President Bush be hauled before the International Criminal Court.

April 2, 2003: Malaysia announces it will proceed with a U.S.-supported Southeast Asian antiterrorist center despite Kuala Lumpur's opposition to the U.S. war in Iraq. The center will benefit Malaysia through training and technology transfer as well as intelligence exchange.

April 3, 2003: The U.S. donates 33 trucks to the Philippine Armed Forces from its stocks in Japan to boost mobility in the southern Philippines.

April 3, 2003: Indonesian Vice President Hamzah Haz calls President Bush "king of terrorists," the only Indonesian leader to denounce the U.S. president personally.

April 4, 2003: More than 80,000 Muslims in southern Thailand rally to condemn the U.S. invasion of Iraq and burn an effigy of President Bush.

April 4, 2003: *Bangkok Post* editorial accuses the United States of unilateralism and ignoring the rule of law in its invasion of Iraq, making the world a more dangerous place.

April 5, 2003: Director General of Indonesia's Ministry of Defense Gen. Sudrajat states that the U.S. attack on Iraq is motivated by the American war on terror and not oil.

April 6, 2003: Philippine intelligence reports released to the *Associated Press* show that Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) operatives captured by Singapore authorities with help from U.S. investigators planned to attack Western embassies, U.S. corporations, and crash a plane into Singapore's airport.

April 7, 2003: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir insists that the UN take charge of peacekeeping and postwar reconstruction in Iraq with U.S. and UK troops withdrawing as soon as possible. Malaysia is ready to assist in Iraq reconstruction.

April 9, 2003: Philippine Armed Forces chief of staff confirms *Balikatan 03-1* joint military exercise with the United States will be held in Jolo, but U.S. forces may not be deployed in parts of the province considered "too hostile."

April 9, 2003: Singapore accepts a squadron of *Apache* attack helicopters that will be based in Arizona and used for training there.

April 10, 2003: Malaysian Acting Prime Minister Badawi insists that the U.S. prove that Iraq possessed WMD and calls on the UN to take a leading role in postwar Iraq.

April 10, 2003: President Arroyo promises to send 500 peacekeepers and relief workers to Baghdad.

April 10, 2003: Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri denounces the U.S. and Britain for practicing the “law of the jungle” by attacking Iraq in defiance of the UN.

April 14, 2003: Indonesian prosecutors indict radical Muslim cleric Abu Bakar Bashir for plans to blow up the U.S. Embassy in Singapore and the bombings of several churches in Indonesia in December 2000.

April 17, 2003: About 1,200 U.S. soldiers arrive in the Philippines to exercise with local troops in antiterrorist exercises scheduled from April 25-May 9.

April 22, 2003: President Arroyo denies that the southern Philippines will become America’s next “battlefront” in the U.S. global war on terror.

April 25, 2003: U.S. and Philippine forces launch a joint training exercise in Luzon with 1,200 U.S. soldiers and 2,500 Filipinos. Defense Secretary Angelo Reyes said the exercise was aimed to improve “combined combat readiness and interoperability.”

April 25, 2003: U.S. permits families of U.S. diplomats to return to Indonesia, indicating that Jakarta’s crackdown on JI terrorists has greatly reduced the prospect of future attacks on Westerners.

April 26, 2003: A pro-U.S. rally of 2,000 takes place in Jolo, supporting the forthcoming *Balikatan* training exercise in this southern Philippines Muslim guerrilla stronghold.

April 26, 2003: Secretary Powell praises Indonesia for cracking down on terrorism, including the trial of Abu Bakar Bashir, JI’s Indonesian leader.

May 6, 2003: Gracia Burnham, the American missionary held hostage for over a year by the Abu Sayaff, in a book describing the ordeal, accuses a Philippine general of demanding a 50 percent cut of the ransom. The deal fell through.

May 7, 2003: U.S. Embassy criticizes the Thai government for killings associated with the crackdown on drug dealers and asked that the killers be apprehended and prosecuted. More than 2,000 people have been killed over the past three months in the anti-narcotics actions.

May 7, 2003: The U.S. criticizes the Cambodian government’s lawlessness and expresses a lack of confidence in the UN-Cambodian agreement for the trial of former Khmer Rouge leaders.

May 10, 2003: *Balikatan-03*, the joint U.S.-Philippine training exercise held this year for two weeks in Luzon, ends.

May 15, 2003: The State Department labels Abu Sayyaf a continued threat in the southern Philippines and Malaysia's Sabah.

May 16, 2003: The annual Thai-U.S. *Cobra Gold* exercise begins with an emphasis on counterterrorism, peacekeeping, and the training of medical personnel in the treatment of SARS.

May 16, 2003: The State Department issues a warning that al-Qaeda operatives, after the Saudi Arabia bombings, are now targeting Malaysia and the Philippines.

May 17, 2003: Malaysia protests a U.S. State Department warning that it is dangerous for Americans to visit the country.

May 19, 2003: U.S. with EU, Japan, and the World Bank regret the Indonesian government's decision to declare martial law in Aceh province, suspending negotiations with separatist rebels who have been fighting Jakarta for decades.

May 19, 2003: Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) warns that U.S. forces will be in danger if they aid the Philippines in its fight against them.

May 20, 2003: U.S. signed a law enforcement assistance agreement with the Philippines to help the criminal justice system better deal with crime and terrorism.

May 20, 2003: During a state visit to Washington by Philippine President Arroyo, President Bush announces \$100 million in new aid for the Philippine Armed Forces and designates the Philippines "a non-NATO ally," making it eligible for additional American arms.

May 21, 2003: The U.S. agrees to transfer 30 *Huey* helicopters to the Philippines to help build its counterinsurgency capability.

May 23, 2003: Thailand announces the creation of task forces in the U.S. and Kuwait to seek Iraq reconstruction business after Washington gave the green light to Bangkok to join in concession bidding.

May 28, 2003: Cambodian authorities close a Saudi-funded religious school and arrest three Egyptians allegedly linked to JI and the October 2002 terror bombing in Bali. The arrests were made on a tip from U.S. officials.

May 30, 2003: Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz states that the Indonesian Army's efforts to crush Aceh separatism by force will not succeed.

May 30, 2003: Aung San Suu Kyi and 19 National League for Democracy (NLD) top party members placed into "protective custody" after violent clashes between her supporters and opponents. Junta announces closure of NLD offices in Rangoon.

May 30-June 1, 2003: The second annual conference of Asia-Pacific defense ministers convenes in Singapore and is addressed by Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz who discusses the new U.S. emphasis on mobility of U.S. forces to respond to crises wherever they occur.

June 5, 2003: U.S. and Philippine officials postpone for six months a joint training exercise in Jolo until more Philippine forces can be trained by U.S. troops to hunt down *Abu Sayyaf* remnants on the island.

June 5, 2003: U.S. and Thailand launch joint naval training exercises (CARAT) involving 1,500 U.S. and 1,700 Thai uniformed personnel. Nine Thai frigates and four U.S. ships are participating.

June 6, 2003: The U.S. states that it suspects Burma's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her entourage were ambushed by "government-affiliated thugs" on May 30 after which she was taken into custody and her party's offices closed.

June 9, 2003: Bangkok's *The Nation* reports that a Thai military source claims that the U.S. wishes to use a military base in Thailand for logistical support for attacks on terrorist groups in Southeast Asia. The U.S. embassy did not comment on the article.

June 10, 2003: Thai authorities arrest several JI suspects based on Singapore intelligence who were allegedly planning to bomb the U.S. embassy among other Western embassies.

June 11, 2003: U.S. announces it is sending special customs inspectors to Malaysian ports, and Muslim countries, with instruments designed to detect chemical and radiological emissions from containerized cargo.

June 9-13, 2003: Thai PM Thaksin conducts an unofficial visit to the U.S. where he meets with President Bush to discuss trade and terrorism and for the first time declares Thailand "an ally" in the global fight against terrorism.

June 13, 2003: U.S. investigators assist Thai police who arrest a Thai national attempting to sell a large amount of radioactive material to terrorists. Cesium-137 could be used to create a "dirty bomb" and probably originated in stockpiles somewhere in the former Soviet Union.

June 18, 2003: Secretary Powell attends ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in Phnom Penh; calls on the Burmese government to release Aung San Suu Kyi from jail, referring to the military junta's actions as "contemptible."