

## **Chapter 5**

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### **Southeast Asia— Progress in Cooperation on Non-traditional Security**



Since the military government of Myanmar violently suppressed street demonstrations in September 2007, it has been increasingly criticized by the international community. But this has not deterred the junta from drafting and adopting a new constitution that ensures the military's right to participate in politics and from continuing to keep Aung Sang Suu Kyi under house arrest. However, when the very severe Cyclone Nargis struck the Myanmar delta and inflicted enormous damage on the region, the government accepted humanitarian aid from Europe and the United States despite its initial refusal. This was largely the result of international appeals by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations (UN). Eventually, relief efforts also gradually began to make headway.

In Malaysia and Thailand, the focus of international attention was on domestic political change. Many believed that the long-standing National Front government, upon which Malaysian politics has been based, might be entering a period of transition. However, with the early resignation of the prime minister, the situation now seems to have stabilized. Thailand, on the other hand, while continuing to witness frequent changes in its prime minister due to domestic political turmoil, became involved in a military clash with Cambodia over territorial claims to a temple at its border with that country. Ratification by member nations of the ASEAN Charter of 2007 proceeded smoothly, and the charter took effect at the end of 2008. Hereafter ASEAN will face the task of forming an effective "ASEAN community" based on the adopted charter, including the establishment of a human rights body. In its external relations, ASEAN in 2008 sought to develop its relationships with the United States, China, India, and Japan while simultaneously taking steps to strengthen its independent ties with North Korea.

In military cooperation, there was a deepening of the cooperative relationship between Indonesia and China. With regard to terrorism, although things seemed to calm down slightly in Indonesia and Thailand, peace negotiations in the Philippines between the government and extremists failed and resulted in the resumption of the fight between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and extremist groups. Thus, the issue of terrorism in Southeast Asia continues to be a major concern in the region.

## **1. Myanmar's Cyclone Damage and International Relief Operations**

### **(1) The International Response toward the Military Regime after Its Suppression of Street Demonstrations**

Europe, the United States and other members of the international community are demanding that Myanmar move rapidly toward political liberalization, including by releasing Aung Sang Suu Kyi and resuming political dialogue with the country's pro-democracy movement. These demands have been rejected by the military regime, which is continuing its authoritarian rule. In September 2007, a large demonstration of citizens and monks broke out in Yangon, the nation's largest city. The people's dissatisfaction with the slow pace of democratization and their frustration with an economy impoverished by European and US sanctions had been building, and sharply rising fuel and food costs added a more immediate impetus. The military junta resorted to force to suppress the demonstration.

The United States and the European Union (EU) responded by tightening their economic sanctions. On February 5, 2008, the US Department of the Treasury announced financial sanctions against family members of regime leaders and against key individuals and businesses with close ties to the military junta who are involved in arms dealings. These sanctions included the freezing of assets under US jurisdiction and the prohibition of all financial and commercial transactions with any US person. On May 1, President Bush signed an executive order freezing all assets held in the United States by three state-owned enterprises from Myanmar that trade in jewelry and lumber, and then on July 29 signed a bill extending economic sanctions against the military regime. On the basis of this law, the Department of the Treasury announced that it would impose sanctions against 10 companies with ties to the regime. On April 29, at its Council for General Affairs and External Relations, the EU adopted a 12-month extension of sanctions against the military government, which included a visa ban and a freezing of assets of members of the regime and a prohibition against lending to state-owned enterprises.

As Europe and the United States extended and/or tightened their sanctions, Myanmar sought to minimize their impact by strengthening its economic and security relations with major neighboring powers such as China, India, and Russia, which have expressed sympathy toward the regime. China has been Myanmar's

most important neighbor, politically, economically, and militarily. On June 20, 2008, the Myanmar government signed a memorandum of understanding with the China National Petroleum Corporation and a consortium led by the Daewoo Group of South Korea for the sale and transportation of natural gas from several of its offshore sites. This project aims to develop an energy supply route from the Indian Ocean to Southwestern China via Myanmar, and is one piece of evidence of Myanmar's importance to China. But Myanmar, at the same time, is carefully maintaining relations with Russia and India to strike a balance in its external affairs and to avoid an excessive dependence on China. In February, the regime approved a Russian company's application for mining exploration in the northern part of the country, and in June it entered into three economic cooperation agreements with India, one for the promotion of investments and the other two for loans to build a wire plant and electric power transmission lines.

The involvement of the UN in efforts to encourage the military regime to democratize also continued. But despite repeated visits to the country and meetings with the regime's leaders by Ibrahim Gambari, special advisor to the secretary-general on Myanmar, arbitration efforts did not appear to be making significant progress. Special Advisor Gambari recently developed a new approach to Myanmar which involves the creation of a national economic forum. The forum, with UN support, would bring together various groups within the country to engage in socioeconomic development. Opposition parties and citizen groups would participate along with the military in projects aimed at alleviating the problems of poverty, education, and hygiene. Project planners were counting on funding to be provided by the EU and the World Bank, under the leadership of the UN.

Gambari first proposed the plan to the Myanmar regime on a visit to the country in November 2007. On February 28, 2008, Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs Masahiko Koumura, after a meeting with Gambari, expressed the Japanese government's full support for his activities. The development of a national economic forum coincides with Japan's Myanmar policy, which seeks to encourage political change from within the country through assisting in socioeconomic development. On March 6, 2008, Gambari again visited Myanmar, where over a 10-day period, he met with Foreign Minister Nyan Win, Information Minister Kyaw San and others in the regime's leadership. At these meetings, he once again touched on the idea for a national economic forum. While the ministers took the

view that sanctions by Europe and the United States were the primary cause of the socioeconomic problems in Myanmar, and that the forum concept would complicate conditions in the country, they nevertheless expressed a certain degree of interest in the idea.

## **(2) The Drafting of a New Constitution**

While continuing to reject demands for democratization from abroad, the military regime completed the process of adopting a new constitution, which is designed to perpetuate the military's involvement in politics. On February 9, 2008, Myanmar's state-run media reported that a referendum on the new constitution would be held in May 2008 and that multiparty general elections would take place in 2010. On February 19, 2008, the state-run media further announced that the State Constitution Drafting Commission had completed work on the new constitution. This brought to a close a protracted 15-year process, which began in 1993 when the government established a National Convention for the adoption of detailed basic principles for the new constitution. This period also included

### **Myanmar's Roadmap to Democracy**

On August 30, 2003, in a speech before members of the State Peace and Development Council, the Cabinet, and NGOs, Prime Minister Khin Nynut announced that Myanmar would be adopting a seven-step program for Myanmar's transition to a democratic state.

1. Reconvening the National Convention, which has been adjourned since 1996.
2. After the holding of the National Convention, a step-by-step implementation of the processes necessary for the emergence of a genuine and disciplined democratic state.
3. Drafting of a new constitution in accordance with the basic principles laid down by the National Convention.
4. Adoption of the new constitution through national referendum.
5. Holding free and fair elections for legislative bodies based on the new constitution.
6. Convening of legislative bodies based on the new constitution.
7. The building of a modern, developed and democratic nation by state leaders elected by the legislatures, and by the government and other central organs established by the legislatures,

*Source:* *Burma Today News*, August 15, 2008.

lengthy adjournments of the convention.

The drafting of the new constitution was an important milestone in the Roadmap to Democracy which the regime announced in August 2003 in response to growing international condemnation of its May 2003 decision to again place Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. Designed to defuse such criticism, the Roadmap provided a timeline of events in which the regime itself was placed in the driver's seat on political reform and democratization. According to this timeline, the completion of the draft constitution signified the end of stage three of the democratization process, with the national referendum and general elections representing stages four and five.

The new draft constitution incorporated provisions and systems aimed at keeping the military in power. First of all, it explicitly stated that the military would play a leading role in the affairs of state. It furthermore gave the military authority to appoint one quarter of those who would serve in the bicameral legislature and allowed it to appoint one of the three persons who would hold the offices of president and vice president. In addition, it made "persons subject to overseas influence" ineligible to run for president, vice president, or the parliament, a provision clearly aimed at excluding Aung San Suu Kyi from politics. On May 27, 2008, in an indication of its intentions to keep Suu Kyi's political influence at bay until the 2010 general elections, the regime announced a one-year extension of her period of house arrest.

The Myanmar government appealed to other ASEAN nations for their understanding of the provisions of its draft constitution. At the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat held in Singapore on February 19, 2008, Foreign Minister Nyan Win explained that, for the foregoing reason, Suu Kyi would be ineligible to run for office in the 2010 general election. His counterparts, while expressing a strong desire to see the referendum and the general elections held on schedule, criticized the idea of Suu Kyi's ineligibility, saying that such an eligibility criterion was "not in keeping with the times" and that it "would be very odd in any country in ASEAN." However, Singapore, the chair country of the conference, adopted the view that the general election was essentially an internal matter for Myanmar and on the basis of the principle of noninterference refrained from further references to this issue.

When Special Advisor Gambari visited Myanmar in March, he had asked the military regime to revise the constitution, permit political participation by Aung

San Suu Kyi, and allow international groups to participate in the constitutional referendum as observers, but the regime rejected all of his requests. The UN Security Council (UNSC), at its May 2 meeting, responded to this rejection by adopting a presidential statement aimed at restraining the regime, in which it called for the holding of a free and fair referendum and the establishment of inclusive and credible political processes.

### **(3) Response by the Military Regime and International Community to the Cyclone Devastation**

The very large Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar on May 2–3, 2008, making a direct landing on the Irrawaddy Delta, the country's rice-growing region and the site of its largest city, Yangon. The storm caused damage of unprecedented magnitude: its high winds, torrential rains, and storm surges left 140,000 persons dead or missing and exacted a huge human toll on 2.4 million others.

The military regime's initial response to the storm's onslaught could hardly be described as adequate. Because of insufficient relief material and equipment, and a lack of expertise, it could not provide relief in an organized and efficient manner. On May 5, immediately after the cyclone struck, the regime announced that it would accept international aid. But this acceptance was selective: while it allowed emergency financial and material aid to enter the country, it refused to issue visas for human assistance from international organizations and from the United States and Europe. The likely explanation is that the regime had feared that the relief efforts would be politicized and the entry of relief personnel from Europe and the United States would increase pressures on it to democratize. While denying entry to European and US relief workers, however, it requested this very same kind of assistance from Thailand, China, India, and Bangladesh, all countries sympathetic to its rule.

Moreover, despite the state of emergency that existed following this catastrophic natural disaster, the government forged ahead with

the national referendum on the new constitution. On May 6, while postponing voting in the hardest hit administrative divisions of Yangon and Irrawaddy until May 24, the regime announced that voting would proceed as scheduled in all other regions on the 10th. On May 8, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued a statement urging a postponement but his appeal was rejected and the referendum took place on the 10th. On the 15th, the regime announced that the people had ratified the new constitution by an overwhelming margin—92 percent in favor, with a voter turnout of 99 percent.

Confronted by the regime's resistance to international aid, the UNSC even debated overriding Myanmar's national sovereignty to provide humanitarian aid. In unofficial deliberations on May 7, France argued on the basis of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine that human rights were being violated and that relief supplies should be delivered to stricken areas without the consent of the Myanmar government. France's aim was to apply to natural disasters a concept originally intended to allow the international community to take action against genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Its proposal, however, was met by strong opposition from the other nations at the meeting, China, Russia, South Africa, and Vietnam. Even the UN and Britain, which had expressed concerns about the human rights situation in Myanmar, were cautious about applying the Responsibility to Protect doctrine to natural disasters. In the final analysis, the UNSC shelved a resolution on forcible intervention. One effect of the devastation of the Myanmar cyclone, however, was to call to the attention of the international community the issue of "human security" versus traditional security, and compel it to ask: under what circumstances should human security, which the international community has increasingly adopted as the norm for its actions in recent years, take precedence over traditional security based on national sovereignty?

Thereafter, however, in response to the urging of the UN, the military regime changed its policy regarding international relief. This cleared the way for full-scale disaster response in the affected areas. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited Myanmar to attempt to persuade the regime to change its position. On May 23, he negotiated directly with the leader of the government, Senior General Than Shwe, chairman of the State Peace and Development Council. Following this meeting, the secretary-general announced that Myanmar had agreed to accept all assistance from the international community.

#### **(4) ASEAN's Response to the Cyclone**

The countries of ASEAN, in response to the devastation of the Sumatra earthquake and tsunami of December 2004, entered into the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response in July 2005. To this day, however, there are still member nations that have not ratified the agreement and so it has not taken force. Without a collective ability to deal with large-scale natural disasters, ASEAN's first organizational response to the devastation of the Myanmar cyclone was to urge member nations to provide assistance to Myanmar. On May 5, 2008, ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan requested emergency assistance from all members of the organization, and countries responded by providing support of various kinds. Myanmar's neighbor, Thailand, in addition to providing emergency funds and material, and to dispatching an emergency medical team, assumed the role of intermediary between the international community and the Myanmar government on issues relating to relief worker access. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, on the other hand, provided emergency financing and material and also offered to dispatch relief teams. Cambodia and Laos provided emergency financial assistance.

Following this initial response, ASEAN sought to devise a policy that would guide their involvement in Myanmar as a regional community. Through its secretariat, the organization made efforts to persuade officials in Myanmar to provide access to assistance being offered by the international community. Simultaneously, Singapore, the ASEAN chair at the time, called on member countries, including Myanmar, to gather for an emergency meeting. Probably because the task of persuading Myanmar required several days, it was not until May 12 that Secretary-General Surin announced a Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting for Singapore on May 19. At this point, roughly 10 days had passed since the cyclone. With the nations requiring yet another week to convene their meeting, criticisms began to mount from NGOs and the media about the tardiness of ASEAN's response. Secretary-General Surin replied by emphasizing the steps being taken by ASEAN to ensure that its relief activities would be effective.

At the special foreign ministers' meeting on the 19th, the countries agreed to establish a task force headed by the secretary-general, which would work with the UN and the government of Myanmar to create an ASEAN-led mechanism to coordinate the flow of aid into the country. On the condition that such aid would

not be politicized, Myanmar indicated that it would accept international assistance and agreed to permit access by medical teams from several ASEAN nations. In addition, ASEAN authorized plans to hold a joint international pledging conference in conjunction with the United Nations.

On May 25, this joint ASEAN-UN pledging conference convened in Yangon, with representatives from 51 countries and 23 international organizations in attendance. While remaining suspicious about the potential for aid to be politicized, the Myanmar government agreed to a wide range of international aid measures. On the issue of reconstruction financing, calculations by the UN and Myanmar were widely divergent, the UN arriving at a total of \$200 million in contrast to a figure of \$11 billion from Myanmar, which had included allowances for long-term losses. The amount ultimately pledged by conference participants was \$50 million. Lastly, participants agreed to establish a Tripartite Core Group (TCG), comprising representatives from the Myanmar government, ASEAN, and the UN, to coordinate relief efforts in Yangon.

The agreement reached at the pledging conference allowed substantial amounts of aid to enter the country from national governments and international organizations, with flows coordinated by the TCG. On May 28, the Japanese government, in response to a request from the Myanmar government, authorized the dispatch of a 23-person international emergency relief medical team to the country. At the end of July, a UN official reported that ordinary relief activities had been carried out. Although criticisms were heard about the tardiness its initial response, intermediation by ASEAN appears to have been relatively successful. On May 30, Secretary-General Surin praised his organization's efforts in comments marking the beginning of work by an assessment team dispatched by ASEAN: "ASEAN made a very significant step in trying to connect the international community through ASEAN with Myanmar on the humanitarian mission"; and, regarding the cyclone damage in Myanmar, "We have been able to open the humanitarian space...I think that is the success of ASEAN. I think that is the resiliency of ASEAN. I think that's a new ASEAN ready to take on the responsibility placed on it...." On July 21, ASEAN, the UN, and the government of Myanmar issued a detailed joint assessment on the damage caused by Cyclone Nargis. In a UN-ASEAN press release announcing this report, Dr. Surin recapped ASEAN's efforts in the following way: "This is the first time that ASEAN has played such a leading role in responding to a natural disaster affecting one of its Member States."

Over the years, ASEAN has come to view nontraditional challenges to security as its most important focus. And, particularly since the Sumatra earthquake and tsunami of December 2004, the organization has considered the provision of emergency assistance during major natural disasters to be an important form of cooperation in meeting these nontraditional risks. Following the Myanmar cyclone and the Sichuan earthquake, multilateral cooperation on disaster assistance has once again emerged as an area of particular interest for ASEAN and its major dialogue partners, notably Japan, China, and South Korea. For example, on June 10, 2008, high-ranking military officers from the ASEAN + 3 countries gathered at the Field Army Commanding Academy of the People's Liberation Army in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, China for a three-day workshop on the issue of cooperation in disaster relief. The workshop covered concerns such as cooperation mechanisms and standardization of strategic guidelines. Then, at the ASEAN + 3 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Singapore held on July 22, the ministers agreed to establish a fund to promote cooperation in disaster management and emergency relief.

The cooperation has not been limited to ASEAN + 3. Discussions on the devastation caused by the Myanmar cyclone and on the responses to the disaster have also taken place at meetings at the Asia-Pacific level. At the IISS Asia Security Summit (the so-called "Shangri-La Dialogue"), which took place on May 30 and June 1, the United States and several other countries criticized the response of the Myanmar government to the disaster. Singapore and Malaysia, on the other hand, emphasized ASEAN's role as an intermediary, recognizing the necessity of assistance by the international community in response to the devastation. In a separate meeting of the defense ministers at this summit, the discussions encompassed general principles for the governing of multilateral humanitarian aid during natural disasters. At the 13th Tokyo Defense Forum sponsored by the Ministry of Defense (on October 21–24), senior officials in charge of defense policy and defense exchange in the Asia-Pacific region (at the level of director-general or general officer) discussed international cooperation for disaster assistance. At these meetings, participants confirmed the role of the military in relief activities after major disasters, and expressed their awareness of the importance of information sharing and coordination between the affected nation and aid-providing countries and organizations.

Members of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) also vowed to build on the

international cooperation that occurs during relief efforts to develop the ARF into a more effective framework for cooperation. The ARF Chairman's Statement, which was adopted on July 24, called for the strengthening of cooperation in the areas of emergency response, disaster relief, and reconstruction. Specifically, the statement stipulated a number of key provisions: improved civilian cooperation in disaster response through training, information sharing and multilateral exercises; the adoption of the ARF Strategic Guidance for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, and the ARF Disaster Relief Workplan; and the carrying out of an initial ARF Disaster Relief Exercise hosted by the Philippines and the United States.

## **2. Domestic Politics in ASEAN, and Intra-regional and Extra-regional Relations**

### **(1) Domestic Politics—Political Change in Malaysia and Thailand**

For many years, Malaysia has enjoyed stability in its political system from the overwhelming majorities held in the Parliament by the National Front coalition. During 2008, however, change seemed to be in the air. The portents of this change were already visible in 2007. At the end of November 2007, more than 5,000 Indian citizens marched in an unauthorized demonstration in Kuala Lumpur, which ended in a clash with the police. Behind this uprising by Indians was the traditional Bumiputra policy, which favors Malays. As economic disparity and corruption continued to worsen, dissatisfaction against the Abdullah Badawi administration grew not only among minority Chinese and Indians but also among majority Malays. And as political instability increased, the people's support of the opposition began to rise, galvanizing principally around former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

On March 8, 2008, a general election for Malaysia's lower house resulted in a historical defeat for the ruling parties. Compared to 90 percent of the seats before the election, the ruling coalition, while retaining its majority, saw its share of the lower house fall below two thirds—the minimum level required for revising the constitution—for the first time in 40 years. Moreover, in elections for state legislative assemblies, which were held simultaneously with the general election, the ruling parties were defeated in five of the country's twelve states, including Penang, the home of Prime Minister Abdullah. Although the prime minister was reappointed to his office on March 10, his ability to lead was severely diminished

as a result of this huge reduction in seats.

Following the election, calls for the prime minister's immediate resignation grew within the ranks of his ruling coalition. Unable to fend off such pressures, Abdullah announced on July 10 that he would resign in the middle of 2010 and hand over power to Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak. Former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar, meanwhile, began maneuvering to persuade members from the ruling parties to switch sides. On September 16, Anwar announced that the opposition parties had obtained a majority of the seats in Parliament and called for negotiations for the transfer of power with Prime Minister Abdullah. Although the Abdullah government ignored this appeal, pressures against the prime minister once again began mounting inside his own coalition, with many demanding his resignation before the middle of 2010. As a consequence, on October 8, 2008, the prime minister announced that he would step down in March 2009. Although these events in Malaysian politics in 2008 did not engender the political change necessary to overturn the ruling coalition, the gains achieved by the opposition compelled the early retirement of the current prime minister. The changes in Malaysian society and in the consciousness of its voters which surfaced in the general election were clearly compelling a reexamination of the basic framework of Malaysian politics, which is based on the Bumiputra policy.

In Thailand, after Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was banished in a coup d'état in September 2006, a provisional military government took power. Later, in the general election of December 2007, the pro-Thaksin People's Power Party (PPP) garnered the most votes and restored civilian rule to the country. However, Thai politics in 2008 continued to be affected by political hostility between pro- and anti-Thaksin factions, causing the kind of political instability that resulted in three changes in prime minister during the year.

On January 28, 2008, a six-party coalition led by the PPP took power, and the head of the PPP, Samak Sundaravej, was elected prime minister. This newly formed pro-Thaksin government attempted to bring back to Thailand conditions that existed before the coup. On February 18, Prime Minister Samak, in his policy address to Parliament, announced a set of socioeconomic measures that would entail major increases in public spending. Then, at the end of March, the PPP began revising the constitution established under the military government, taking specific aim at provisions that provided amnesty to participants in the coup d'état, vested the power to dissolve political parties in the Election Commission, and

suspended the civil rights of former Prime Minister Thaksin and pro-Thaksin members of parliament.

Anti-Thaksin factions, who resisted these actions by the government, particularly its attempts to revise the constitution, fought back by holding large protest rallies on almost a daily basis, led by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), a citizens group. The actions of the PAD, which was demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Samak, gradually became more extreme. At the end of August, it began illegal occupations and sit-ins at the prime minister's office and the Phuket Airport. As time went on, clashes between the PAD and Thaksin supporters began causing serious injuries and deaths. On September 2, Prime Minister Samak issued a declaration of a state of emergency in Bangkok.

During this political turmoil, the military maintained a position of disinterested observer. Because of the international condemnation that it had invited through its overthrow of the civilian government in 2006, the military announced that this time it would maintain a stance of neutrality and noninterference. The role of changing the government fell instead upon the judiciary. During the military regime, there was a wholesale replacement of members on the constitutional court. Thus, even after the restoration of civilian governance, the court was generally viewed as being swayed by political forces led by the military. On September 9, the constitutional court found that Prime Minister Samak had acted unconstitutionally by appearing on a TV cooking show and receiving payments for this appearance while still in office. According to the constitution, therefore, the prime minister was out of a job. Separately, the Supreme Court ruled in a number of cases that former Prime Minister Thaksin and his family were guilty of corruption and tax evasion. Thaksin, who had delayed his return to Thailand until a PPP government was established, left the country once again in August when the tide appeared to turn against him.

Deputy Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat was appointed the new prime minister. This provoked a furious response from the PAD, which was seeking to eliminate the former prime minister's influence on politics. Somchai is Thaksin's brother-in-law and the PAD would not back down from its demands that he be removed. It surrounded the Parliament to prevent Somchai from delivering his administrative policy speech and in late November occupied Bangkok's two airports. These actions paralyzed airport functions and aroused fear of adverse economic consequences for tourism and factory shipments as well as of damage

to Thailand's international image. Despite this show of force by the PAD, Somchai refused to resign.

What sealed his fate was once again the judiciary. On December 2, the constitutional court ordered the disbanding of the PPP on the grounds that it had violated election laws. It further stripped Prime Minister Somchai and other party leaders of their right to hold office for five years. By the terms of this ruling, the prime minister no longer held office and the government fell again after less than three months in power. Subsequently, the opposition Democrat Party enticed defections from the ruling coalition and succeeded in establishing a new government with four former coalition parties. On December 15, Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva was elected prime minister. While pledging to restore health to the economy, Abhisit sought to underscore the differences between his policies and those of the Thaksin era, by declaring, for example, his intentions to reassess the need for large public works projects.

This structure of hostile opposing sides in Thai politics represents a struggle for power between emerging capitalist forces rallying around former Prime Minister Thaksin and the traditional power structure centered on the military and the bureaucracy. The royal family has apparently given its tacit support to the traditionalists. Although this latest showdown has shifted the reins of power to traditional groups, the fundamental structure of conflict remains. Support for Thaksin remains deep-seated, particularly among northeastern rural villagers. Thaksin supporters surrounded the Parliament on December 29, during opening ceremonies. This time, in a reversal of roles between attacker and defender,

they attempted to obstruct the administrative policy speech of the prime minister. Although Prime Minister Abhisit has included national reconciliation among his top priorities, these kinds of actions make it doubtful that reconciliation will happen anytime soon.

In addition to political turmoil at home, Thailand also confronted a dispute with neighboring Cambodia over claims to the Preah Vihear

temple ruins on the border between the two countries. For many years, both Thailand and Cambodia had claimed the territory on which the temple is situated. In 1962, the International Court of Justice ruled that it was on Cambodian side of the border. In June 2007 the Cambodian government applied to have the temple designated a World Heritage Site. The Thai government consented to this move and on June 18, 2008 both countries issued a joint declaration.

However, within the context of the fight between pro- and anti-Thaksin factions, the Preah Vihear ruins developed into a contentious political issue. Anti-government interests issued loud denunciations against the Thai government's decision to support Cambodia in its World Heritage Site application and began a sit-in in the front of the prime minister's residence. The opposition Democrat Party demanded that the parliament entertain a no-confidence resolution against the Samak cabinet, and anti-Thaksin members of parliament petitioned the administrative court to nullify the cabinet's decision on the registration of the temple. On July 14, Foreign Minister Noppadol Pattama resigned in response to criticism that he had acted arbitrarily, without the approval of the parliament, in supporting Cambodia's move to register the temple site.

The situation grew serious when both countries mobilized their militaries. When on July 15 Cambodia detained monks from Thailand who were attempting to enter the temple, Thailand deployed more than 100 soldiers to an area near the temple in protest. This led Cambodia to mobilize its troops and created a tinderbox situation in which the countries' two armies were arrayed across the border from one another.

Cambodia, the weaker of the two nations, sought to bring the situation under control by appealing to regional and international organizations. On July 22, the Cambodian government sought emergency consultations with the UNSC. On the same day, a Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting convened in Singapore, where the ministers discussed the Preah Vihear issue. While Cambodia pursued a solution within the framework on ASEAN, Thailand rejected the organization's involvement. Secretary-General Surin indicated that without the consent of both nations ASEAN would find it difficult to involve itself in any dispute resolution. Confronted by a traditional challenge to intra-regional security, in which two countries disagreed about a border, ASEAN proved to be incapable of offering any effective solution.

Ultimately, both nations resorted to dialogue to settle the issue. Through a

meeting of foreign ministers, they endeavored to restore calm. By the middle of August, troops deployed to the area near the temple site decreased to 30. In October, however, tensions between the two armies once again heightened. The forces opened fire, resulting in the deaths of two Cambodian soldiers. Immediately after the commencement of fighting, however, the commanding officers of both armies agreed to a temporary ceasefire and avoided an escalation of the battle. Both prime ministers then held talks on the problem and agreed to a peaceful resolution of the issue. In November, Thailand and Cambodia agreed to convene a border commission and to place the contested area temporarily under joint control. Discussions between the two nations have continued periodically since then. Cambodia has gradually taken a more flexible stance, culminating in its statement that it would not bring up the Preah Vihear issue at the next ASEAN Summit.

## **(2) Intra-regional Relations—Ratification of the ASEAN Charter and the Establishment of a Human Rights Body**

In November 2007, ASEAN leaders signed the ASEAN Charter, which provides a legal and institutional framework for the organization. While reaffirming the basic principles to which the nations of the organization have traditionally subscribed, such as nonintervention in internal affairs and the importance of consensus, the charter stipulates the extent of the authority of the ASEAN Summit and the methods by which it will arrive at decisions, and also establishes mechanisms for conflict resolution. In 2008, the ratification process began in each country. On January 7, Singapore, the ASEAN chair at the time, announced that it had completed ratification of the charter. Singapore was followed in February by Brunei, Malaysia, and Laos, in March by Vietnam, and in April by Cambodia. At the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in July, Myanmar declared that it had completed the ratification process. In an interview with the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* on March 5, Secretary-General Surin said that the outlook was for the charter to take effect by year end and that his policy would be to begin strengthening the secretariat before the charter took force.

At this point Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand had not yet ratified the charter. In Indonesia, parliamentarians were split on their views on the document and it appeared that ratification might fail. However, on October 8, Indonesia's parliament voted in favor of adoption. Philippines President Gloria Macapagal

Arroyo had already indicated, at the time of the charter's signing in Singapore, that she intended to delay ratification so long as the human rights situation in Myanmar had not improved. However, as the ratification process began accelerating in other countries, the Philippine government changed its policy toward active support of the charter. On October 7, the Philippine Senate approved ratification. In Thailand, despite fears among some that internal political instability might hamper a smooth adoption of the charter, ratification proceeded without major hitch in parliament. On November 15, Thailand declared that it had ratified the charter, making ratification unanimous. On December 15, at a Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Jakarta, ASEAN declared its charter to be in force.

Article 14 of the charter deals with the establishment of an ASEAN human rights body, stipulating that ASEAN would establish such a body to promote and protect fundamental human rights and that the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting would determine the terms by which the body will operate. On July 21, 2008, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting convened in Singapore and opinions were exchanged on the authority granted to this body. At this meeting, an activist group (Indonesia, the Philippines) argued that the body should be given the right to sanction violators, while a cautious group (Vietnam, Myanmar) opposed this view on the grounds that such sanctions amounted to interference in internal affairs. Singapore, the ASEAN chair, is also reported to have expressed reservations about granting sanctioning authority. The debate exposed a politically divided ASEAN, which was split on the question of whether ASEAN would apply the principle of noninterference more flexibly and seek to strengthen itself as a community, or whether it would adhere firmly to traditional interpretations of noninterference. A high level panel on the establishment of a human rights body, which was launched at the foreign ministers' meeting, convened for the first time. Recognizing that a legacy of discussions on human rights had produced a certain consensus, the panel indicated that it would work on its proposals through a series of monthly meetings and report to the ASEAN Summit. The ASEAN Summit, which had been scheduled for Bangkok in December 2008, was postponed until February 2009 as a result of the previously described turmoil in Thailand.

### **(3) Extra-regional Relations—A Focus on Japan and North Korea**

Recent years have seen more vigorous and extensive efforts by Southeast Asia to strengthen relations with China and India, primarily in the area of economic cooperation. The involvement of the United States in antiterrorism activities has also expanded political cooperation between the United States and Southeast Asia over a wide range of issues. As these relations between Southeast Asia and the major powers expand, Japan, one of ASEAN's major dialogue partners and a country with traditionally close relationships with the region, has also taken steps to strengthen its ties with ASEAN. In the area of economic cooperation, Japan invited the foreign ministers of the five countries in the Mekong region to Tokyo in January 2008 for the first Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting, and in June ratified an economic partnership agreement with ASEAN.

In May 2008, then Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda announced a "New Fukuda Doctrine" in which he highlighted the importance of Southeast Asia to Japan. He was taking a page from the historical "Fukuda Doctrine" articulated in 1977 by his father, the late former Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda. Yasuo Fukuda articulated the new doctrine in a speech entitled "When the Pacific Ocean Becomes an 'Inland Sea'," which he presented at an international conference entitled the "Future of Asia," organized by the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* on May 22. Comparing the Pacific Ocean to a vast inland sea, Fukuda appealed to attendees to work over the next 30 years to build a close network of nations in the Asia-Pacific region.

In the speech, Fukuda discussed a policy proposal entitled the "Five Pledges," in which he demonstrated a shared awareness of the issues and a spirit of cooperation with ASEAN. He pledged in this regard to support the creation of the ASEAN Community and to establish a Permanent Representative of Japan to ASEAN and also promised Japan's cooperation in efforts to eliminate economic inequality in the region. Furthermore, with cooperation in the area of nontraditional security in mind, Fukuda proposed the creation of a system of "Disaster Management and Infectious Disease Control in Asia," which would aim to link emergency relief agencies in Asia into a network to support "diplomacy for disaster management cooperation" and provide effective responses to the problem of avian flu. The prime minister's proposals elicited a positive response from newspapers in ASEAN countries. In Singapore, the *Straits Times* reported on Japan's desire to continue its close partnership with ASEAN, while in Thailand, the *Bangkok Post* discussed in detail Fukuda's proposal for the establishment of a

system of emergency relief during natural disasters.

The year 2008 also saw a flurry of activity between North Korea and Southeast Asia/ASEAN, aimed at developing both bilateral and multilateral relations. In terms of North Korea-ASEAN relations, North Korea's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) deserves notice. The TAC, a treaty aimed at promoting the peaceful settlement of conflicts within Southeast Asia, has in recent years become a vehicle for fostering trust between ASEAN and other countries, as these countries become signatories to affirm their friendly relations with the organization. The idea of having North Korea sign the treaty came from ASEAN. On February 20, 2008, after an ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat, Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo announced that the

### **The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC)**

The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) was signed at the First ASEAN Summit held in Bali in February 1976. Consisting of five chapters and twenty articles, the TAC proclaims that ASEAN shall settle disputes within the region peacefully on the basis of friendship and cooperation among member nations. Although Article 15 provides specifically for a High Council to be constituted as a means of resolving conflicts, the nations have never once applied this article to the settlement of a dispute. Instead, the TAC today plays a symbolic function, providing a means for expressing agreement with the principle of noninterference in internal affairs and with the spirit of peaceful resolution of conflicts. Its significance lies in its being a vehicle for enhancing the growth of international trust.

The initial signatories to this treaty were the original five ASEAN nations (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand). In the course of ASEAN expansion in the 1980s and the 1990s, the organization added Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia and all became signatories of the treaty. Subsequently, at the Third ASEAN Summit held in Manila in December 1987, ASEAN amended the TAC in order to extend the spirit of peace and stability of the Southeast Asian region to countries outside the region. Toward this end, the new Article 1 provided that the TAC would be open to accession to states outside of Southeast Asia.

Thereafter the number of countries acceding to the TAC has continued to increase. Following Papua New Guinea in 1989, the list of countries joining the treaty expanded as follows: in 2003, China and India; in 2004, Japan, Pakistan, South Korea, and Russia; in 2005, New Zealand, Mongolia, and Australia; and in 2007, France, Timor-Leste, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The accession of North Korea in 2008 brought the total number of signatories to the TAC to 25.

member nations had agreed to sound out North Korea on the possibility of its acceding to the TAC. As representative of ASEAN, Yeo made a formal visit to North Korea on May 10, remaining in the country for five days. In meetings with leaders of the North Korean government, Yeo requested that North Korea join the TAC. North Korea responded through a letter to Yeo from Foreign Minister Pak Ui Chun. Dated June 12, this letter stated that North Korea would be willing to sign the treaty on the condition that the treaty's provisions relating to the High Council, which is established to settle conflicts, would not apply to North Korea. On July 24, at a meeting of the ARF, North Korea formally became a signatory to the treaty, the 15th country outside the region to do so.

An article published by the Korean Central News Agency on July 27 provides something akin to a formal comment by North Korea on its accession to the TAC. This article reports that the country signed the treaty "as a token of its support to [the] ASEAN and its willingness to contribute to the regional peace and prosperity." ASEAN adheres to noninterference as a fundamental principle and this is enabling Southeast Asian countries and North Korea to build good bilateral relations. North Korea has also been participating in the ARF since 2000. In light of these actions, it may be that North Korea feels it is expedient to participate in a multilateral framework centering on ASEAN; from a political standpoint, it may also be calculating that this framework offers a suitable arena for it to participate in international society. Its accession to the TAC may thus represent one step, albeit a very cautious one, toward venturing onto the international stage. ASEAN's intention, on the other hand, may be to position itself to exert influence as a mediator on matters relating to the Korean Peninsula. This would fit in with its efforts to continue to play a key role in the security framework of the Asian-Pacific region.

In terms of bilateral relations, North Korea is endeavoring to strengthen its ties with countries that have only latterly joined ASEAN (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam). Vietnam and Laos were members of the socialist bloc during the Cold War and have continued to maintain single-party Communist (or, in the case of Laos, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party) system. In part because of this affinity of political systems, Vietnam and Laos continue to have their own diplomatic relations with North Korea. And, because both countries have achieved rapid economic growth in recent years through reform and open-door policies, many feel that North Korea is drawing upon the development models of these two

countries, particularly the Doi Moi (“renewal”) policy of Vietnam, for its own development. It can be speculated that Vietnam’s rise to the rank of the world’s second largest exporter of rice and its election to the UNSC as a non-permanent member for a two-year term beginning in 2008 are also motivating North Korea to solidify its ties with the country.

In 2008, there were frequent exchanges of visits by dignitaries between North Korea and Vietnam and Laos. Among the most notable were trips to Vietnam by North Korea’s Security Minister Ju Sang Song in June and by its Foreign Minister Pak Ui Chun in July, where both conferred with Communist Party Secretary-General Nong Duc Manh. Security Minister Ju Sang Song visited Laos in June following his visit to Vietnam and signed a memorandum relating to cooperation between the security agencies of both countries. At the end of August, Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh visited North Korea, where he discussed economic cooperation between the two countries. And, although the trip never materialized, the media reported in April that North Korean National Military Commission Chairman Kim Jong Il would be visiting Vietnam.

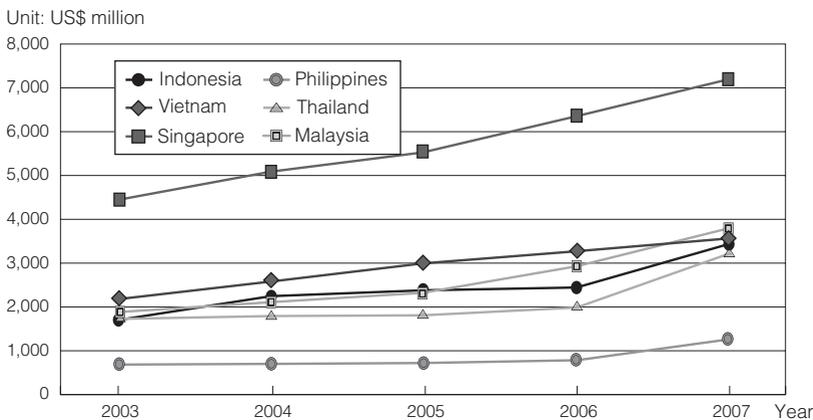
The revitalized diplomatic relations between North Korea and Myanmar are also worth noting. Ever since the attempted assassination by bombing of the president of Korea in Rangoon (Yangon) in 1983, diplomatic relations between Myanmar and North Korea had been severed. In April 2007, those ties were restored. Each nation, insulated internationally, now has something to offer the other: it is widely held that North Korea has been supplying weapons to Myanmar for many years, while Myanmar can now provide food and natural resources to North Korea. In April 2008, the press reported that Myanmar was purchasing North Korean missile systems and rocket launchers through a Singaporean trading company. In October, Myanmar Foreign Minister Nyan Win visited North Korea and met with Foreign Minister Pak Ui Chun. In November, the third vice bilateral consultation meeting between the foreign ministries of both countries was held in Naypyidaw, the capital of Myanmar.

### 3. Military Trends in Southeast Asia

#### (1) National Defense Budgets and Procurement Activity—A Focus on Arms Procurement by Indonesia

Although defense budgets are now on the rise throughout Southeast Asia (see Table 5.1), these increases are all backed by healthy economic development. Along with increases in defense budgets, nations are actively modernizing their arms and equipment. In 2008, reflecting the roughly 6-percent rate of economic growth that it has achieved over the past several years, Indonesia increased its defense budget by 11 percent over 2007 to approximately \$4 billion. In the 1990s, Indonesia saw military aid cut back sharply by the United States because of its involvement in human rights problems in East Timor. Based on this experience, the country has sought to end its military dependence on the United States since the Suharto era and has been taking steps to diversify the sources of its arms and equipment. In recent years, Russia has emerged as a major supplier of its weapons. In August 2007, Indonesia signed a contract with Russia to purchase six Sukhoi fighters and the following September agreed to accept a \$1 billion loan from Russia for the purchase of Russian-made weapons. Then on August 6, 2008, it took delivery of six Mi-17 helicopters. At an international defense expo held on

**Table 5.1. Trends in defense budgets of ASEAN 5 + Vietnam**



Source: Prepared by the author from IISS, *Military Balance* 2006–9.

November 19–22, 2008 in Jakarta, Irkut, a Russian manufacturer of aerospace equipment, announced that it would be developing an unmanned aircraft jointly with Indonesia's Agency for Technology Development.

Indonesia is also rapidly deepening its bilateral cooperation with China in military matters. In November 2007, Minister of Defense Juwono Sudarsono visited China and signed an agreement on military cooperation. This pact was based on a strategic partnership agreement between the two countries that was entered into in April 2005, which provides for the advancement of technology transfer and exchange, mutual student exchanges, and purchases of arms and equipment. In January 15–20, 2008, Chinese Minister of National Defense Cao Gangchuan paid a return visit to Indonesia, at which time agreements were reached on joint training and exercises between the two countries and on joint production and investment in military vehicles, aircraft, and transport ships. Minister of Defense Juwono cited two companies that would be the recipients of investment from China: the aircraft manufacturer Dirgantara Indonesia, and the ship manufacturer PAL. With its antiquated equipment needing to be updated, the Indonesian military had long desired to see improvements made by domestic defense manufacturers in the areas of product quality, price and delivery times. By responding to needs in Indonesia for financial and technological support of the defense industry, China's cooperation was in tune with Indonesia's demands.

Through its fight against terrorists, the United States has once again been made aware of the important role that Indonesia can play and, in recent years, has taken steps to strengthen bilateral military cooperation. These moves also may reflect the rapidly closer ties that China and Russia are developing with Indonesia. In 2008, the United States moved aggressively to provide Indonesia, which it views as a regional leader, with assistance in upgrading its military equipment. On January 22, Minister of Defense Juwono said that the Indonesian government had agreed to place seven radar systems provided by the United States along the Makassar Strait. In addition, on February 25, US Secretary of Defense Robert

Gates visited Indonesia, where he met with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Minister of Defense Juwono. Following his meeting with Gates, Juwono said that the Indonesian government was considering the purchase of six F-16s from the United States.

Major procurement activity by other Southeast Asian nations was as follows. Malaysia took delivery of four Su-30MKM fighters in March 2008, following the six that were delivered in 2007, in accordance with a 2003 agreement to acquire 18 of these aircraft. The Royal Malaysian Air Force is also considering the acquisition of airborne warning and control system (AWACS) planes, which it has identified as a top priority issue in its mid-term revisions of the Ninth Malaysia Plan, the nation's medium-term economic development plan for the period 2006–2010. Singapore, meanwhile, continued to make substantial progress in developing its 3rd Generation Fighting Force, benefiting from generous defense budgets that are growing along with its rapidly expanding economy. On August 22, France's DCNS announced that the Singapore Navy had taken delivery of the sixth of the company's *Formidable*-class frigates, the full complement of such ships that it had planned to acquire. The Singapore Air Force is now apparently expressing interest in Lockheed Martin's F-35 joint strike fighter and is reported to be considering the acquisition of up to 100 of these planes over the next several decades.

The Philippines defense budget for fiscal 2008 increased by six percent over the previous year. In May 2008, the Philippine armed forces ordered 18 Aermacchi trainer aircraft. In Thailand, the military requested a 17.8-percent increase in its fiscal 2009 budget. The Thai government announced in January 2008 that it would be budgeting for the acquisition of six Gripen fighters. Thailand demonstrated a commitment toward enhancing the security of the Strait of Malacca. On September 18, it signed the Revised Standard Operating Procedures and Terms of Reference for the Malacca Straits Patrols Joint Coordinating Committee, agreeing to join Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore in their Eyes in the Sky joint air patrols and in their coordinated maritime patrols.

## **(2) Terrorism in the Region and Progress in Military Cooperation— A Focus on the Philippines**

The activity of Islamic extremists in Southeast Asia differed by country in terms of mode of attack and extent of damage. In Indonesia, large-scale bombings attributed to the extremist organization Jemaah Islamiah (JI) occurred continually

between 2002 and 2005 but since 2006 the country has experienced no major acts of terrorism. Supported by the United States and Australia, the anti-terrorist special forces unit of the Indonesian National Police has cracked down on JI and arrested or killed its leaders, severely reducing its organizational ability to carry out large-scale attacks. On November 9, 2008, three members of JI who were the acknowledged lead perpetrators of the Bali bombings of October 2002 (Imam Samudra, Ali Ghufron, and Amrozi were executed). However, this has not eliminated the fundamental causes of extremism and terrorism, which are rooted in poverty and social inequality. JI continues to carry out its activities. In July 2008, the national police arrested 12 members of JI in Palembang, Sumatra, on suspicion of plotting a bombing attack. In his administrative policy speech in August, President Yudhoyono called on the people to remain vigilant, saying that terrorism continued to be a threat to Indonesia.

The number of deaths from the insurgency in the Deep South of Thailand, which began in January 2004, stood at over 3,400 as of the end of November 2008. The basic cause of the uprising includes the thorny problem of how ethnic Malay Muslims, who make up the majority of people living in the region, can coexist with other people in predominantly Buddhist Thailand. Hence a fundamental solution of this problem remains far down the road. While small-scale attacks in the region, including armed raids, arson, bombings, and sabotage, show no signs of abating even today, in the year 2008, at least, there were fewer attacks and casualties compared to the previous year. The return of relative calm to the area is generally attributed to stepped-up military action. As political tumult continued to roil the central government, Prime Minister Samak handed sweeping authority to the military to deal with the insurgency. In response, the military increased troop strength and changed areas of deployment to intensify its crackdown on the militants. As a result, it succeeded in reducing the number of violent incidents. And, although the Thai government will not officially confirm it (because it considers the insurgency to be a purely domestic problem), the press reported that Vice President Yusuf Kalla of Indonesia had mediated a meeting between members of militant groups and officials of the Thai government, which was held in the outskirts of Jakarta in September 2008.

In the Philippines, the possibility of peace in Mindanao once again faded into the distance as peace negotiations broke down between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the extremist Islamic group operating in

Mindanao. The Philippine government had been negotiating with the MILF since it entered into a ceasefire agreement with the group in 2003. In November 2007, both parties agreed to expanded boundaries for the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and to follow up this agreement with the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) on August 5, 2008. However, on August 4, the Supreme Court of the Philippines issued a temporary restraining order against the signing of the MOA-AD in response to a lawsuit filed by local officials seeking to block the agreement. The decision by the Supreme Court led the government to dissolve its MILF negotiating team and caused heavy fighting between government forces and the MILF to resume. On October 14, the Supreme Court declared the MOA-AD to be unconstitutional, which meant that negotiations between the government and the MILF on expansion of the ARMM are now back to square one. With a quick compromise in peace negotiations between the government and the MILF now unlikely, sporadic hostilities between the two sides will probably continue. The International Monitoring Team (IMT), which since its establishment in October 2004 had played a major role in improving the security situation in Mindanao, was also affected adversely. At the end of November, Malaysia, one of the IMT's key countries, withdrew its forces. The Malaysian government had for many years played the role of mediator between the Philippine government and the MILF. This demonstration of its intentions to withdraw by Malaysia is widely seen as an action aimed at encouraging the Philippine government to move forward in the negotiations. In fact, Malaysia has indicated that it will return to the IMT when progress is achieved in the talks.

Joint military training between the United States and the Philippines took the form of anti-terrorism exercises aimed at dealing with the MILF and Abu Sayyaf, another extremist Islamic organization operating in Mindanao. A report issued in June 2008 by the Combating Terrorism Center of the US Military Academy in West Point concluded that the threat from Abu Sayyaf was declining, possibly because of the success of search-and-destroy operations by the Armed Forces of the Philippines, which was receiving military assistance from the United States, including the joint training. Among the best known of the regular training exercises between the Philippines and the United States is "Balikatan." In 2008, the Balikatan exercises were held in Central and Western Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and Palawan from February 18 to March 3, with 6,000 US troops and 2,000 troops

from the Philippines participating. Also, Australia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Brunei participated as observers. During Balikatan 2008, the Philippine and US armies offered free medical care and constructed and repaired community infrastructure, including schools, as humanitarian assistance projects for local inhabitants. Further, the participating members in Balikatan conducted exercises for relief operations in natural disasters, combined staff exercises aimed at strengthening maritime security, and field training.