

# NEITHER FRIEND NOR FOE

Myanmar's Relations  
With Thailand Since 1988  
A View From Yangon

IDSS Monograph No. 1

Maung Aung Myoe



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MYANMAR'S RELATIONS WITH  
THAILAND SINCE 1988

A VIEW FROM YANGON

MAUNG AUNG MYOE

INSTITUTE OF DEFENCE AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

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# DEDICATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This work is dedicated to  
DR. KHIN MAUNG NYUNT  
To whom I owe everlasting gratitude



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# GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

ABSDF	All Burma Student Democratic Front	KRC	Karen Refugee Committee
ABSU	All-Burma Student Union	LID	Light Infantry Division
APC	Armoured Personnel Carriers	MLRS	Multiple Launch Rocket System
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	MOC	Military Operation Command
ATS	amphetamine-type stimulants	MTA	Mong Thai Army
BBC	Burma Border Consortium	NDF	National Democratic Front
BCG	Burma Co-ordinating Group	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
CCT	Christ in Thailand	NMSP	New Mon State Party
CIA	Country Intelligence Agency	NSC	National Security Council
CIPA	Counter Intelligence of Public Affairs	PNO	Pao National Organisation
CRS	Catholic Care Service	PSLA	Palaung State Liberation Army
DAB	Democratic Alliance of Burma	RBC	Regional Border Committee
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency	RDF	rapid deployment force
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army	ROC	Regional Operation Command
DPNS	Democratic Party for New Society	SCNR	State Council for National Reconciliation
IRC	International Rescue Committee	SEC	South East Command
JBC	Joint Boundary Commission	SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
JCBC	Joint Commission on Bilateral Co-operation	SSA	Shan State Army
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service	SSNA	Shan State National Army
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army	SURA	Shan United Revolutionary Army
KNLP	Kayan New Land Party	TBC	Township Border Committees
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party	TOC-B	Tactical Operation Command Bases
KNU	Karen National Union	UNDCP	United Nations Drug Control Programme
KNUP	Karen National Union Party	UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
		UWSA	United Wa State Army
		WNA	Wa National Army

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# INTRODUCTION

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Ever since she regained her independence in January 1948, the Union of Myanmar has declared, and consistently followed, a non-aligned and independent foreign policy. Successive Myanmar governments have managed her foreign relations on the basis of five principles of peaceful coexistence.

- Mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty
- Non-aggression
- Non-interference in each other's internal affairs
- Equality and reciprocity
- Peaceful coexistence

Prior to 1962, the Myanmar government under Prime Minister U Nu was active in international and regional affairs. Since the advent of the Revolutionary Council led by General Ne Win in March 1962, activism in Myanmar foreign policy had become less and less pronounced. Indeed, between 1962 and 1988, the Myanmar government had managed to stay clear of international Cold War politics by following a foreign policy of isolation (as well as self-reliance since 1974). However, with the formation of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in September 1988, later renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in November 1997, the Myanmar government began to adopt a more active approach in foreign relations.

In the context of the principles of peaceful coexistence, Myanmar has pursued a friendly and good neighbourly policy towards its neighbours. The Myanmar and Thai governments established diplomatic relations in 1949. On account of its past encounters with Myanmar, in particular the historical memory of Myanmar sacking the Thai kingdom of Ayudhaya in the 18th century, the Thai government has been cautious in dealing with Myanmar. In Thailand, Myanmar had been portrayed as an enemy of Thailand for

over a century. As a result, while the Myanmar government had never supported any anti-Bangkok insurgent groups, the Thai government had backed the Kuomintang (KMT), a foreign aggressor in Myanmar, and other anti-Yangon insurgent groups. Through this, Thailand has thereby succeeded in securing a fairly effective buffer zone. The existence of formidable insurgent troops along the Myanmar-Thai border had prevented a direct clash between the troops of the two countries. However, once the Myanmar government gained control over the border areas in the early 1990s, bilateral tensions and clashes have become more frequent and intense.

The Thai government adopted a policy of constructive engagement towards Myanmar from late 1988. Although it was not without its imperfections, the Thai government has hoped that such a policy would enhance its national security and, in particular, its border security. However, with the deep-rooted historical animosity on the part of Thailand and Myanmar's memory of Thailand's involvement in anti-Myanmar activities in the recent past, the relationship between the two countries since 1988 has not been completely smooth. Diplomatic disputes and tension have become common features of Myanmar-Thai relations. Myanmar's border with Thailand has become a focus of tension and conflict, and a potential flashpoint on the mainland Southeast Asia.

In this study, I examine the factors and issues that has caused bilateral tensions between Myanmar and Thailand. Owing primarily to a lack of time and access to various documents, this study is not a comprehensive one. Rather it is an examination of the Myanmar government's perspective on Myanmar-Thai relations, in particular the Myanmar government's view of Thailand's constructive engagement policy, the buffer zone policy in Thai national security, the territorial disputes (both land and maritime) between the two countries, the refugee problem and other trans-national issues such as drug trafficking. However, I alone will be responsible for the content of this monograph. Moreover, I should also make it clear that this work does not necessarily represent the view of the Myanmar government. My intention here is to give readers an insight into the Myanmar government's perspective on Myanmar-Thai relations. As I understand that the international community has heard much about the Thai side of the story through the Thai media, I sincerely hope that this study will be able to redress the balance.

# 1

## CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT A MYANMAR PERSPECTIVE

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The Myanmar government has never been completely convinced that the Thai government has followed its policy of constructive engagement consistently.<sup>1</sup> To the Myanmar government, it appears that the Thai government's public rhetoric about constructive engagement is more a smokescreen for its involvement in various anti-Yangon organisations and exploitation of Myanmar resources than a firm foundation for a stable and friendly relationship between the two countries. Myanmar-Thai relations have been managed on the basis of personal diplomacy between the leaders of the two countries. As it increasingly finds inconsistencies and self-contradictions, the Myanmar government has lost trust in Thailand's constructive engagement policy. On the one hand, the Thai government had supported Myanmar for ASEAN membership and went along with other ASEAN members to invite Myanmar to the ASEAN-EC meeting. On the other hand, it has tacitly supported various anti-Yangon organisations. While it was the Thai government who first coined the term "constructive engagement", it was also responsible for destroying its beauty. For the Myanmar government, which follows the five principles of peaceful coexistence, constructive engagement means nothing more than "non-interference in each other's internal affairs" and any deviation from that principle could mean an infringement of national self determination and sovereignty.

### **CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT: THE THEORY**

Officially, the basis of relations between Myanmar and Thailand since late 1988 has been constructive engagement. When Chatichai Chunchavon came to power in Thailand, he laid down the foreign policy principles necessary to govern Thailand's relations with its neighbours, including Myanmar. His famous slogan was to transform Indochina "from battlefield into marketplace". In such a context, the Thai government had laid down three basic objectives in its policy

towards Myanmar.

- To promote a close relationship with Myanmar as a neighbouring country with which it shares a border, for the benefit of security
- To encourage Myanmar to be a good and stable neighbour
- To co-operate with the Myanmar government in various issues of conflict in accordance with the mutual interests of both countries in order to develop close co-operation in economic, social, technical and cultural fields<sup>2</sup>

Based on these objectives, the Thai government pursued a foreign policy towards Myanmar which came to be known as constructive engagement. The underlying rationale of this policy was to encourage political coexistence rather than isolation and criticism as the most effective means to influence positive changes in Myanmar. Engagement with Myanmar by promoting trade and investment would contribute to the changes driven by growth. Amitav Acharya, a scholar on Southeast Asia regional security, has argued that while the nature and scope of the policy of constructive engagement was somewhat obscure, the political restraint it embraced was consistent not only with the ASEAN principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a state but it was also a pragmatic move.<sup>3</sup> At about the same time, on 25 January 1989, echoing Chatichai's vision, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh suggested the creation of *Suwannaphume* (Golden Land) which encompassed the mainland Southeast Asia. The Suwannaphume plan was to make Thailand the economic centre of mainland Southeast Asia. But this proposal did not go any further as neighbouring countries saw it as resonant of Thai hegemonism.<sup>4</sup> Myanmar was also sceptical about the plan as it was redolent of the Greater Thailand Policy of the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> An article in the Myanmar media made this comment.

In the post Cold War period, having realised the changes in political and military situation in some neighbouring countries, together with the said motto of "from battlefield into marketplace", there was a programme with a classical name, "Suwannaphume", the Golden Land. The ultimate objective of the programme was to make Thailand the hub of development when the resource-rich mainland Southeast Asia would transform itself into a golden land in the post Cold War period. In essence, by making Thailand the centre of political, economic and technological development of (the mainland) Southeast Asia, it would exploit natural resources or raw materials from neighbouring countries

and sell Thai finished products back to those countries as markets. A step further in the plan would be to transform Thailand from an economically powerful country into a politically and militarily influential country in the region.<sup>6</sup>

Although constructive engagement has been the official policy of the Thai government towards Myanmar since late 1988, it was only in August 1991 that Thai Foreign Minister Arsa Sarasin coined the term constructive engagement for Thailand's relations with Myanmar. This became the official ASEAN approach as well.<sup>7</sup>

Until early 1992, the relationship between Myanmar and Thailand based on the constructive engagement policy was fairly stable and consistent though there were some problems. Both sides exercised considerable restraint on issues that could escalate into bilateral tensions and clashes. This restraint was due primarily to the close relations between the Thai military commanders, particularly General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, and the Myanmar government leaders. Thai Foreign Minister Arsa Sarasin, at the EEC-ASEAN meeting in Brussels in July 1991, defended the constructive engagement policy and argued that it was the only way to deal with Myanmar, and that Thailand had no choice but to pursue this policy because of the need to maintain border security.<sup>8</sup> He went on to introduce this concept in the UN General Assembly on 2 October 1991. In April 1992, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, Commander-in-chief of the Thai Army and an architect of the February 1991 military coup, concluded that Thailand had to continue the policy of constructive engagement after reviewing Thai policy towards Myanmar and opposed economic sanctions called by western governments.<sup>9</sup> When Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai came to power in mid 1992, the Thai government continued to hold firmly to the constructive engagement policy although there were problems in the border areas. The Thai government supported Myanmar for ASEAN membership. However, it soon began to send conflicting signals to the Myanmar government soon after that.

Ever since its inception, the constructive engagement policy has been criticised from time to time by certain Thai academics and politicians. It was also obvious that Myanmar dissidents abroad and western governments, particularly the United States and the European Union, were very much against the policy from the very beginning. In December 1992, M. R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, who later became Deputy Foreign Minister in 1997, criticised the Thai constructive engagement policy as having failed to bring about

constructive changes inside Myanmar. In his words:

It seems that the constructive engagement Thailand is talking about is just limited to business engagement more than anything else. The constructive element is completely absent. Ultimately it should be that we have to exert all our influence to force the Rangoon authorities to be more liberal. In turn, it will also mean our participation in international groups calling for Burma to liberalise its political system. We must try to put emphasis on the word “constructive”.<sup>10</sup>

Sukhumbhand had also been critical of the Myanmar government and once warned that granting membership to Myanmar would make ASEAN appear to be a “club of dictators” before the international community.<sup>11</sup>

The most serious challenge to the constructive engagement policy came in 1998 when Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan called on ASEAN member states to change their traditional non-intervention approach in each other’s internal affairs to what he called “constructive intervention”. The proposed change, no doubt, had been directed against the Myanmar government. On 12 June 1998, Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan said, “When a matter of domestic concern poses a threat to regional stability, a dose of peer pressure or friendly advice can be helpful.”

Then he proposed that ASEAN should adopt the constructive intervention approach. In fact, the original idea of constructive intervention came from Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in July 1997 but it did not get much attention at that time. Amitav Acharya wrote in the *Nation* that there was no easy alternative to constructive engagement for ASEAN but constructive intervention would be a promising policy course of action.<sup>12</sup> On 22 June 1998, Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan told the Directors-general of the Thai Foreign Ministry that Thailand needed a constructive intervention policy. A Foreign Ministry spokesman told the press that Thailand would pursue a constructive intervention policy that would allow Thailand to express her views on the affairs of other countries.<sup>13</sup> Three days later, the minister softened his position and amended the policy to one of “flexible engagement”. Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan explained:

While we seek to realise our socio-political and economic ideology, if this was to negatively impact the sensitivities

of other countries, then we should try to explain to our friends and neighbouring countries, and seek to obtain their understanding for a more flexible approach among ASEAN countries.<sup>14</sup>

Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand, though he had considerably softened his tone of criticism of the Myanmar government, defended flexible engagement, saying that Thailand was entitled to comment on the situation inside Myanmar. He argued that members of ASEAN should be able to express their views on domestic issues that had regional implications.<sup>15</sup> When it came up for discussion at a meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers, Indonesia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and Malaysia were sharply critical of the flexible engagement policy. The only support for Thailand came from the Philippines. The Myanmar government started a media campaign and warned that any change to ASEAN's long-standing policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries was unacceptable. The official media in Myanmar commented that some ASEAN foreign ministers were being presumptuous. Although the official media in Myanmar maintained a "no specific reference" policy in its comments on Thailand, the Philippines and their respective foreign ministers, one semi-official magazine, *Myet-Khin-Thit* (New Meadow, မြေကင်းသစ်), took a more direct and serious course of criticism.

Notwithstanding the failure to push his proposal through at that meeting, the Thai Foreign Minister declared that he would press ASEAN further to consider his proposal. To the Myanmar government, the Thai government under Chuan Leekpai (1997–2000) had followed the policy of flexible engagement without officially subscribing to it. This became more apparent when Thailand began to take a different stance from other ASEAN countries in defending Myanmar at some international forums, such as the International Labour Organisation and the Human Rights Commission. At a seminar organised by the Supreme Command at the National Defence College on 20 April 2000, Dr. Wittaya Sujaritthanark, former director of the Asian Studies Institute of Chularongkorn University suggested that flexible engagement might be a better policy for Thailand towards Myanmar than constructive engagement. He argued that ASEAN's constructive engagement policy towards Yangon was intended to serve ASEAN's needs, which might not necessarily work for Thailand.<sup>16</sup>

Despite all these indications of changes in its approach to the Myanmar government, the Thai government continued to send



signals that it would support the overall ASEAN policy of constructive engagement with Myanmar. In this context, Thailand stood with ASEAN to invite Myanmar to the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting, which took place in December 2000 after three years of diplomacy. Similarly, on 24 March 2000, at a discussion between the Thai Army and the National Security Council (NSC), when the army urged the Thai government to review the policy of constructive engagement with Myanmar, Mr. Kachadpai Burusphat, the Secretary-General of the NSC, defended the policy. In response to accusations by senior Thai Army commanders that the Myanmar government was being uncooperative over the repatriation of Myanmar refugees, Kachadpai stated that the Myanmar government had been co-operative in exchanging information and cracking down on drug laboratories along the Myanmar-Thai border and the two countries were on the right track in helping each other to combat drug trafficking.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in theory, constructive engagement has remained the official foreign policy of the Thai government towards Myanmar. I will now present the practical aspects of the policy of constructive engagement.

## CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT: THE PRACTICE

About three months after the SLORC came to power, a high-powered Thai delegation led by General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, then Acting Supreme Commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, paid a visit to Yangon on 14 December 1988. He was the first foreign dignitary to visit Myanmar amid criticisms of the SLORC's crackdown on the 1988 demonstrations. On this occasion, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh expressed his brotherly love for the Myanmar military leaders. In his speech at the *Dagon Yeiktha* (a guest house) of the Ministry of Defence in Yangon, the general said:

My dear brother (Akogyi), first of all, I don't know how to address you. Should I address you as His Excellency, the Prime Minister, or Excellency the Minister of Defence or Minister of Foreign Affairs? But it is indeed very kind of you to address me as a brother... You yourself and all my Myanmar brothers are now working very hard for peace, stability and prosperity of the Union of Myanmar. So allow me to thank you and all my brothers for a very, very warm welcome and very wonderful hospitality.<sup>18</sup>

For the Myanmar government, this timely visit by General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh was a much needed boost to public relations.

The general and military-connected businesses were handsomely rewarded with logging concessions, fishing rights and agreements on border trading.

As mentioned earlier, there were some problems in relations between the two countries over which both sides exercised considerable restraint and kept relations on track, consistent with the policy of constructive engagement. A Myanmar newspaper article pointed out that “since the early 1990s, the Thai government had claimed that it followed the policy of constructive engagement but it was not completely smooth at all; the problem was that some black sheep within the Thai political circle made self-contradicting activities.”<sup>19</sup> Here, I would like to discuss some issues that could have escalated into tension and damage the relationship between the two countries.

According to Myanmar government sources, in September 1989, Lieutenant Colonel Wah Hsin, chief of the County Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Mae Sot, masterminded a plan to kidnap the deputy Myanmar military attaché in Bangkok, Major Win Aung. However, the whole operation was aborted at the last minute.<sup>20</sup> (Though the Myanmar intelligence community knew of this plot as early as 1990, it was kept secret until late 1999.) A month later, in October 1989, the Alliance for Democratic Solidarity (*Da-Nya-Ta*) and other insurgent groups along the Myanmar-Thai border got together and drew up a plan, known as Operation Direct-Link, to take over the state. They called their grouping the Counter Intelligence of Public Affairs (CIPA). The CIPA had two operational areas – Payathonezu and the Karen Revolutionary Territory. The main objective of the CIPA was “to infiltrate Myanmar, give support to malcontents in the country and to tarnish the prestige of the Government by provoking unrest with arson, robbery and other subversive acts in towns and villages.”<sup>21</sup> The D-days of Operation Direct-Link were on 13, 14 and 15 November 1989. If the plan had been successfully executed, the State Council for National Reconciliation (SCNR) would have been formed. In this regard, at a press conference on 5 October 1999, the Myanmar government stated:

Through the assistance of Colonel Verapon from the Thai Armed Forces Special Central Intelligence and Lieutenant Colonel Wah Hsin of County Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Mae Sot, a Thai Army unit under the Third Army at Chiangmai supplied the weapons and equipment. The *Tatmadaw* (as the Myanmar Armed Forces are called)

received intelligence and took pre-emptive measures.<sup>22</sup>

In connection with Operation Direct-Link, the Tatmadaw captured five 9mm pistols, three revolvers, four sniper rifles, 88 sets of walkie-talkies, 14 sets of Yaesu walkie-talkies, 4 sets of Yaesu communication equipment and two sets of Kenwood communication equipment, among others.<sup>23</sup> Again, the whole affair was kept secret until 1999.

Throughout 1989 and 1990, the Thai government had tolerated to a certain extent artillery shells fired by the Tatmadaw landing on Thai soil. In some instances, it had also turned a blind eye to intrusion by Myanmar troops into Thailand to encircle insurgent strongholds from the rear. Close co-operation between the two countries, particularly between the two armed forces, had helped resolve issues that could have easily escalated into tension and armed conflict. For example, in July 1989, when rumours about an invasion and the stationing of Myanmar troops on Thai soil were reported in Thai newspapers, the Thai Foreign Ministry contacted the Myanmar ambassador in Bangkok (at midnight) and sought an explanation without first going public. The Myanmar ambassador rang Lieutenant General Tin Oo, Chief of Staff of the Myanmar Army, right away. The Chief of Staff asked the ambassador to inform the Thai Army that the troops were not from Myanmar. Insurgents were masquerading as Myanmar troops and Myanmar troops would block them if the Thai Army launched an attack. The Myanmar ambassador immediately passed the information onto the Thai authorities. A similar incident involving the burning of a Thai village in September 1989 was also resolved peacefully.<sup>24</sup> The Thai Army also waived compensation arising from damage caused by the Myanmar troops in 1989. The Thai government also helped to repatriate some Myanmar students who had run into insurgent controlled areas for fear of being prosecuted for their role in the 1988 demonstrations. Throughout 1990 and 1991 there were several exchanges of visits by senior government officials of both sides.

By mid 1992, however, relations between the two countries began to turn sour. The capture of a disputed region, Hill Point 1542, in the Bokeyyin area (according to the Thai version, it was in Thailand's Chumphone province) in early 1992 by Myanmar troops created some tension between the two countries and it almost escalated into a border war. The Thai media attacked the Myanmar government for alleged intrusion and occupation of Thai territory. Some Thai politicians and senior military personnel took a tough stand and even planned to use force to resolve the issue. The tension,

however, was defused peacefully and diplomatically in late 1992.

In February 1993, the Thai government allowed eight Nobel laureates, including Bishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa, Dr. Oscar Arias from Costa Rica and the Dalai Lama from Tibet, to visit refugee camps along the Myanmar-Thai border. They met insurgents and expatriates in Thailand. The Nobel laureates denounced the Myanmar government for violation of human rights and demanded the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel laureate and leader of the National League for Democracy, who had been under house arrest since July 1989, and other political prisoners.<sup>25</sup> Thai Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri also joined the Nobel laureates by saying that Thailand supported the release of political detainees and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Although this was clearly not in line with the principle of constructive engagement, Foreign Minister Prasong said that Thailand would continue to pursue constructive engagement with Myanmar though it may not agree with Yangon on every issue.<sup>26</sup> When Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan was in Yangon for the Joint Boundary Commission (JBC) meeting, Myanmar Foreign Minister U Ohn Gyaw told him that the Myanmar government was not happy with the comments and the widely publicised tour of the Nobel laureates along the Myanmar-Thai border. But he said that the Myanmar government understood that Thailand had its own foreign policy.

Another bilateral tension came up in early 1994. The 1992 edition of *Longman's Dictionary of English Language and Culture* had an entry for Bangkok as "the capital city and main port of Thailand and it is famous for its temples and other beautiful buildings, and is also often mentioned as a place where there are a lot of prostitutes". By July 1993, angry politicians in Thailand had protested to the publishers for painting Bangkok as a world centre for international sex tourism.<sup>27</sup> At that time, Thailand was notorious for sex tourism and travel agencies in a number of countries were organising sex tours to Bangkok. In order to improve Thailand's image abroad, the Thai media began to publish articles portraying many of the prostitutes working in Thailand as being from other mainland Southeast Asian countries, particularly Myanmar and Cambodia. Articles reported that the bad economic situation caused by poor economic policies of the Myanmar government pushed young Myanmar women to work in Thai brothels. By early 1994, the Myanmar government had become so offended by the coverage on prostitution in Thailand by Thai newspapers, which basically blamed it on Myanmar, that it let its censor board pass a story that attacked the Thai establishment.

In the February 1994 issue of *Myet-Khin-Thit*, a popular magazine in Myanmar widely believed to be connected to the Myanmar intelligence community, part six of a story entitled “Adrift” (အလွတ်အပ်) was run. The author of the story criticised Thai culture, insinuating that Thai society was so debased that even Princess Sirindhorn would have been a prostitute if she were not born to the Thai king.<sup>28</sup> The story was constructed on the basis of a dialogue between a Vietnamese and a Myanmar (of the Kayin/Karen race).<sup>29</sup> The article drew strong protest from the Thai embassy in Yangon, especially on the comment on Princess Sirindhorn. The magazine printed an apology in a later issue.

A series of problems took place in 1995. In early 1995, during operations against the strongholds of Kayin/Karen insurgents, Myanmar troops encountered the Thai Army’s artillery fire. Although the Myanmar media generated a psychological warfare, it exercised great restraint. It avoided the specific mention of the involvement of the Thai authorities in the articles. This unhappy incident was further compounded by a number of incidents along the Myanmar-Thai border. First, the Myanmar government was not happy about the Thai government’s protection of the Mong Thai Army (MTA) led by Khun Sa. The MTA attacked Tachileik, a border town across Mae Sai, in early March 1995. When the Tatmadaw launched a counter-offensive, they ran into Thai territory. The Myanmar government believed that the Thai authorities gave the MTA protection. This triggered a media offensive against Thailand in Myanmar. Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1 of the SLORC remarked that “it is difficult to read the position of a neighbouring country toward Myanmar over the Tachileik issue”.<sup>30</sup> Another incident was the illegal encroachment of Myanmar territory in the Myawaddy Friendship Bridge area. As a result, the Myanmar government asked the Thai government to halt all construction activities. A third problem was the murder of several Myanmar fishermen in Thailand. The Myanmar government protested to the Thai government and asked for an investigation. In view of these incidents, the Myanmar government closed border checkpoints.

The coming of General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh to power in 1996 eased much of the tension between the two countries. In order to foster closer and friendlier relations with the Chavalit government, the Myanmar government reopened border checkpoints and permitted construction of the bridge to resume. The Myawaddy Friendship Bridge was finally opened on 15 August 1997. It was followed by the release of a few Thai fishermen detained in Myanmar

prisons. However, the return of Chuan Leekpai to power in late 1997 again changed the diplomatic atmosphere of Myanmar-Thai relations. By mid 1998, when Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan tried to introduce constructive intervention to ASEAN and to apply the same principle to Myanmar-Thai relations, the Myanmar government responded with criticism of the Thai government. The relationship between the two countries deteriorated further as the Thai government became more and more critical of Myanmar domestic policies. It plunged to its lowest point after the seizure of the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok on 1 October 1999.

A group of armed men entered the Myanmar Chancery in Bangkok posing as applicants for visas and took some 40 people hostage, including some diplomats.<sup>31</sup> The hostage drama ended peacefully when Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand escorted the terrorists to safety at the Myanmar-Thai border. But the incident caused considerable damage to Myanmar-Thai relations. Unprecedented leniency and almost favourable treatment were shown to the hostage takers by the Thai authorities and certain comments made by the Thai Minister of Interior annoyed the Myanmar authorities. In Myanmar's view, the Thai authorities were unusually sympathetic towards the terrorists throughout the hostage drama.<sup>32</sup> The Myanmar media even suggested that some local Thai authorities might have been involved or co-operated with the hostage takers in the whole saga. The *Wunthanu* journal wrote that "by seeing them (Thai police officers) one had the feeling of a movie-goer watching a film where the ending was already known".<sup>33</sup> The release of information on Operation Direct-Link of 1989, in which two Thai intelligence officers were involved, at the press conference on 5 October 1999 was a hint that the Myanmar authorities were suspicious that there was involvement of local Thai authorities in the hostage drama. This was followed a week later by the publication of a newspaper article on the involvement of Thai intelligence in a plan to kidnap a Myanmar military attaché.<sup>34</sup>

According to Saw Tin Oo, who was arrested by the Myanmar authorities on 1 March 2000 in Myawaddy in connection with the seizure of the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok:

The seizure of the Myanmar embassy was pre-arranged. The group discussed and co-ordinated the plan in the Maneeloy camp. As the group decided to return to the jungle near the Myanmar border by helicopter lift after the seizure, they made two helicopter landing zones near the Kamarpalaw camp. Though there were seven checkpoints



between Maneelay and Bangkok, none of these checkpoints inspected the baggage of the group. At the time of the embassy seizure, Thai police took the bag from Saw Tin Oo and handed it to the group (inside the embassy).<sup>35</sup>

The Myanmar authorities were puzzled as to how the hostage takers could know that they would definitely return by helicopter. Saw Tin Oo's story of a pre-arranged helipad was confirmed by the Thai helicopter pilot, Police Major Somyot Buaman.<sup>36</sup> The Myanmar authorities generally had a strong suspicion about the involvement of local Thai authorities in the hostage drama and viewed it as a conspiracy.

A more serious problem arising from the hostage drama was a comment made by Thai Interior Minister Sanan Kachornprasart. In a press interview, he stated: "They (the hostage takers) are not terrorists; they are students who are fighting for democracy. We have given them safe passage to their own country. We don't consider them to be terrorists. They are student activists."<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, the Interior Minister said that as Thailand was a free and democratic country anyone was entitled to freedom of expression and there would be no discrimination of whatever nationality or whoever one was. It was all right as long as one did not break the law or commit a crime.<sup>38</sup> Incensed by such an indulgent comment on the hostage takers by a Thai minister, the Myanmar government launched a media offensive on Thai policy towards terrorism and sponsored two mass rallies in Yangon and Mandalay to denounce terrorist acts.

A number of articles critical of Thai policy and its treatment of the terrorist group appeared in Myanmar newspapers. In response to Interior Minister Sanan's presumptuous remark, one article asked, "The licensed prostitution and booming sex industry is adequate for manifestation of Thailand as a free and democratic country but is there any democratic country in the world that does not consider the unlawful seizure and ransacking of a diplomatic mission a violation of law or committing a criminal act?"<sup>39</sup> The author of the article related an event in September 1989. A Myanmar gem trader (smuggler), while making payment in a tailor shop opposite the Mae Sot police station, dropped a Thai currency note (the baht) and caught it underfoot on the floor so as not to let it get blown away. The shop owner called the police and had the trader arrested. The gem trader was charged with insulting the Thai king because the note bears the king's portrait. The gem trader was released only after he paid a bribe of fifty thousand baht. The author added that Thais



would applaud if someone put a folded baht note into the panty of a stripper in Sai Cowboy in Bangkok, a notorious place for strip joints, live sex shows and brothels. The writer then went on to ask who had committed a criminal offence, the gem trader or the terrorists who seized the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok.<sup>40</sup>

One of the casualties of the hostage drama was the closure of border checkpoints. The Myanmar government closed border checkpoints on 2 October as a security precaution along the border.<sup>41</sup> According to Thai sources, the closure of the border checkpoints cost Thailand more than 50 million baht a day in lost revenue.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, according to Suchart Triratanawattana, vice president of the Tak Chamber of Commerce, such a closure also cost Thai traders at least 10 million baht a day.<sup>43</sup> The Myanmar government also terminated fishing rights for Thai trawlers. The ban on fishing cost a loss in revenue of about 45 million baht a day for Thailand.<sup>44</sup> Although pressure and lobby from the Thai business community, especially from the provinces along the Myanmar-Thai border, to negotiate a compromise with the Myanmar government mounted, Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand said, "Thais are in no hurry to reopen the border as there is no justification for the Burmese (Myanmar) to close it."

At the same time, the Thai media tried to pressurise the Myanmar government to change its stand by telling them that it would lose revenue from the fishing industry unless it allowed fishing access to the Thai trawlers. The Myanmar government was not moved. The Myanmar ambassador in Bangkok told the press that unless the Thai authorities arrested the five terrorists, normalcy would not return to Myanmar-Thai relations. Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai responded, "No one can tell us what to do or what not to do."<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan went to Yangon at the invitation of the Myanmar Foreign Minister in late November 1999 and negotiated the reopening of the border checkpoints. Though the border checkpoints were reopened on 24 November, no fishing rights in Myanmar waters were granted to Thai trawlers. It was also agreed that, in future, advance notice should be given whenever there would be any halting of border activities, such as a border closure. In the course of discussion, the Myanmar government raised the issue of the terrorists responsible for the seizure of the Myanmar embassy and told the Thai Foreign Minister that Myanmar would leave it up to Thailand to deal with them according to Thai law. On his return to Bangkok, Foreign Minister Surin said, "From now on, we hope that our relations will be on a formal footing, and both sides look

forward to further co-operation and better relations in the spirit of ASEAN and in the spirit of good neighbourliness.”<sup>46</sup>

Only a few months after the seizure of the Myanmar embassy, another hostage drama took place in Thailand. On 24 January 2000, a group of ten terrorists seized the Ratchaburi Hospital and took hostages. The Thai government took firm measures and the hostage drama ended swiftly with all ten terrorists killed. The whole saga lasted about 25 hours. The Myanmar government did not comment on the way the Thai authorities handled it but sent a congratulatory note to the Thai government. However, this issue had a further complication as the Thai authorities began to link the hostage issue to Myanmar’s domestic politics. Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand said that Thailand needed to review its border policy with Myanmar and to re-evaluate Thai foreign policy towards Myanmar.<sup>47</sup> The Thai authorities began to blame the Myanmar government indirectly by implying that policies of the Myanmar government caused “the desperate situation of the Myanmar dissidents along the border”<sup>48</sup> and triggered the terrorist activities. Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai commented that “these people had been in conflict with the Myanmar government and we were in a difficult position because they had been forced out of the border areas adjoining our territory.”<sup>49</sup> Although the Myanmar government did not make any official protest or criticism on these commentaries, it started a media campaign and informed the Myanmar public about a sharp difference with Thai policy on terrorism, especially when it came to Thai national interests. Some articles mentioned in passing that it was the Thai government that kept refugees and insurgents and that the Myanmar government had nothing to do with it; Thais were creating their own problems.<sup>50</sup> Some articles sent a message that “you refugees and dissidents in Thailand could never expect that Thais would treat you well unless you were useful to their national interest.”<sup>51</sup> Some articles highlighted the extra-judicial killing of the ten hostage takers on 24 January 2000 by Thai security forces as an example of the Thai government’s ‘humanitarian’ policy. When Thai government spokesman Akapol Sorasuchart defended the Thai commandos against accusations that they shot hostage takers in the head (in cold blood) after they had surrendered by saying that the commandos were trained to shoot at heads, one article in a Myanmar newspaper commented that the Thai government should send the commandos to the Olympics for the shooting competition. If they could shoot moving targets right in the head, they would surely win gold medals.

A few months later, the Myanmar media came out with another offensive against the Thai government when the latter invited British Foreign Minister Robin Cook to visit a refugee camp along the Myanmar-Thai border and Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand made comments about the Myanmar government in late April 2000. The deputy foreign minister, who accompanied Robin Cook to the refugee camp, told the press that the British Foreign Secretary should know the real situation of Myanmar refugees and of Myanmar itself for the purpose of seeking a solution. He also said that Myanmar refugees were not an issue that concerned only Thailand but an international one. Moreover, he said that the Myanmar government should learn from Thailand about treating refugees. Apparently, Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand tried to draw international attention and to pressurise the Myanmar government. The Myanmar media retorted that refugee camps were sources of revenue for the Thai government and the Thai exploited the refugees for cheap labour.<sup>52</sup>

Tension between the two countries escalated further in early 2001 and the relationship reached its nadir since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1949. Tension became so high that both sides came close to militarising along the border. In early 2001, in addition to alleged Thai military involvement and support for anti-Yangon insurgents, inflammatory comments made by Lieutenant General Wattanachai Chaimuenwong, commander of the Thai Third Army, exacerbated the already sour relations between the two countries. Myanmar military commanders in Yangon, apparently incensed by the remarks of General Surayud Chulanont, Commander-in-chief of the Royal Thai Army, and Lieutenant General Wattanachai Chaimuenwong, commander of the Third Army, fired off terse statements. The Myanmar media launched an offensive against the Royal Thai Army in general and the Third Army commander in particular with a series of articles attacking them. General Wattanachai Chaimuenwong was targeted and singled out in the media offensive, probably because of his stunning comments on Myanmar officers. On one occasion he said that "all Burmese (Myanmar) unit commanders who caused the conflict should (be) brought before a firing squad".<sup>53</sup> During a press conference on 3 March 2001, Major General Kyaw Win, Deputy Chief of Defence Services Intelligence, said that the Myanmar government would like to be friends with the new Thai government headed by Thaksin Shinawatra but they have to see whether the Thai government could control or influence the behaviour of the Third Army. He said that "as long as the Third Army remained unchanged in its behaviour, there will be no meaningful solution to the present

problem".<sup>54</sup> A few days later, an article appeared in the *Bangkok Post* which made reference to remarks by "senior officers from the Third Army" saying that the bombing of a Thai Airways Boeing 737 about to be boarded by the Prime Minister could be a revenge attack by the Myanmar Army. Although this accusation was rejected outright by the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok, an unspecified Myanmar embassy source stated that "if Myanmar wanted to settle a score with Thailand, it was not with the Prime Minister but with the commander of the Third Army".<sup>55</sup>

In February 2001, the Tatmadaw launched an offensive against "narco-insurgents led by Yut Sik".<sup>56</sup> During the fighting the Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA), or the Shan State Army (SSA), troops fled into Thai territory, specifically the area controlled by the Third Army, for protection. The Third Army commander gave them protection. The SURA, with the active support from the Thai Army, launched artillery attacks on Myanmar territory (both military and civilian targets), from inside Thailand. The Myanmar government regarded the attacks on the E-7 hillock on 11 February 2001 and on the PB-1 outpost on 20 April 2001 as deliberate acts of aggression by the Thai Army. Furthermore, the Myanmar government accused Thai troops of being behind the attacks on the E-7 hillock, the BP-1 outpost and the Pachee outpost of the Tatmadaw.<sup>57</sup> It was claimed that the BP-1 outpost was bombarded with over 500 artillery shells during attacks between 23 and 25 April 2001. The artillery fire was undertaken by Thai artillery in the guise of the SURA.<sup>58</sup> On 10 May 2001, a Thai Air Force F-16 jet fired a rocket into a Myanmar border town, Mong Yun. The United Wa State Army (UWSA) and residents of Mong Yun retaliated with artillery fire on the royal project site in Doi Angkhang.<sup>59</sup>

With regard to the incidents along the Myanmar-Thai border, Major General Kyaw Win said:

The situation along the border could remain tense as long as Thailand continues its policy of maintaining a buffer zone. As long as this policy is being pursued, it would be difficult to defuse the situation, and our two militaries will not be able to work together. We understand that the present issue is bigger than the normal border issues and needs to be addressed at a higher level. Our two governments can co-ordinate with each other to improve the situation but it is still unclear whether the present administration has any control over the Third Army. There is a friendship between us and the Thaksin government. Our friendship with some

of its leaders go back a long way and our armies understand each other. We give priority to friendship. We have never allowed anti-Thai elements to establish bases on our soil.<sup>60</sup>

Major General Kyaw Win warned that as long as the Third Army did not change its attitude, improvement of the border situation would be slow. He intimated that relations would be better under the new government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, whose Defence Minister, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, was a former prime minister who had close ties with Myanmar.<sup>61</sup> In spite of the fact that the Thaksin government came up with a policy of forward engagement, tension remained high and it further escalated into a war of words when Lieutenant General Wattanachai Chaimuenwong continued to make inflammatory comments about the Myanmar government and its leadership. Several articles criticising the Thai government also appeared in Myanmar newspapers. One article, written by Dr. Ma Tin Win, was particularly critical of a former Thai king and drew much protest from the Thai government. The article wrote:

Why did King Maha Mongkut easily sign the agreement as bidden by Bowring (in 1855)? I can say one thing for sure. If he gave all the things the British wanted, he did not lose the throne. He thus gave away the country to keep his throne. For the British, there were no expenses for war. Nor were there management costs. By keeping the King of Siam on the throne, the British could ask him for whatever they wanted. Siam was not enslaved. If I have to say with constraints, its jurisdiction and legal tradition were broken, and its monetary system was seriously compromised. It has in fact become a real slave. As King Mongkut was on the throne of Siam, there was no one who would say that Siam was enslaved. Its people would not know it. But it is a real slave. It is nothing else but a real slave.<sup>62</sup>

On 24 May 2001, the Thai government delivered an aide memoire to the Myanmar ambassador in Bangkok, which stated that the “articles were flawed by ingrained prejudice and total disregard for historical accuracy”. It further stated that “the Burmese government must take appropriate measures to remedy the situation and prevent any recurrence of such an abomination, and to cease the ongoing campaign by Burmese state-run media organisations to publish hostile articles and reports designed to incite hatred between the two nations.” The Myanmar ambassador replied that the articles did not reflect the government policy and were written

by individuals. He also pointed out that there were articles in Thai dailies that insulted Myanmar. In fact, Thai writers had been portraying Myanmar kings as thieves, robbers and demons in their history textbooks and movies. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, who is also of blue blood and a former deputy foreign minister, demanded an "official and unconditional apology" from the Myanmar government for the articles.<sup>63</sup>

However, despite serious protests from the Thai government, Myanmar newspapers continued to publish more articles criticising former Thai kings and the Thai nation for a few more days. On 29 May 2001, the Myanmar ambassador in Bangkok delivered letters from the Secretary-1 of the SPDC and the Foreign Minister, which stated that the Myanmar government would look into the matter and fix the problem.<sup>64</sup> A long-term observer of Myanmar-Thai relations commented that "perhaps this unhappy incident could have been avoided if Thai generals, particularly Lieutenant General Wattanachai Chaimuenwong, and the Thai media did not start making one inflammatory comment after another on the Myanmar government; it has now become tit for tat."<sup>65</sup> Dr. Ma Tin Win, in her article which appeared in the *Kyemon Daily* on 30 May 2001, reminded Thais that "if they do not want others to utter profanity against their beloved Majesties, they should refrain from speaking out of turn and watch their tongues".<sup>66</sup>

Another retaliation came in March 2001 when the Myanmar government instructed the media to use the words "Yodaya" (the old Myanmar term for Ayudhaya) and "Siam" rather than "Thai" or "Thailand". A Myanmar newspaper article complained about the use of "Burma" or "Phama" in Thai dailies.<sup>67</sup> In his meeting with the press in Thailand on 25 November 1999, Myanmar Foreign Minister Win Aung requested the media in Thailand to use "Myanmar" and "Yangon" instead of "Burma" and "Rangoon". He said that persistent use of the name "Burma" by the two English dailies in Thailand, the *Nation* and the *Bangkok Post*, created confusion among the younger generation. The Myanmar government had complained about the Thai media's use of the term "Burma" rather than "Myanmar" to the Thai authorities for some time. The Myanmar Foreign Minister said he understood that this could be the policy of the media but also said that he would like his request to be noted.<sup>68</sup> However, both the *Nation* and *Bangkok Post* continued to use the terms "Burma" and "Rangoon".

In early June 2001, the Myanmar government introduced three



supplementary textbooks on Myanmar-Siamese relations for primary and secondary students in which Thais were portrayed as lazy, servile and frivolous. The textbooks stated: “Thai people are given to fun and appreciation of beauty. They are disinclined to self-reliance and hard work.”

Supplementary history textbooks for secondary students cover subjects on Thai social behaviours, the Myanmar-Thai wars in the pre-colonial period, the Greater Thai Policy of the pre-World War II period, Thailand’s support of anti-Myanmar organisations (including insurgents), Thai involvement in drug trafficking and exploitation of Myanmar resources. This socialisation process will certainly have a long-term negative impact on Myanmar-Thai relations. Instead of time healing all wounds, it has now become “time wounds all heals”.

## MECHANISMS REGULATING RELATIONS

Cross-border tensions have occurred despite the existence of two types of mechanisms to regulate Myanmar-Thai relations. One is the *de jure* mechanism and the other, the *de facto* mechanism. Since early 1989, both the Thai and Myanmar governments have set up mechanisms for smooth co-operation between the two countries. The existing *de jure* mechanisms for bilateral consultation and co-operation between Myanmar and Thailand include the Joint Commission on Bilateral Co-operation (JCBC), the Joint Boundary Committee (JBC), the Regional Border Committee (RBC) and the Township Border Committees (TBC).

The agreement to establish the Myanmar-Thailand Joint Commission on Bilateral Co-operation was signed in Bangkok on 21 January 1993. The JCBC is co-chaired by ministers for foreign affairs from both countries. It aims to facilitate, consult and co-operate in areas of mutual interests. Since the first JCBC meeting in September 1993, there have been five JCBC meetings to date. The two sides discussed co-operation in the fields of culture, health, education, agriculture, tourism, trade, investment, finance, forestry, communications, fishery, energy and narcotic suppression.

**Table 1.1 – Meetings of the Joint Commission on Bilateral Co-operation**

No.	Meeting	Date	Venue
1	1st Meeting	16–18 September 1993	Yangon
2	2nd Meeting	1–2 December 1994	Bangkok



3	3rd Meeting	5–7 August 1996	Yangon
4	4th Meeting	7–9 December 1997	Bangkok
5	5th Meeting	23–24 August 1999	Yangon

The Myanmar-Thailand Joint Boundary Committee, which is co-chaired by the deputy foreign ministers of both countries, was formed in 1991 to resolve boundary issues between Myanmar and Thailand. Since the first JBC meeting in February 1993, there have been four meetings.

**Table 1.2 – Meetings of the Joint Boundary Committee**

No.	Meeting	Date	Venue
1	1st Meeting	18–21 February 1993	Yangon
2	2nd Meeting	29–30 March 1995	Bangkok
3	3rd Meeting	18–19 August 1997	Bangkok
4	4th Meeting	4–6 May 1999	Yangon

The Myanmar-Thai Regional Border Committee (RBC) was established in 1989. The aim was to further strengthen existing bonds of friendship between the two countries and to give full and practical effect to the maintenance of peace and security along the common border. Since its first meeting in September 1989 the RBC has met 20 times, including two special meetings. The terms of reference of the RBC are:

- to consult on measures which may be necessary to resolve common security problems and other specific problems which may arise in the border area;
- to ensure the execution of measures by the competent authorities and for its effective co-ordination and supervision; and
- to hold meetings as and when border situations arise.

On the Myanmar side, the RBCs have been formed according to military commands, namely the Regional Border Committee (Eastern Command) and the Regional Border Committee (South East Command) with the respective military commanders as chairmen. There have been two new RBCs on the Myanmar side since 1996 as two new regional commands, the Triangle Region Command and the Coastal Region Command, were opened in Keng Tung and Myeik respectively. At the last three RBC meetings (the 16th, the 17th and the 18th), the Myanmar delegations were headed by Major General Thein Sein, commander of the Triangle Region Command. The Thai

side also has the First, Third and Fourth Army Areas RBCs.

**Table 1.3 – List of Regional Border Committee meetings**

No.	Meeting	Venue	Date
1	1st RBCM	Chiengmai (Thailand)	19–20 Sep 1989
2	2nd RBCM	Taunggyi (Myanmar)	12–13 Dec 1989
3	3rd RBCM	Pitsanulok (Thailand)	13–14 Mar 1990
4	4th RBCM	Mawlmyaung (Myanmar)	14–15 Aug 1990
5	5th RBCM	Kanchanaburi (Thailand)	23–24 Apr 1991
6	6th RBCM	Taunggyi (Myanmar)	12–13 Nov 1991
7	1st SRBCM*	Bangkok (Thailand)	18–19 Aug 1992
8	7th RBCM	Chiengmai (Thailand)	16–17 Nov 1992
9	2nd SRBCM*	Yangon (Myanmar)	8 Dec 1992
10	8th RBCM	Mawlamyaing (Myanmar)	8–11 Nov 1993
11	9th RBCM	Bangkok (Thailand)	25–29 Apr 1994
12	10th RBCM	Taunggyi (Myanmar)	5–8 Nov 1994
13	11th RBCM	Phitsanulok (Thailand)	24–27 Apr 1995
14	12th RBCM	Mawlmyaung (Myanmar)	19–22 Feb 1996
15	13th RBCM	Phitsanulok (Thailand)	18–21 Jun 1996
16	14th RBCM	Taunggyi (Myanmar)	11–13 Dec 1996
17	15th RBCM	Chiengrai (Thailand)	25–30 Aug 1997
18	16th RBCM	Kawthaung (Myanmar)**	22–24 Jul 1998
19	17th RBCM	Phuket (Thailand)	16–17 Mar 1999
20	18th RBCM	Kengtung (Myanmar)	2–4 Apr 2001

\*Special Regional Border Committee Meeting

\*\*Held on the Thahtay Island Resort

The Township Border Committee (TBC) is the subordinate organisation of the RBC. The terms of reference of the TBC are:

- to deal with security matters along the border within their respective jurisdictions;
- to deal with any other specific border problems;
- to establish liaison between the corresponding TBCs of the two sides; and
- to hold meetings as and when circumstances require, at a mutually agreed location.

The TBCs have regular and frequent meetings. Initially the two countries agreed to establish three TBCs each in Myanmar and Thailand respectively. They were Tachileik, Myawaddy and Kawthaung on the Myanmar side and Mae Sai, Mae Sot and Ranong on the Thai side. At the 4th RBC meeting (August 1990), the Thai delegation proposed to establish a TBC at Singkorn Pass in Prachuab Kiri Khan Province (across the border from Maw Taung in Myanmar).

The Myanmar delegation asked its Thai counterpart to suggest an alternative place. However, at the 10th RBC meeting (November 1994), the Thai delegation again proposed to establish a TBC at Singkorn Pass. The Myanmar delegation told its Thai counterpart that Myanmar was not yet ready to establish a TBC at Maw Taung at that stage and that it would take up the proposal when conditions permit in the future. But a few more TBCs were established. On the Myanmar side, two TBCs were formed in Huay Pon Long (Mese) and Phaya Thonzu while on the Thai side, two TBCs were formed in Mae Hong Song and Sanklaburi.

In terms of de facto mechanisms adopted to regulate the relations between Myanmar and Thailand, the group within the Thai government which decides policy issues between the two countries is an important consideration of Myanmar policymakers. As the Myanmar government had closer relations with Thai military personnel, particularly with General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and his colleagues, it preferred to place the Myanmar policy making card in the hands of the Thai military. Apart from personal diplomacy, the Myanmar government considered border trade, fishing rights and logging concessions to be major elements in managing its relations with Thailand.

Since late 1988, the Myanmar government has tried to place Myanmar policy making in the hands of the Thai military or active and retired military personnel. It had succeeded somewhat until around 1998. The Myanmar government gave the most favoured person treatment to Thai military officers. It was usually followed by some bilateral agreements or actions of political or economic significance. In this way, the Thai military continued to exercise influence on the Thai Foreign Ministry with regard to relations with Myanmar. For example, the Myanmar government reopened border checkpoints and trading posts only after General Chettha Thanojara's visit to Yangon in March 1997. During his visit, the general discussed fishing rights, logging concessions and the future of 274 Thai fishermen detained in Myanmar prisons. In November, on another of General Chettha Thanojara's visits to Yangon, the Myanmar government released 98 prisoners. Between 1993 and 2000, the Myanmar government released 469 Thai prisoners from jail.

However, after Chuan Leekpai returned to political office for the second time in 1997, the Myanmar government faced opposition in placing the Myanmar policy card in the hands of Thai military. Chuan Leekpai also held the position of Defence Minister. "In order

to control the Thai Armed Forces, by removing some generals," the Myanmar government believed, "Chuan Leekpai hand-picked and appointed General Mongkol Ampornpisit as Supreme Commander, General Surayud Chulanont as Commander-in-chief of the Thai Army and Lieutenant General Wattanachai Chaimuenwong as commander of the Third Army. These generals are hardliners and have strong anti-Myanmar sentiments."<sup>69</sup> In fact, General Surayud Chulanont was personally hand-picked by Chuan Leekpai to replace General Chettha Thanajaro as army commander-in-chief.<sup>70</sup>

When General Surayud Chulanont became army Commander-in-chief in late 1998, the Thai military left the foreign policy issue to politicians and the Foreign Ministry personnel while the army co-ordinated with the Foreign Ministry. In early April 2000, at his meeting with the Thai press, General Surayud Chulanont said that the Thai Army should not interfere with foreign affairs though he had personal relations with Myanmar military leaders.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps the Thai government under Chuan Leekpai had more or less a coherent foreign policy in its relations with Myanmar. More importantly, the Thai Foreign Ministry gained control over Myanmar policy decision-making and politicians such as Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan and Sukhumbhand became key players in the decision-making.

However, it appeared to the Myanmar government that the Thai military did not give the Foreign Ministry or the political leadership an independent decision-making role but it allied with Thai Democrats like Chuan Leekpai, Surin Pitsuwan and Sukhumbhand. To that effect, a senior Myanmar authority recently questioned the control of the decision-making process in foreign policy, particularly with regard to Myanmar, by the Thaksin Shinawatra administration. It seemed that the political leadership under Prime Minister Thaksin and Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh did not gain control over the Thai Army in connection with Myanmar policy, not at least until late May 2001. The Myanmar government became suspicious that the Class-12 alliance of the Chulachomkhalo Military Academy<sup>72</sup> had been working hand in hand with elements of the Royal Palace circle and the Privy Council. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported that "Thailand's Queen Sirikit had played an uncharacteristically strident behind-the-scenes role in reinforcing Lieutenant General Wattanachai Chaimuenwong's position".<sup>73</sup> Although the Royal Thai Army and Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied such a royal intervention, the Myanmar government was not completely convinced. Former General Prem Tinsulanonda, head of

the Privy Council, who strongly backs General Surayud Chulanont and Lt. Gen. Wattanachai Chaimuenwong, has good connections with the Royal Palace.<sup>74</sup> To the Myanmar government, it appeared that these connections had effectively blocked Defence Minister General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's mid-year military reshuffle plans.

Here I would like to present how the Myanmar government tried to apply resource diplomacy in regulating Myanmar-Thai relations as a de facto mechanism. Logging concessions was one of them. As mentioned earlier, a few months after General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's visit to Yangon in December 1988, the Myanmar government signed logging concessions and fishing rights with a number of Thai firms that had close relations with the Thai military. A total of 35 Thai firms were given logging concessions in Myanmar. Almost all the concession areas were along the Myanmar-Thai border, which were under the control of various anti-Yangon insurgents.<sup>75</sup> The Myanmar government had granted border-logging concessions to Thai timber companies with the aim of preventing timber smuggling through collusion between insurgents and border timber merchants. Most of the Thai timber companies were found to have disregarded the conservation rules and regulations contained in the concession contract. In March 1992 the Thai Ministry of Commerce lifted the requirement of certificate of origin and import permit for products imported from Myanmar, worsening the illegal milling and logging activities along the border. As forests along the Myanmar-Thai border are water catchment areas in both countries, Myanmar accorded priority to the conservation of forest on the Myanmar side of the border. On account of all these and other environmental considerations, the Myanmar government decided to stop issuing border logging concessions at the end of 1993 and ban cross-border trading of timber to Thailand.

Fishing rights in Myanmar waters is a big business. According to Thai sources, it is worth about 45 million baht a day in revenue. The Myanmar government granted fishing rights to Thai trawlers in 1989. Shortly after that, the Myanmar government found out that Thai trawlers were cheating in various ways. Thai fishing companies forged documents and sent extra ships. For example, an original fishing licence was for ten trawlers but forged documents allowed about twenty trawlers to fish. In addition, banned fishing nets and mines were used. At various bilateral meetings, the Myanmar government complained to the Thai authorities about these incidents and asked for Thai help in taking some measures. At

the 15th RBC meeting (December 1996), the Thai delegation opened a discussion on fisheries. The Thai delegation urged the Myanmar delegation to take legal action against Thai crew who encroached on Myanmar waters but with provisos based on actual circumstances to prevent any maltreatment and to assign officials to monitor fish trading at Kawthaung in co-operation with Thai officials. The Myanmar delegation agreed to the request.<sup>76</sup> Although the Myanmar government was not happy with the way Thai trawlers fished in Myanmar waters, it continued to grant fishing rights until late 1999. The Myanmar government revoked all fishing rights in the wake of the seizure of the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok. It was meant to express dissatisfaction over the way the Thai authorities handled the hostage issue. Initially, the Thai media reacted to this by commenting that the Myanmar government would lose revenue from fishing if it did not allow Thai companies to operate in Myanmar waters. In fact, fishing trawlers from Korea, Taiwan and China were poaching in Myanmar waters and some more new companies were offering better packages for fishing rights in Myanmar. In March 2001, the Thai Overseas Fisheries Association pushed the Thaksin government to start talks with Myanmar to reopen its waters to Thai fishermen. The president of the association believed that closer relations with the Myanmar government would help secure fishing rights revoked in late 1999.<sup>77</sup> However, the Myanmar government remained indifferent on the issue up to the present.

The average value of illegal border trade between Myanmar and Thailand in the period between 1974 and 1982 (nine years) was 16,043 million baht a year. This included 6,407 million baht a year of Myanmar export such as teak, gems, minerals and other agricultural and animal products (including live cattle). Thai export to Myanmar accounted for 9,636 million baht a year. This included textiles, synthetic products, plastic wares, soft drinks and sweets. Thailand had a trade surplus of 3,229 million baht a year.<sup>78</sup>

**Table 1.4 – Thai-Myanmar Trade**

Year	Import	Export	Re-export	Balance
1989	2,156,947	638,350	1,640	-1,516,957
1990	3,373,267	1,072,827	468	-2,299,972
1991	4,784,951	1,463,498	15,749	-3,305,704
1992	3,579,368	2,040,529	5,296	-1,533,543
1993	3,924,407	3,827,458	9,589	-87,360
1994	3,952,690	5,995,895	9,079	+2,052,284
1995	5,510,909	8,637,758	21,577	+3,148,426



1996	3,292,698	8,057,590	21,091	+4,785,983
1997	2,535,286	12,513,483	61,996	+10,040,193
1998	2,591,001	14,082,708	52,001	+11,543,708
<b>Total</b>	<b>35,701,524</b>	<b>58,330,096</b>	<b>198,486</b>	<b>+22,827,058</b>

Note: Values of trade in thousands of baht

Sources: Statistical Yearbook of Thailand (various years)

In 1998, Thailand exported 14,082.7 million baht and imported 2,591 million baht worth of commodities. The border trade could have accounted for about 90% of the total trade, with transactions of about 50 million baht a day. According to Panithi Tangphati, president of the Tak Chamber of Commerce, the export value to Myanmar in 1998 was about 130 million baht a month (for the Myawaddy trading post). Major exports were shoes, garments, tyres, building and construction materials, fishing equipment and stainless steel products. Thai traders were interested in opening more trading posts.<sup>79</sup> In April 2001, according to a Thai source, the tension along the Myanmar-Thai border shrunk the border trade by 70% and export volume plummeted to 100 million baht a month from 400 million baht.<sup>80</sup>

As mentioned earlier, closing border checkpoints was one of the measures used by the Myanmar government to manage its relations with Thailand. In 1995, the Myanmar government closed three border checkpoints on the Myanmar-Thai border and reopened them only in March 1996. It halted all trade transactions and caused several hundreds of millions of baht in lost revenue for Thailand. The checkpoints were closed again in October 1999 for about two months in the wake of the seizure of the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok. It was reopened only after a visit by Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan in November. The most recent closing of border checkpoints was in February 2001. This time, it was the Thai authorities who closed the border unilaterally. The Thai Third Army commander ordered the closure of border checkpoints in Chiangrai, Chiangmai, Mae Hong Son and Tak provinces on the morning of 13 February 2001 without giving any prior notice to the Myanmar authorities. Checkpoints at Mae Sai-Tachileik and Mae Sot-Myawaddy were reopened again unilaterally by the Thai authorities on 12 March 2001. When the checkpoints were reopened, Thailand set several conditions unilaterally. The Myanmar government stated that "the Thai authorities treated us like a country under their influence. Ignoring the equality and mutual respect between the two countries, Thailand treated us like a satellite state."<sup>81</sup>



The Myanmar government retaliated the Thai action by keeping the border closed until further notice. Moreover, on 15 March, it informed local Thai authorities in Sangkla Buri that the Three Pagodas Pass checkpoint would be closed until further notice.<sup>82</sup> After the 18th RBC meeting, the Myanmar government agreed to reopen the checkpoints in Tachileik and Paya Thonezu before the Buddhist New Year. Though border checkpoints were reopened in April after the RBC meeting, the Myanmar government imposed tougher rules. Bans on many Thai products, such as soft drinks and MSG, were imposed.

## CONCLUSION

Despite all the bilateral tensions, constructive engagement has remained the official Thai foreign policy towards Myanmar. Yet it appears that the Myanmar government has never been thoroughly convinced that the Thai government has followed the policy of constructive engagement consistently. The conflicting and confusing signals sent by the Thai government has further strengthened the Myanmar government's perception that it cannot trust Thailand. As far as the Myanmar government is concerned, the Thai government had followed the policy of flexible engagement without officially subscribing to it ever since the return of Chuan Leekpai to political office in 1997. It is still too early to judge Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's policy of forward engagement with Myanmar. Bilateral relations have been managed on the basis of personal diplomacy with the support of resource diplomacy. In managing bilateral relations, the Myanmar government relied more on the *de facto* mechanism than the *de jure* one. Moreover, it had succeeded somewhat in placing the Myanmar policy card in the hands of the Thai military by using resource diplomacy and giving favourable treatments to Thai military personnel. Issues affecting bilateral relations have been discussed among the military commanders of both countries. Though the RBC should be subordinate to the JCBC and the JBC, it has become the most important forum for bilateral relations. One of the most important reasons is the fact that regional commanders in Myanmar, being members of the SLORC or the SPDC, are above ministers. It appeared that most of the bilateral tensions arose primarily from actions and comments made by Thai government officials. For the Myanmar government, such activities were an infringement of Myanmar's national self-determination and sovereignty. Though the Thai media and Thai government officials like to make offensive comments on the Myanmar government, they took the Myanmar government's criticism of them as an offence. However, the Myanmar

government’s criticism should be understood in the light of what Thailand has done.

NOTES

1 This is a general impression I have received in my conversations with various Myanmar government officials.

2 Venika Boonma-kee. *Burma: Thai Foreign Policy Under Chatichai Chunhavan’s Government*. Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund, 1997, p. 140

3 Amitav Archarya. “Human Rights and Regional Order: ASEAN and Human Rights Management in Post-Cold War Southeast Asia” in *Human Rights and International Relations in the Asia-Pacific Region*, edited by James T. H. Tang. London and New York: Pinter, 1995, p. 175

4 The *Suwannaphume* idea was revived again in November 1999 when Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan proposed a promotion of tourism in the region under the said programme. It also included the development of tourism-related infrastructure and transport link among mainland Southeast Asian countries.

5 A recent article in a Myanmar newspaper criticised that recent Thai support for anti-Yangon insurgents of Shan ethnic origin would reintroduce the idea of the Greater Thailand Policy or the Pan-Thai Movement.

See

သတင်းစာတစ်ခုတွင် ဝန်ထမ်းကွန်ပရိုင်းဆင်းကျမ်းပျံ့နှံ့ခဲ့သည်။

မြို့မသတင်းစာ၊ အောက်တိုဘာ ၂၀၀၁။ Reporter Thet Shey. “Look

on Opium Insurgents as They Are” in *Myanmar Alin* (17 February 2001)

ကရိုသင်းဘောင်း၊ ရန်ကင်းကုသိုလ်က (၁၅ ဇူလိုင် ၂၀၀၁)။ Kapiya

Kan Kaung. “Divine Dividence” in *Kyemon* (12 April 2001)

7 John Funston. “Thai Foreign Policy: Seeking Influence” in *Southeast Asian Affairs 1998*. Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 1998, p. 295

8 *Bangkok Post* (6 November 1991)

9 *Nation* (23 April 1992)

10 Kavi Chongkittavorn. “Thai Policy on Burma, A Failure?” in *Nation* (20 December 1992)

11 Amitav Archarya. “Better Try Constructive Intervention” in *Nation* (17 June 1998)

12 *ibid.*

13 *Nation* (23 June 1998)

14 *Bangkok Post* (26 June 1998)

15 *Nation* (13 July 1998)

16 *Bangkok Post* (23 April 2000)

17 *Bangkok Post* (25 March 2000)

18 *Working People's Daily* (15 December 1988)

19 ကာပိယာကန်ကော့င်းရှေ့ခေတ်တိုင်း. Kapiya Kan Kaung. *Divine*

*Dividence*

20 The plan was to kidnap Major Win Aung while he went to Mae Sot to welcome a Myanmar military delegation, and to create unconfirmed, conflicting and confusing stories in first few days after the kidnapping. One story was that the deputy Myanmar military attaché in Bangkok was kidnapped as he was involved in illegal gem trading as a broker and appropriated all gems and money. Another story was that the deputy Myanmar military attaché was kidnapped by mistake as a gem trader. At the same time, there would be more follow-up articles discrediting the Myanmar military attaché office and staff. Finally, Lt. Col. Wah Hsin would rescue the attaché. Everything had been arranged. The location of the kidnapping and the place to hide the victim were also prearranged. Two of the kidnappers, Shwe Hti and Po Thagyan, were issued with pistols, grenades and walkie-talkies. Lt. Col. Wah Hsin ordered the local police to keep a close watch on the attaché. Everything went well until the last few minutes. The target was sitting on a stool under the shade of a plum tree. The two kidnappers and their driver drove a van to an area nearby. As the kidnappers were walking towards the attaché, they realised that he was wearing a Myanmar military Uniform when they were a few steps away. They reported back to the Thai intelligence officer. Lt. Col. Wah Hsin called off the mission at the last minute. Since the Myanmar attaché was in uniform, it was quite impossible to claim that he was a gem trader.

21 မြန်မာ့အလင်း (6 အောက်တိုဘာ ၂၀၀၀). *Myanma Alin* (6 October 2000)

22 ibid.

23 ibid.

24

မြန်မာ့အလင်းသတင်းစာ၊ မြန်မာ့နိုင်ငံခြားရေးဝန်ကြီးဌာန ၅၀ နှစ်ပြည့်အထမ်းမှီပုံစံရုပ်  
 ခုံပုံစံခြားရေးဝန်ကြီးဌာန (၁၉၉၇)။ Nyunt Swe. “Diplomatic  
 Experience” in *Golden Jubilee Publication of Foreign Ministry*. Yangon: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1997, p. 62

25 *Bangkok Post* (19 February 1993)

26 *Bangkok Post* (20 February 1993)

27 *Press Association Newsfile* (2 July 1993)

28 ရိုက်ကောင်းရွေးချယ်မှု၊ မြန်မာ့နိုင်ငံရေး (အမှတ် ၄ မြေပေပေါ် ၆၅) (၁၉၉၄)

. Po Kan Kaung. “Adrift” in *Myet-Khin-Thit* No. 46 (February 1994) pp. 134-136

29 Part of a conversation between Nguyen Kein (referred to as NK), a Lieutenant Commander in the Vietnamese Naval Strategic Intelligence Office, and Saw Henry Aye (referred to as SHA), a KNLA

major defected to the Myanmar government is reproduced:

NK: I don't want to look down on Myanmar people just because of you.

SHA: How do you know I am Myanmar? What are your evidences?

NK: Dear friend, why do you want to be proud of, as Mr. Prasert, being a citizen who worships feudal lord?

SHA: What do you mean by this? And who are you?

NK: My name is Nguyen Kein. A Vietnam citizen. A Vietnamese. I am discharging duties for the unfinished revolution and anti-imperialist struggle of my nation and my people. Why can't you be proud of yourself by saying your own nation and race, like myself?

SHA: My name is Saw Henry Aye. I am a Myanmar citizen, a (Kayin/Karen). Where is my wife (referring to a Thai-Vietnamese half-blood girl named Nuk, a Vietnamese agent who once worked at a Thai Media giant as she sacrificed herself as a concubine to the Thai boss)?

NK: Don't worry. She is on a mission, as a comrade, for your and for our causes.

SHA: I don't think it is a good idea to ask a woman to go on such a mission.

NK: Well, it is not like that. We thought of pros and cons of the mission. I told her about the nature of job and safety and danger, and she agreed. Though your girl is not the daughter of a king (princess), like Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, you have to believe that she is more patriotic and capable than Sirindhorn. Yes, Sirindhorn became famous because she was born to the Thai king. But if she were born to a peasant or a fisherman family, she would have become a prostitute too.

SHA: Why do you make such a comment?

NK: I am telling you the truth. You know that prostitution, a victim of the Thai social system, is a traditional profession of the Thai society. I am not exaggerating. In most of Southeast Asian countries, there are revolutionary forces for national liberation and anti-imperialist struggle. Your girl is a hero or a flower adrift in the current of Thai social life and Thai society that based on pleading capitalists with prostitution since it lacks the revolutionary characters.

SHA: Did you kidnap me? (Saw Henry Aye was on a fishing boat off the Gulf of Siam and on the way to Vietnamese territorial waters.)

NK: No, let me put this way. We keep you for a while. Once the mission is over you are free to go. Take it easy and stay free on the boat. I let you stay free because I trust you as I respect the dignity of your nation and your people. If you were a Thai, I would have tied you down like a pig.

SHA: Do you really mean it?

NK: If you were a Thai, I don't bother to bring you here and I would have killed you in Bangkok.

NK: Except blind worship of their king, Thais have no respect for their law and no regard for their sovereignty. They do not respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other nations either. Thai foreign policy is one thing on the surface (paper), but a completely different one behind the back (in practice). Until now, the Thai Army has never shouldered the national duty. They betrayed the national causes. Our armies in Vietnam and Myanmar have essence and characteristics of revolution and a long history of shouldering national duties.

30 Speech by Secretary-1 at Special Refresher Course No. 15 for Basic Education Teachers (1 April 1995)

31 The group was led by Jonney (an alias) Kyaw Oo from the All Burma Student Democratic Front (ABSDF), an anti-Yangon insurgent group. The members of the groups were members of the ABSDF and God's Army, a Karen insurgent group. The group was named Vigorous Burmese Student Worriers (VBSW) (ဗိုလ်ချုပ်မှူးကြီး, *Myanma Alin*, 6 October 1999). Some of their close associates stayed outside the embassy annex. More than 300 police officers were mobilised to resolve the hostage drama (*Bangkok Post*, 2 October 1999). The Thai police opened a communication channel with the hostage takers. According to Myanmar sources, the group asked the Thai authorities to bring Mr. Moo, camp commandant of the Maneeloy refugee camp, to them and made him the liaison. Through Mr. Moo, the group demanded the release of all political prisoners in Myanmar, recognition of the results of the 1990 election and the reconstitution of a new government. (ဗိုလ်ချုပ်မှူးကြီး, *Myanma Alin*, 6 October 1999). The next morning, the group asked for two helicopters to land on the embassy grounds to take them, along with some of the hostages, to the Myanmar-Thai border. The group sent an ultimatum, threatening that if the helicopters failed to arrive by 8 a.m., they would kill one hostage every half an hour. Helicopters came at 9:30 a.m. but could not land in the grounds of the embassy. By midday, the hostage takers, accompanied by Deputy Foreign Minister M.R. Sukhumbhand and Mr. Moo, boarded the helicopter and landed at Suen Phung village in Ratchaburi Province. According to Thai sources, it was Mr. Chaiyapruerk Sawaengcharoen, a former director of the Maneeloy camp, who accompanied Mr. M.R. Sukhumbhand (*Bangkok Post*, 3 October 1999). Some hostages (Westerners) accompanied the group to the helicopter-boarding place. These hostages "waved to the students (the hostage takers) and onlookers cheered loudly and applauded them when the helicopter took off and several hostages cried." (*Bangkok Post*, 3 October 1999) *The Asia Yearbook 2000*, published by Far Eastern Economic Review, wrote: "There was a bizarre scene as some of the foreign

hostages garbed themselves with the pro-democracy headbands worn by their captors and waved them a sentimental farewell as they left in the helicopter." (*Asia Yearbook 2000*, p. 209) One of the photographs in the *Bangkok Post* on 3 October showed a Westerner hostage turning back into the embassy compound while two Thai hostages were running from it. To the Myanmar government, it was an indication that some Westerners were collaborators rather than hostages.

32 A Thai commentator even wrote: "Many of our officials appeared to be too sympathetic to the hostage takers. The term "Stockholm Syndrome" is used to refer to a situation in which over a period of time hostages come to identify with their captors. In the Thai case, it was not only the hostages (Westerners?) but the authorities who were supposed to negotiate for their release also became sympathetic to the wishes of the hostage takers, and quite early on in the saga." *Nation* (6 October 1999)

33 သီအိုဝီ. *Wuntharnu* (12 October 1999)

34

စိုးကဲကောင်းကောင်း မုတ်သွယ်မုတ်သွယ် ကျော် (မင်းသိန်းဝင်း၊ အသက် ၁၉၉၉). Po Kan Kanug. "Truth Cannot be Hidden" in *Kyemon* (12 October 1999)

35 ဦးစိုးမင်း. *Myanma Alin* (20 May 2000)

36 Police Major Somyot Buaman told to the press: "The gunmen (hostage takers) said they could not locate their destination. They told me to fly to the Takolang base, but they did not know its location. While flying over a mountain range, a pall of smoke came into view, to the delight of the armed men. Some 40 armed men emerged from the forest and waved. The armed men in the helicopter waved in return. The men below were on an overhanging rock which had been cleared of bushes, obviously to facilitate a helicopter landing. Around the landing area lay some bonfires and sticks flying red flags. Jonney had been the first to jump out of the helicopter after it reached the ground. He hugged the people on the ground. The others on board followed him and they all hugged each other." *Nation* (4 October 1999)

37 *Nation* (4 October 1999)

38 BBC Broadcast (2 October 1999, 14:30 GMT)

39 ဦးကဲကောင်းကောင်း Made in Thailand (မင်းသိန်းဝင်း၊ အသက် ၁၉၉၉).

Po Kan Kaung. "Made in Thailand" in *Kyemon* (8 October 1999)

40 *ibid.*

41 *Bangkok Post* (3 October 1999)

42 *Nation* (4 October 1999)

43 *ibid.*

44 *Asia Yearbook 2000*, p. 209

45 *ibid.*, p. 210

46 *Bangkok Post* (24 November 1999)



- 47 *Nation* (25 January 2000)
- 48 *Nation* (25 January 2000)
- 49 *Bangkok Post* (26 January 2000)
- 50

သဘင်အစဉ်အတွင်း ဖြစ်ပွားခဲ့သည့် အကြောင်းအရာများ (အကြောင်း ၄ ဆောင်ပါး) (၂၀၀၀)။

Reporter Thet Shey. "Bad Guests that Behave Like Vipers" in *Kyemon* (4 February 2000)

- 51 ကော့ကွဲးသား မိသားစုဝင်များ၏ အပြစ်ဒဏ် (အကြောင်း ၂၀ ဆောင်ပါး)။

Kaytu Nilar. "Run Away from the Parents" in *Kyemon* (20 February 2000)

- 52 Kan Kaung. "Robin Cook, Sukhumbhand and

Defamation of Human Rights" in *Kyemon* (3 May 2000)

- 53 *Bangkok Post* (27 Feb 2001)
- 54 *Times of India* (4 March 2001)
- 55 *Bangkok Post* (7 March 2001)

56 This is the description given in the Myanmar media.

57 For more details, please see Chapter 2, "Buffer Zone".

- 58 သက်သေခံရမှုများ၏ အကျိုးအမြတ် (အကြောင်း ၁၄ ဆောင်ပါး)။

. Htet Aung. "Let's Keep up with Alaungpaya Spirit" in *Kyemon* (14 May 2001)

- 59 *Bangkok Post* (25 May 2001)
- 60 "Myanmar Says Thai Buffer Zone Causes of Border

Conflict" in *Times of India Online* (5 March 2001)

- 61 "Myanmar Blames Thai Army for Border Tension" in

*Times of India* (4 March 2001)

62 Dr. Ma Tin Win. "Never Been Enslaved, But Real Slave" in *Kyemon* (18 May 2001)

- 63 *Bangkok Post* (25 May 2001)
- 64 *Bangkok Post* (30 May 2001)
- 65 Interview with a Myanmar scholar (25 May 2001)
- 66 သက်သေခံရမှုများ၏ အကျိုးအမြတ် (အကြောင်း ၃၀ ဆောင်ပါး)။ Dr.

Ma Tin Win. "Placing Loving Kindness in the Foe" in *Kyemon* (30 May 2001)

- 67 သက်သေခံရမှုများ၏ အကျိုးအမြတ် (အကြောင်း ၁၄ ဆောင်ပါး)။ Htet Aung. "Let's

Keep up with Alaungpaya Spirit" in *Kyemon* (14 May 2001)

- 68 *Nation* (26 November 1999)

- 69 သက်သေခံရမှုများ၏ အကျိုးအမြတ် (အကြောင်း ၂၀ ဆောင်ပါး)။

. Reporter Thet Shey. "Non Other Than This" in *Myanma Alin* (2 April 2001)

- 70 *Bangkok Post* (9 September 1999)
- 71 *Bangkok Post* (9 April 2000)
- 72 Supreme Commander General Sampao Chusri, Army

Commander-in-chief General Surayud Chulanont and Third Army commander Lt. Gen. Wattanachai Chaimuenwong were classmates at the

Chulachomklat Military Academy. They graduated in 1965. *Bangkok Post* (14 May 2001)

73 *Far Eastern Economic Review* (31 May 2001)

74 Surayud is like an adopted son to General Prem and Wattanachai served under Prem in the mid 1960s.

75 For comprehensive details about how Thai firms operated, please see Tom Kramer. "Thai Foreign Policy Towards Burma" M.A. thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1994, Chapter v.

76 *Bangkok Post* (17 December 1996)

77 *Bangkok Post* (7 March 2001)

78 [စိုးကြော့ (သဂုဇ်) နှင့် မိုးညိုတို့၏ (၁၉၅၆-၆၀ ခုတ် ၂၀၀၁)].

Chingya (Maubin). "Good Neighbour" in *Kyemon* (10 March 2001)

79 *Nation* (10 February 1999)

80 *Bangkok Post* (26 April 2001)

81 Press Conference (14 March 2001)

82 *Nation* (16 March 2001)

# 2

## BUFFER ZONE A SOURCE OF TENSION

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To the Thai government, one of the reasons for creating a buffer zone between Myanmar and Thailand was to contain the expansion of communism into Thailand. However, by the mid 1980s, as the Thai government won over the Communist Party of Thailand, it began to downplay the role of the buffer zone in its national security policy. The Thai government had signalled to its neighbours, particularly Myanmar, that it would not support any insurgents. By the early 1990s, when it no longer felt the pressure of communist expansion from its eastern flank as Vietnam withdrew its troops from neighbouring Cambodia, the Thai government began to see Myanmar as a potential threat. This perception was heightened by the forced modernisation in Myanmar, which was in fact long overdue. Until 1996, Thailand had a fairly secure buffer zone between Myanmar and itself. The fall of strongholds of the Karen National Union (KNU) and its military wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), and the return of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) to legal-fold (a term used, mostly in Myanmar, to refer to the status of insurgents who have surrendered their arms and returned to the legal framework of the government) and the surrender of the MTA to the Myanmar government had caused considerable alarm to the Thai government. The Thai government began to take substantial steps to create another buffer along the Myanmar-Thai border. This time the buffer zone was intended to contain an increasingly powerful Myanmar. The Thai government placed 30 provinces along the Myanmar-Thai border under the Commander-in-chief of the Thai Army. The Civilian Army Scheme was introduced and self-defence villages were established along the Myanmar-Thai border. The Thai subscription to the buffer zone policy had been a major source of tension between Myanmar and Thailand.

## THE BUFFER ZONE SINCE THE LATE 1980s

In January 1987, during General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's visit to Yangon, General Saw Maung, Chief of Staff of the Tatmadaw, made four requests to Thailand in connection with the insurgents along the Myanmar-Thai border. The first request was for the Thai government to take measures to prevent foreigners from gaining access to the insurgents. The second was for the Thai government to take some measures to prevent arms, ammunition and other war materials from reaching the insurgents. General Saw Maung said diplomatically that he believed the Thai government did not supply war materials to insurgents but at the same time told General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh that he was rather surprised to learn that insurgents had so many weapons, ammunition and other war materials without having facilities for their production. The third request was for the Thai authorities to disarm and detain insurgents who retreat from battles into Thai territory and, if possible, to hand them over to the Myanmar authorities. General Saw Maung said that he was aware that the Thai Army had always put its troops on alert whenever Myanmar troops conducted counter-insurgency operations in the border area, and the Thai Army could use these troops to disarm and detain the insurgents. The fourth request was an understanding by the Thai government that the Myanmar government had no intention to occupy Thai territory. General Saw Maung explained that from time to time insurgents made the Thai authorities believe that shelling came from Myanmar but it was actually from themselves. The Tatmadaw had tried as much as possible not to infringe into Thai territory but, as General Saw Maung admitted, sometimes shells inevitably landed on Thai soil. He explained that though the Tatmadaw commanders realised that it was easier to attack insurgent strongholds from the rear by crossing the border and using Thai territory, Myanmar troops were very cautious not to do so. It was a request for understanding.<sup>1</sup>

Referring to the Thai security policy along the Thai-Malaysian border, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh categorically denied that the Thai government allowed anti-Yangon insurgent groups to use Thai territory. In fact, the general said that both Thailand and Myanmar should have a clear policy on this. He further surprised Myanmar commanders by saying that as the insurgents were doing harm to Thailand, the Thai government did not support them. General Chavalit even suggested that the two armed forces co-operate to suppress insurgency. However, the Myanmar commanders were rather sceptical about the general's comments and suggestions.<sup>2</sup>

During General Saw Maung's visit to Thailand in July 1987, General Chavalit again confirmed that the Thai government did not recognise any ethnic insurgent groups along the Myanmar-Thai border. On 27 July 1987, at a dinner hosted in honour of General Saw Maung, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh said:

First of all, I remember that I told you and all my fellow officers that your (Myanmar) security is our (Thai) security. Secondly, I told my brothers (Myanmar commanders) that Thailand sees no threat, but only friendship from the west (Myanmar). And we won't allow any people or anybody to come and destroy our friendship. Thirdly, we are looking forward to have very good co-ordination and co-operation at every level of our command. And last point I told my brothers that I would like to see the words that get matched by action. We all Thai fellow officers looking forward to this day very much, and feel very happy to stay with you.<sup>3</sup>

The Myanmar delegation was taken by surprise by this. However, they were not convinced that the Thai authorities really meant co-operation.<sup>4</sup> Although the Tatmadaw commanders gave serious consideration to the Thai proposal of co-operation and co-ordination of command at every level, they could not understand why the Thai Army made such a move and what it really meant.<sup>5</sup> They wondered whether the Thai Army would actually co-ordinate with the Tatmadaw in suppressing insurgency along their common border. The Tatmadaw commanders recalled that the Thai government had never kept their promises. As a result, the Tatmadaw authorities concluded that Myanmar could not expect Thai help in suppressing insurgency along the Myanmar-Thai border and Myanmar had to rely on its own resources.<sup>6</sup>

When General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh came to Yangon again in April 1988, he further discussed the feasibility of co-operation and co-ordination between the two armed forces. He tried to convince his counterpart that such co-operation would benefit both countries. He also hoped that further steps in this direction could be taken in near future. Referring to General Saw Maung, the general said:

As you Akogyi (big brother) know, relations between our two countries have reached its highest point. We became friends from the lowest point. Then, we became close friends and now we are in the process of firmer relations and permanent and mutual co-operation.

Indeed, there had been a period of diplomatic honeymoon between Myanmar and Thailand since 1985. A series of high level visits between the two countries took place in the second half of the 1980s. This included the royal visits by the Thai Crown Prince and the Princess Royal.

However, with regard to the Thai proposal, Myanmar commanders did not give an answer. They were not convinced by General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's assurance of not supporting anti-Myanmar insurgents and not allowing them to use Thai territory as they had several intelligence reports indicating that Thai security forces were involved in insurgent activities. For example, in March 1988, a Wa National Army (WNA) camp was found inside Thai territory (NC-0303). On 22 March 1988, two Thai helicopters landed in the WNA camp located on Point 5154 Hillock. A week later, when Myanmar troops captured the WNA camp, they found that Thai security forces had provided food and electricity for the camp.

Meanwhile, the 1988 demonstrations in Myanmar led to a change of government. In December 1988, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh went to Yangon, heading a business and military delegation. At his invitation, a Myanmar delegation led by Lieutenant General Than Shwe, the Commander-in-chief of the army, went on a five-day trip to Thailand in late April 1989. The Myanmar delegation thanked the general and the Thai authorities for their co-operation in the repatriation of students from Thailand. However, in May 1989, the Tatmadaw found out that the Thai Army had provided support fire for the KNU/KNLA. In December 1989, when the Tatmadaw captured the KNLA's Phalu camp, all KNLA troops crossed the border into Thailand easily. The Thai authorities had allowed the KNLA members to stay freely on her soil. Throughout the 1990s, the Tatmadaw had repeatedly found instances where Thailand did not abandon her buffer zone policy.<sup>7</sup>

According to Alfred McCoy, the Thai government had fanned the armed conflicts (insurgency) along the Myanmar-Thai border partly because of the historical enmity between Myanmar and Thailand and partly because of contemporary perceptions of Myanmar as a threat to Thai security. Thailand had often supported insurgent groups in order to weaken the Myanmar government and to create a buffer zone between the two countries.<sup>8</sup> In 1995, a Thai police General explained the Thai government's policy towards Myanmar:



The Thai government... did not want it (Myanmar) to have unity and peace. Thus the Thai government supported minority groups and provided them with arms. However, the Thai government did not trust the minorities either. Thailand did not want the minorities to win for fear that the conflicts among themselves would have a negative impact on Thailand. In other words, the Thai government did not want any party to win the war.... There should be no complete peace in Myanmar. In this way Thailand would achieve security and freedom from the Myanmar threat.<sup>9</sup>

For Thailand, as a Myanmar newspaper article had argued, insurgent groups under the various banners along the Myanmar-Thai border were, in the context of Thai national security policy, not only buffer zones in its forward defence but also sources of revenue for its economy. Only when the Tatmadaw gained "border dominance" did confrontation between Thai and Myanmar troops take place from time to time.<sup>10</sup> Until early 1996, Thailand had an effective buffer zone along the Myanmar-Thai border.

The defence white paper of Thailand, entitled *The Defence of Thailand 1994*, stated that "Myanmar Armed Forces are skilled in the art of jungle warfare and, with the acquisition of modern high capability weapons, it will become a formidable force."<sup>11</sup> Although it acknowledged that the increasingly capable Myanmar Armed Forces was a security concern for Thailand, the white paper did not make any comment on the counter-insurgency efforts of the Tatmadaw along the Myanmar-Thai border. However, in *The Defence of Thailand 1996*, published after the Tatmadaw had captured almost all insurgent strongholds along the Myanmar-Thai border, the NMSP's return to legal-fold and the MTA surrender, it was stated that "suppression of minorities by the Myanmar government" affected Thai national security.<sup>12</sup> It was quite disturbing to the Myanmar government and the Tatmadaw leadership who had publicly gave assurance that they were not fighting insurgents for racial (ethnic) or religious reasons. In fact, it was the Myanmar government that had successfully brought about peace settlements to more than a dozen ethnic insurgent groups (as of early 1996). Even a few months before *The Defence of Thailand 1996* was published, the Myanmar government had successfully negotiated with the NMSP, a major Mon insurgent group which operated along the Myanmar-Thai border, and took 10,000 Mon refugees back from Thailand for resettlement. The Myanmar government and the Tatmadaw, therefore, drew the logical conclusion that the loss of a buffer zone had become a serious

security problem for Thailand. As far as the Myanmar government was concerned, it was the Myanmar military which had destroyed the Thai buffer zone.<sup>13</sup>

From 1996, the Thai government began to restore some form of a buffer zone between Thailand and Myanmar. On 14 August 1996, Chulalongkorn University held a seminar on Thai national security issues. The panel at the seminar concluded that “although there was no imminent threat to Thailand’s security in the 21st century, border problems, especially those on the Burmese (Myanmar) side, could turn into hot spots in the future.”<sup>14</sup> According to Surachat Bamrungsuk from Chulalongkorn University, “in the next five to ten years, Thailand’s security problem will shift from its eastern flank to its western one (the Myanmar-Thai border).” He further stated that “as the Burmese (Myanmar) forces are consolidating their hold on minority-controlled areas along the border, which stretches more than 2,400 kilometres, chances of armed confrontation between the two countries will increase.”<sup>15</sup> Further steps were taken to secure a buffer zone between Myanmar and Thailand.

The year 2000 witnessed major developments in Thai security policies along the Myanmar-Thai border. On 6 January 2000, in his lecture to 200 officers at the National Defence College and Joint Staff College, Thai Supreme Commander General Mongkol Ampornpisit warned that “Thailand should remain vigilant with Burma (Myanmar) as it posed a potential security threat.”<sup>16</sup> Although this kind of message would be quite common in the National Defence College, what was significant was that it became a public statement. On 10 March 2000, the Thai National Security Council sponsored a seminar on “Security Policy Towards Burma”. Kachadpai Burusphat, the Secretary-General of the Thai National Security Council, told the audience that there were no major changes in the Thai security perception and policy towards Myanmar, and he was hopeful that the Myanmar government would compromise with its opposition (insurgents, some political parties and expatriate groups). The Myanmar government interpreted that to mean Thailand would continue to host and support anti-Yangon insurgents and political organisations.<sup>17</sup>

In April 2000, the Thai Ministry of Defence asked the Thai government to amend Ministerial Regulation No. 45, which was jointly drafted by the defence and interior ministries, and Article 13 of the 1954 Conscription Act, which prohibited tribe people living in 500 villages in the 26 border provinces of Thailand from entering

military service.<sup>18</sup> Major General Saksin Thipayakesorn, chief of the Reserve Affairs Department in the Thai Army, argued that “times have changed and rural areas, especially those in the North, were not what they were five decades ago.”<sup>19</sup> Though his remark was somewhat vague, the Myanmar authorities interpreted that Thailand had lost a buffer that had been there for about five decades and, as a result, another had to be created.

In December 2000, the Thai Army laid down a plan to build up to 50 new villages for the hill tribes to control them more effectively and for border security. Major General Pradit Boonkerd, the Army’s chief of the Directorate of Civil Affairs, explained that these new villages, known as “self-defence villages”, would be built in the Tak province, next to the Myanmar-Thai border. A three-phase programme was the basis for the self-defence villages.<sup>20</sup> According to the programme:

All villagers would register with the authorities and be issued with household registration documents and ID cards; villagers would be trained to defend themselves and use firearms while information centres and bunkers are established; and villagers would be encouraged to find production opportunities and boost productivity.<sup>21</sup>

To the Myanmar government, this policy, recommended by the Thai Army, advocated the fact that by recruiting people from the hill tribes along the Myanmar-Thai border, the Thai Army would get troops familiar with the terrain for its national defence.<sup>22</sup>

The Thai Army also planned to form a so-called ‘civilian army’ with about 5,000 members along the Myanmar-Thai border. It was under the Territorial Defence Training Scheme supervised by the Third Army. By May 2000, a total of 120 villages in Chiangmai, Chaingrai, Tak, Mae Hong Son, Phayao, Nan, Uttaradit and Phitsanulok were already under the programme. Lieutenant General Chamlong Phothong declared that by the year 2001, the number of villages under this programme would have grown to 529. The training programme included teaching the villagers how to use various kinds of weapons, explosives and communication equipment. Yet Colonel Banyong Sirisunthorn, deputy chief of the project, stated that these villagers were not trained to fight in a war. Under this programme Phaya Phrai village, which is just two kilometres away from the Myanmar-Thai border, formed a local defence organisation with 270 members. According to a Thai source,

“even though every village had been registered and recognised by the local administration authority, 99% of the villagers were not Thai and did not have identification cards.”<sup>23</sup>

With regard to the Thai policy of building a buffer zone along the Myanmar-Thai border, an article in a state owned newspaper in Myanmar commented:

With the surrender or return to legal-fold of armed national groups and the capture of KNU strongholds along the Myanmar-Thai border by the Tatmadaw, Thailand has lost its front-line defensive positions. In this situation, as a tactical commitment, Thailand made arrangements in a harmonious way to put its northern region under the command of the special administration department to transform villages of hill tribes into defence villages, to enlist members of the hill tribes for military service and to deploy special forces along the border in a bid to substitute its lost domains along the border and to gain control of the border area.

The National Security Council has already agreed to put provinces along the Myanmar-Thai border, such as Tak, Mae Hong Son, Chiangrai and Chiangmai, under the Internal Security Operation Command and to open a special administration department in the northern region. Due to the agreement, civil administration has totally vanished from these provinces and the joint military-police administration and control has become the main administrative system. In reality it is the restoration of the administration system practised during the insurrection of the Communist Party of Thailand.

Work to set up 50 defence villages in the hill regions in 30 provinces located along the Myanmar-Thai border under the leadership of the Civil Affairs Department of the Thai Army has started. It is stated that the project is being implemented to prevent hill tribes from moving to the plain.... More interesting is to what extent the number of families and minions of the remnant insurgents and the one-time refugees of Myanmar might be included in the project. One cannot say that this is unlikely.

The matter of enlisting hill tribes into military service is also interesting. As the past successive governments of

Thailand had never acknowledged the hill tribes as citizens, tribesmen from over 500 hill villages of the 26 provinces were totally barred from joining the army under the 45th Ministerial Regulation and the 1954 Conscription Act. Now, members of the hill tribes are lured with various kinds of inducements to enlist in the army. Included in the inducements is the pledge that they will be issued national registration cards as soon as they join the army. According to a report by the Thai Ministry of Defence, if these tribesmen could be recruited into the army, Thailand would get braver and tougher soldiers who know the territory very well.<sup>24</sup>

Since the second half of 2000, the Thai government has planned to use the SURA in the north and the KNU in the south as proxies to create buffer zones. By September, with tacit support from Thai security forces (including intelligence sharing), the KNU attacked Tatmadaw outposts. The KNU briefly captured Bayin Naung and Maw Phathu (near Maela). Though the Tatmadaw recaptured these outposts, the initial success encouraged the KNU and the SURA to launch more attacks on Tatmadaw positions.<sup>25</sup> By November 2000, the SURA had begun to build camps along the Myanmar-Thai border while its headquarters remained inside Thailand. Moreover, Thai security forces began to paint the UWSA and the DKBA as drug-running organisations while it was projecting the SURA and the KNU as anti-narcotic forces that should be armed and trained. It was believed among Myanmar military officers that some of the SURA and KNU members were trained alongside Task Force 399 in the name of drug suppression during the annual Cobra Gold 2001.<sup>26</sup>

In summary, the Myanmar government finds it hard to believe that Thailand has abandoned the buffer zone policy. In 1991, in connection with the prolonged insurgency in Myanmar, Sithu Aung, a Myanmar government officer, wrote:

Some countries, under the pretext of border problems, usually encourage the insurgents of their neighbours who have taken up strongholds on the border. Their motive is to make the border their buffer zone. Some countries make contacts with their neighbours' insurgents on the border for their economic gains.<sup>27</sup>

As recently as in March 2001, an article in a Myanmar newspaper stated that one of the cornerstones of Thai security policy

was to “build a buffer zone between the potential threat nation and itself by supporting any organisation that opposed the government of that nation.”<sup>28</sup> On 4 March 2001, in connection with the tension escalating along the Myanmar-Thai border, Major General Kyaw Win, deputy chief of the Office of Strategic Studies, stated that “the situation along the border could remain tense as long as Thailand continues its policy of maintaining a buffer zone. As long as this policy is being pursued, it would be difficult to defuse the situation, and our two militaries will not be able to work together.”<sup>29</sup>

If Thailand wants to prove that it does not have a buffer zone policy, there is only one simple thing to do instead of giving lip service and verbal commitments, according to a Myanmar newspaper. The Thai government should deny any insurgent entry into Thailand and push them back into Myanmar when the Tatmadaw launches operations. Thailand needs to show clearly to the Myanmar government that its words match its actions.<sup>30</sup>

## **INVOLVEMENT OF THAI SECURITY FORCES IN ANTI-MYANMAR INSURGENCY**

At the first RBC meeting (September 1989), the Thai delegation stated that “Thailand would not allow its territory to be used by any parties for activities against the Myanmar government.”<sup>31</sup> Thai delegations at subsequent RBC meetings had repeatedly assured their Myanmar counterparts that Thailand had not allowed anti-Yangon insurgent groups to operate on Thai soil. At the 15th RBC meeting (August 1997) the Myanmar delegation requested the Thai delegation to take necessary action against insurgent groups residing in Thailand and handed over a detailed list of insurgent activities to the Thai delegation. In reply, the Thai delegation stated that no insurgent groups had been allowed to use Thai territory as a base to attack Myanmar.<sup>32</sup> At the 16th RBC meeting, the Myanmar delegation urged the Thai government to give serious consideration to Myanmar’s request and “to strictly prohibit terrorist insurgents from taking shelter and using Thai territory to organise attacks inside Myanmar.”<sup>33</sup> In reply, the Thai side again stated that no insurgent groups had been allowed to use Thai territory as a base to attack Myanmar.<sup>34</sup>

It is undeniable that, since the 1960s, the Thai government had maintained close ties with various anti-Yangon insurgents along the



Myanmar-Thai border. In those days, the Thai Army even maintained liaison officers with insurgent groups. In the 1980s, the Internal Security Operation Command co-ordinated these activities. The Thai intelligence, including County Intelligence Agency, the army and the police (border patrol police) worked closely with insurgent groups. Generally speaking, the buffer policy of the Thai government served the interests of both Thailand and anti-Yangon insurgent groups. For Thailand, it was an effective barrier against the expansion of communism into Thailand while the insurgents had access to arms, ammunition, communication equipment, foreign contacts and other facilities such as medical care for their troops. Thai security agencies supported insurgent groups.

There was ample evidence of the Thai military's involvement in various anti-Yangon insurgencies, particularly in two aspects. One was the support fire for the insurgent forces and tolerance of the insurgents' use of Thai territory. The other was the tolerance of the contraband arms trade and supply of war materials to insurgents. The Tatmadaw came to learn more about the extent of Thai involvement in anti-Yangon insurgent groups when Khun Sa surrendered and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), a splinter group of the KNU, and other former KNU members returned to legal-fold. Tin Than Oo, an army officer, wrote:

Of the peace settlement groups, ten had opened their headquarters in Thailand. Now the leaders of these groups are on good terms with the Tatmadaw leaders. I am sure that they told the Tatmadaw leaders of whom they had to deal with, where they had to open bank accounts and who had been involved in their activities. But the Myanmar government's position was "let's forget the past". As U Khun Sa, who had been deeply involved with authorities in Thailand and knew too much, surrendered, there was no reason why he should not reveal all the facts.<sup>35</sup>

In May 1989, during its offensive on the KNU's Wakha Haung (Old Wakha) stronghold, the Myanmar military found out that several Thai security personnel had helped the KNU. Thai Army Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC) and Bell-205 helicopters were present across the Thaungyin River. In support of the KNLA, the Thai Army fired 155mm artillery on Tatmadaw troops.<sup>36</sup> However, the Tatmadaw was able to capture Wakha Haung. During the final phase of the offensive, Tatmadaw troops crossed the Thaungyin River in hot pursuit of the insurgents as the KNLA troops fired across the Thaungyin River. The Tatmadaw also returned artillery fire on the

artillery positions in Thailand. Clashes between Thai and Myanmar troops took place. The Thai Army lost some APCs and weapons in the clash. Moreover, due to a wrong map reference by the local Thai intelligence officer, the Thai Air Force bombed its own troops.<sup>37</sup> This indicated that Thai security forces were helping anti-Yangon insurgents. To assess the damage, a Myanmar delegation was sent to the area. At the second RBC meeting, the Thai delegation submitted a list of damages caused by Myanmar troops. According to the list, between September 1988 and July 1989, Myanmar troops intruded 11 times into Thai territory. In that same period, a total of 1,430 shells landed on Thai soil on 74 occasions, 41 houses and 120 stores or shops were set on fire, 60 houses and 14 offices were damaged, two people killed and 16 were injured. The damage was estimated at 19 million baht.<sup>38</sup>

At that RBC Meeting (December 1989), in order to avoid any misunderstanding, the Myanmar delegation proposed the formation of a Joint Observation Team, consisting of five members from each side under the RBC, to attend to certain emergency situations that might arise along the border and which required the immediate attention of the two sides.<sup>39</sup> According to the Myanmar proposal, the Joint Observation Teams should be based in Tachileik-Mae Sai in the north, Myawaddy-Mae Sot in the south and Kawthaung-Ranong further south. The terms of reference of the Joint Observation Team were as follows.

- To move to the nearest area where the operations take place during the period when the Myanmar Tatmadaw launch operations against insurgents
- To be directly responsible to the RBC
- To submit with supporting evidence any matter which requires the attention of the RBC in the shortest possible time
- To solve minor problems by itself in the shortest possible time<sup>40</sup>

However, the Thai delegation did not accept the idea. At the third RBC meeting (March 1990), the Thai delegation stated:

The Thai government was of the view that it was not necessary to form Joint Observation Teams as there exists a machinery to deal with the problem. This machinery is the Township Border Committee. If the TBC is not competent to handle the problem, its terms of reference may be revised accordingly.<sup>41</sup>

The Myanmar delegation said that it proposed the formation of the Joint Observation Team as a pragmatic way to dispel any

unwanted and unnecessary misunderstandings that might arise along the border when Myanmar conducted operations against insurgents. The Myanmar delegation requested the Thai delegation to reconsider the proposal and to take note of the matter since it had been put forward with good intentions.<sup>42</sup> However, at the 17th RBC meeting (March 1999), after naval clashes in the Andaman Sea, the Thai delegation proposed a joint naval operation and patrol with the Myanmar navy. But the Myanmar delegation explained that it was not a practice of Myanmar to do so. The Myanmar government would not accept any joint operational or patrol-type activity with foreign nations.<sup>43</sup> Again in December, during his visit to Yangon, General Sampao Chusri, Supreme Commander of the Thai Armed Forces, made a proposal for joint patrol along the Myanmar-Thai border to deal basically with drug dealers. But the Myanmar government did not agree.<sup>44</sup>

Since late 1991, the Tatmadaw had been launching major offensives on KNLA positions. The objective was to capture all KNLA strongholds along the Myanmar-Thai border, with Marnepalaw being the most important target. Almost five infantry divisions were deployed in the war zone. The Bureau of Special Operations under Lieutenant General Maung Hla oversaw the entire operation. During its attack on Kyepyaung hillock and Nawta hillock in March 1992, Tatmadaw troops came under fire from 107mm rockets of the Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS). The 107mm MLRS was an inventory of the Thai Army,<sup>45</sup> evidence that Thai Army personnel had been helping KNLA troops.<sup>46</sup>

At about the same time, on another front, Tatmadaw troops engaged KNLA troops in Bokeyyin Township. When the Tatmadaw captured the Ywahaylu camp of the KNLA on 18 February 1992, the Thai authorities protested that it was a part of Thai territory. Moreover, Thai security forces, accompanied by two APCs, advanced to a nearby area and fired several rounds. Tatmadaw troops at the Ywahaylu camp observed that the retreating KNLA troops had been living in a school building on Thai territory and moving about freely with their weapons on Thai soil. None of these troops were disarmed. For the Tatmadaw, it was a clear indication that Thai territory was safe haven for anti-Yangon insurgents.<sup>47</sup>

One unfortunate incident took place during the Tatmadaw's offensive on the Ywahaylu camp. As the line of communication between Ywahaylu and the nearest Myanmar village was very bad

and it took several days to get rations for the troops, Captain Shwe Daung from the Tatmadaw negotiated with a warrant officer from a local Thai Army unit to buy rations from Chumphon. Under this agreement, Myanmar troops in mufti (with no weapons) could go to Chumphon and buy rations several times. During these trips, Lieutenant General Kitti Ratanachaya, commander of Thai Fourth Army in Chumphon, received Captain Shwe Daung twice. However, when KNU leaders bribed some local Thai authorities, including some military officers, the Thai Army arrested Myanmar soldiers. Tin Than Oo wrote:

On 31 January 1992, Captain Shwe Daung and Sergeant Bankit went to see Lieutenant General Kitti Ratanachaya for the third time. This time, General Ratanachaya was not friendly. Having received them warmly twice, the Thai Army (under General Ratanachaya's instructions?) arrested Captain Shwe Daung and Sergeant Bankit. Other Myanmar troops carrying rice bags were also arrested in separate places. Captain Shwe Daung and twenty-two other ranks (a total of 23 persons) were arrested without any warning.<sup>48</sup>

Tatmadaw commanders approached their Thai counterparts and negotiated for the release of their arrested comrades through proper channels. But the Thai Army turned a blind eye to the issue.<sup>49</sup> The Tatmadaw leadership was left to wonder why the Thai Army had arrested Myanmar personnel after having received them twice by a senior Thai general. They thought that the Thai authorities should have at least warned Myanmar soldiers not to come again if they no longer wanted them on the Thai soil. After all, it was not an illegal entry into Thailand. During eleven months under detention in Thailand, the Myanmar soldiers were beaten regularly and tortured inhumanely.<sup>50</sup> Only when Myanmar troops arrested the chief administrator of Mae Hong Song district, along with other timber smugglers inside Myanmar in early October 1992, did the Tatmadaw trade the chief administrator for Captain Shwe Daung and the group. Even at the time of their release, they were forced to sign a statement that gold at the Shwe Dagon pagoda (in Yangon) belonged to Thailand. They were beaten until they signed the document.<sup>51</sup> While the KNLA troops were allowed to stay and move freely with their weapons on the Thai soil, the Myanmar soldiers in mufti with no weapons and who had made proper arrangements to enter into Thailand were arrested and detained without any explanation. From this incident, the Tatmadaw commanders drew the logical conclusion that helping and protecting anti-Yangon insurgents was more important than friendship between the two countries or armies.<sup>52</sup>

In the early morning of 20 March 1995, MTA troops launched an artillery attack and offensive on Tarchileik from Mae Sai. When Tatmadaw troops successfully countered the MTA offensives, the latter escaped into Thai territory. Among them, 20 MTA soldiers were hospitalised in Mae Sai.<sup>53</sup> On 22 March 1995, Lieutenant Colonel Yu Lwin Aung, chairman of Tarchileik Township Border Committee met his Thai counterpart and discussed the MTA's attack on Tarchileik. Colonel Yu Lwin Aung told the Thai colonel that the MTA withdrew from Tarchileik into Thai territory in three separate groups and requested the handover of the MTA troops to the Myanmar authorities. But the Thai colonel informed Colonel Yu Lwin Aung that the MTA troops were disarmed in accordance with the law of Thailand and all of them were released at 0700 hours on the same day of the attack. The Myanmar colonel protested and said that such action would mean protection or lending support to the MTA. It would cause misunderstanding and distrust in relations between the two countries. Moreover, Colonel Yu Lwin Aung requested the Thai colonel to show him the detained weapons and to transfer them to the Myanmar authorities. The Thai colonel advised him to lodge an official request through the border committee and he would bring the case up to a higher level.<sup>54</sup>

At about the same time, in early 1995, the Tatmadaw, in co-operation and co-ordination with the DKBA, launched major offensives in the Southeast Command area. Throughout the assault on the KNLA strongholds the Tatmadaw troops encountered Thai artillery support fire on several occasions. When it captured Maenepalaw (the KNU/KNLA headquarters) and Wankha Thit (Kawmura), one of the best-defended strongholds, the Tatmadaw seized four Thai Army APCs from the camps. The Myanmar troops were not surprised at all. They even found bodies of Thai military personnel in the Kawmura camp.<sup>55</sup> A Myanmar commentary wrote that "the arrival of these APCs was quite strange. It couldn't have dropped from the sky. It came from the next-door country (Thailand) by crossing the Thaungyin River."<sup>56</sup>

On 8 February 1995, a Tatmadaw column led by Major Than Swe, commanding officer of a Tatmadaw battalion, almost captured the Kawmura stronghold. They were within hand grenade range (about 50 yards) when the Thai Army launched MLRS rockets and artillery on the advancing Tatmadaw column. Over a hundred troops, including Major Than Swe, were killed within a few minutes. The offensive was temporarily halted. At that moment, Lieutenant Aung Soe from the DKBA told the Tatmadaw commander to bribe the Thai

Army officers. In the late evening, Lieutenant Aung Soe and three other DKBA members crossed the Thaungyin River and bribed the Thai officers launching the MLRS attacks. From then on, though the Thai Army continued to provide MLRS fire for the KNLA, none of the rockets landed on Tatmadaw positions.<sup>57</sup> Tin Than Oo, who was the war correspondent at the Marnepalaw and Kawmura battles, wrote:

During the Kawmura battle, the Thai Army used its trucks to transport all reinforcement troops for the KNU. These troops needed to walk just over a hundred steps to reach Kawmura. Ammunition was stockpiled.... Wounded personnel were immediately transferred and admitted to Mae Sot hospital. Frankly speaking, Thai Army personnel even came into the Kawmura camp for help.<sup>58</sup>

In fact, when the Kawmura camp was captured in the afternoon (1530 hours) of 21 February 1995, one of the officer peak-caps the Tatmadaw troops found in the Kawmura must have belonged to a senior Thai Army officer.<sup>59</sup> Crates of ammunition with Thai Army Ordinance Service labels were seized in abundance. According to the Myanmar source, during the Kawmura battle, between 19 January 1995 and 9 February 1995, the Thai Army provided support artillery fire for the KNLA troops on at least 12 occasions.<sup>60</sup>

Having crossed the Thaungyin River into Thai territory after their retreat from Kawmura, the KNLA planned to launch a counter-offensive. The KNU bribed some Thai Army personnel to launch artillery fire on Kawmura. The Thai Army launched MLRS rockets on the Tatmadaw troops from Thai territory,<sup>61</sup> inflicting heavy casualties on Myanmar troops.<sup>62</sup> According to Myanmar sources, the Thai Army also provided locations of Tatmadaw artillery positions to the KNU. The Tatmadaw was aware that the Thai Army used artillery locating radar (ALR) and aerial surveillance photographs to locate Tatmadaw positions. All that information, as well as intercepted signals from Tatmadaw troops, were regularly passed on to the KNLA.<sup>63</sup> The Thai Army set up a signal intelligence station for interception in Ban Wang Kaew, just across the Thaungyin River from Kawmura.<sup>64</sup> An article which appeared on 27 February 1995, less than a week after the capture of Kawmura, reported:

On the east bank of the Thaungyin River, some armed forces personnel from the next-door country (Thailand) were together with the KNU. With them were three sets of signal/communication machines. They intercepted



and eavesdropped the enemy's (the Tatmadaw) signal communications. Some village chiefs, including the chief of Maw Taw village Ah Kyaing, helped them translate the intercepted messages. All these intelligence gathered were passed to Htaw Hla (KNLA brigade commander). Ammunition transported by trucks (from Thai Army) easily reached Wakha Thit (Kawmura). Htaw Hla received radar findings (ALR), intercepted messages and intelligence and aerial surveillance photographs (from the Thai Army).<sup>65</sup>

In fact, the Thai Army had helped the KNU construct various strongholds along the Myanmar-Thai border, including Kawmura. A Myanmar journalist who is very familiar with insurgent activities along the border wrote:

In those days, the KNU who followed positional and static defence built non-retreatable defences with poor technical knowledge. Later, they got the technical know-how to build stockades, overhead bunkers and defence lines that could be boasted as the NATO standard (from the Thai Army). In some cases of building defence lines and stockades, foreign-trained Thai Army engineers themselves did aerial survey and provided close supervision.<sup>66</sup>

Even after the Kawmura battle, Thai security forces continued to be involved in launching attacks on Myanmar camps inside Myanmar. On 1 May 1995, 24 shells of 82mm mortar landed on Manepalaw camp. The artillery attack came from Hwebawlu village in Thailand. On 4 May 1995, three Thai military helicopters from inside Thai territory fired seven rockets at the Thumwehta monastery.<sup>67</sup>

Throughout the late 1990s, the Myanmar government had protested Thai involvement in anti-Yangon insurgent activities along the Myanmar-Thai border. In his interview with the *Asian Defence Journal* in August 2000, Thai Foreign Minister Dr. Surin Pitsuwan answered the question of Thailand being accused by Myanmar and Laos of aiding rebels as follows:

Let me make it perfectly clear that Thailand does not support the insurgents or refugees from neighbouring countries who seek refuge in Thailand. Thai policy is to provide humanitarian aid for a period of time before returning displaced persons across the border. We will not

become involved in insurgent activities. They are here on a humanitarian basis only. The border is closely monitored to ensure that insurgents do not use Thailand as a springboard for attacks on governments in neighbouring countries. We have a regional border committee to stay in touch with Myanmar and one of their topics of discussion are the activities of insurgents and ethnic minority groups. As for any unsubstantiated accusations that Thailand supports insurgents, it is important not to overlook the fact that many of these activities are conducted by people living in remote parts of Myanmar not yet under full government control.<sup>68</sup>

In spite of this assurance by the Thai Foreign Minister, available evidence clearly shows the Thai government's involvement in anti-Yangon insurgent activities. Clashes between Myanmar troops and insurgents along the border in early 2001 once again proved that Thai policy was unsubstantiated. An article in a Myanmar newspaper claimed this.

Since 1999, some Thai security forces has provided ammunition, communication equipment, medical care, training facilities and instructors to the SURA. Thai officers attended passing-out ceremonies. Some Thai security forces even threatened Lahu nationals (from Myanmar) to join the SURA. It was a forced recruitment. They were also involved in transporting SURA troops as well as in fighting and support artillery fires. Thai security forces allowed the KNPP to set up headquarters in Mae Hong Song and the KNU headquarters and No. 6 KNU Brigade in Kalawthawt and Htishawkhee. On 6 September 1999, Major General Sanchai Ratchatawan, commander of the 9th Infantry Division, held a discussion with Oliver, commander of No. 4 KNLA Brigade, Mututu, commander of No. 6 KNLA Brigade, Phado Kwe Htoo from the Myeik/Dawae Administrative Committee and the son of KNU chairman Bo Mya. Then on 13 September 1999, Major General Sanchai, together with other military officers, held a discussion with Oliver in Lokburi. On 15 September 1999, he met with the Central Committee of the NMSP (the remaining faction) at the office of the 9th Infantry Division in Thong Phaphum.<sup>69</sup>

Another Myanmar source pointed out that the KNU had been receiving all kinds of assistance, ranging from weapons and

ammunition to troop transportation and medical care, through the co-ordination of senior officers from the Internal Security Operation Command.<sup>70</sup>

During the SURA attack on Tatmadaw positions in the Kyahtina, Lwekhanchon and Lwemasoak areas in February 2001, the Tatmadaw believed that Thai troops were assisting the SURA.<sup>71</sup> When the SURA launched artillery attacks on E-7 hillock and Tarchileik early on the morning of 11 February 2001, Thai troops were reportedly involved. The artillery attack came from Aung Zeya Hill, located inside Thai territory. To the Myanmar government, it was very clear that the Thai authorities had allowed the SURA to use Thai soil to attack a Myanmar military post and a Myanmar city. Moreover, the Tatmadaw also found out that Thai Army personnel participated in the artillery attack.<sup>72</sup> A Tatmadaw press release noted that "Thai military units, putting SURA to the front and giving them covering fire from the rear, launched the attacks."<sup>73</sup> At a press conference on 25 April 2001, Lieutenant Colonel San Pwint explained:

At midnight on 21 April 2001, three truckloads of a combined force of Thai Army troops and members of Ywet Sit's SURA drug bandits arrived at the Thai military camp which is opposite to the Pachee outpost. At 1:15 a.m. the next day, heavy artillery and small arms began firing on the Pachee outpost from the Thai military camp. Then, about 200 attackers from the Thai camp approached the Pachee outpost. During the attack searchlights from the Thai camp were projected on the Myanmar outpost. The Thai camp also gave continuous artillery support and small arms fire. In addition to giving supporting fire, Thai troops joined the SURA in attacking the Pachee outpost; SURA is just in name as the majority of the attackers were Thai Army troops.... Similarly, the SURA was placed in the forefront while Thai troops gave supporting fire and took part in launching attacks on O-7 (E-7) hillock, Lwemasoak camp and Lwetawkham camp in Tarchileik in February. Myanmar has filed protests many times against the involvement of Thai troops. It is known that Thai troops are stationed together with members of the SURA.<sup>74</sup>

In fact, Thai security forces and authorities were deeply involved in helping the SURA. According to Myanmar sources, the Thai authorities had been helping to build SURA bases and camps in the Lwetainglyan, Nantpinlein and Lwelon (Point 5151) areas since November 1999. These places were inside Thai territory. In December 1999, the Thai Army delivered some 60mm mortars (including

ammunition) and RPG launchers. Moreover, the SURA troops were allowed to stay in a former Thai military outpost named Maemaw, near the Myanmar-Thai border. SURA troops were also allowed to wear military uniforms when they moved around in Thailand. In September 2000, about ten instructors from the Thai Army came to Maemaw camp and taught some 200 SURA troops about artillery. On 2 May 2000, some senior Thai military officers attended the Independence Day ceremony of the SURA. Beginning from 1 October 2000, a new camp for the SURA had been under construction with the help of the Thai authorities in Mongna village (map reference Y-735934). In December 2000, the Thai authorities forcibly recruited some Shan nationals of Myanmar citizenship to work in Thailand for the SURA by threatening to jail them for illegal entry if they did not comply. About ten instructors from the Thai Army trained the recruits. On 5 and 6 February 2001, the Thai Army transported some SURA troops from Lwelon and Mongna to Maheintet. The Thai Army Special Force was also involved in this.<sup>75</sup>

Throughout February to April 2001, Thai troops were stationed together with SURA troops. Myanmar sources stated that on 10 February 2001, some Thai troops were together with SURA troops in an outpost (T-9312) across the Parche outpost of the Tatmadaw. At the same time, the Thai Army helped the SURA build trenches and bunkers in Lwemaetaw (Point-6274). On 21 February 2001, about 150 Thai troops were together with about 200 SURA troops in surrounding the Tatmadaw Lwetawkhan camp. During this encounter, three Thai Army helicopters landed in the SURA camp. In March, the Thai Army delivered 300 M-16 assault rifles to the SURA.<sup>76</sup>

On 22 April 2001, the SURA and the Thai Army troops attacked the Tatmadaw outpost in Parche. At the press conference, Lieutenant Colonel San Pwint explained:

About 1:15 a.m. on 22 April, artillery attack and assault came from the Thai outpost across the Parche camp. Then, about 200 troops approached the Tatmadaw outpost from the Thai outpost. During the attack on the Parche outpost, Thai Army troops used spotlights and provided support artillery fire for the SURA. Thai troops were also involved in the assault. The SURA was just in name and the Thai troops were the one attacking the Tatmadaw position.<sup>77</sup>

To the Myanmar government, Thai troops are not only supporting the insurgents but also participating in combat activities.

In August 1990, at a RBC meeting in Mawlamyaing, the Thai delegation promised that the Thai government would take serious action against contraband weapons reaching insurgent camps. But in February 1991, for example, a truckload of weapons still reached the KNU. Although there was no way to know the capacity in which he was involved, a major from the Thai Army was on the truck. The truck transported more than 1,000 75mm shells and 500 RPG rockets from the Laotian border to the KNU. On 12 January 1992, four truckloads of ammunition arrived at KNU Major Soe Soe's residence in Mae Sot. Again, on 14 March 1992, three truckloads of ammunition, including 180 boxes of AK-47 bullets and 160 boxes of M-16 bullets, arrived at the Wankha camp.<sup>78</sup> In fact, the Tatmadaw seized several boxes of ammunition labelled RTA ordnance during their operations. At the second RBC meeting, the Thai delegation stated that the Thai authorities had taken effective measures in suppressing arms smuggling along the common border. The delegation cited the number of arrests as evidence of sincerity and seriousness in tackling the issue as stated at the first RBC meeting.<sup>79</sup>

According to a study conducted by Thai scholars, most of the arms supplied to Myanmar insurgents came from warehouses along the Thai-Cambodian border. These warehouses were under the control of a unit known as "*so po ko to bo 315*" (Special Operation Division 315). The unit operated secretly and independently. According to a police officer who raided 12 warehouses in December 1993, three hundred trucks would not be enough to transport all the weapons in the warehouses. These weapons included 130mm artillery, anti-tank guns and all kinds of bombs, mines and explosives. Thai officers in plain clothes allegedly smuggled the arms out for sale to insurgents along the Myanmar-Thai border. Many millions of U.S. dollars worth of weapons and explosives delivered by the U.S. government to the Thai military were smuggled out by Thai police and military officers for sale to insurgents.<sup>80</sup> Some of the arms supplied to anti-Yangon insurgents originated from stocks of the Thai military.<sup>81</sup> In May 1994, a Thai-U.S. anti-drug task force caught three Thais with 51,350 rounds for M-60 and M-16 rifles. These bullets were marked as the property of the Royal Thai Army.<sup>82</sup> A recent evidence of the Thai Army's involvement in supplying weapons to anti-Yangon insurgents, according to Myanmar sources, surfaced in January 2001. It was claimed that on 2 January 2001, three truckloads of weapons arrived at a Thai military camp at Bahtpaithai. On 11 January these weapons were transported to Daunggwun (near Marnepalaw) and subsequently transferred to Phukhe from the No. 7 KNLA Brigade. These weapons were distributed among KNU, DAB and SURA

troops. A ceremony to hand over the arms and ammunition was also held on 14 January 2001 at Daunggwin. In February 2001, after the E-7 hillock incident, the Thai Army issued 300 new M-16 assault rifles to the SURA.<sup>83</sup>

The Thai police has caught arms smugglers transporting arms to insurgent groups along the Myanmar-Thai border from time to time. In 1993, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, in his capacity as the Minister of Interior, conceded that most of the trucks caught illegally transporting weapons belonged to the Thai government and that most of the smugglers were policemen.<sup>84</sup> The value of arms seized between 1990 and 1992 is estimated, on the basis of police reports, to be about 608 million baht (U.S. \$25 million). The director of the Thai police estimated that the quantity of weapons seized by the police was less than 10 percent of the total trade. Another police officer who investigated contraband arms trade estimated that the quantity seized was just a tiny portion of the whole trade. In a 1995 interview, a police Major General said that only small-scale smugglers were caught. According to the estimate given by Thai scholars, the value of contraband arms trade in 1992 was between 10.3 and 51.7 billion baht (between U.S. \$413 million and \$2.07 billion). That was the amount spent by insurgent groups along the Myanmar-Thai border in 1992. The estimate for 1995 was about 20 billion baht.<sup>85</sup> The profit was shared among some politicians, military and police officers, and businessmen. The contraband arms trade was difficult to control for several reasons. According to the Thai scholars:

First, the participants and beneficiaries from the trade include some ministers, MPs, top party officials, big businessmen, local godfathers, police and military officers. They have both political and financial clout as well as deadly weapons. Second, the Thai *government's security policy promotes conflicts in neighbouring countries*, which generate the demand for arms. Third, the organised arms and drug trade is well established with a wide network both inside the country and internationally.<sup>86</sup> (italics are mine for emphasis)

This suggested that the objective of the contraband arms trade was not simply to make money. It was also a part of the measures taken by Thai officers to create a buffer zone along the Myanmar-Thai border. This became more evident when the Thai Army supplied weapons to insurgents if necessary.



## CONCLUSION

As long as the Thai authorities continue to maintain a close association with anti-Myanmar insurgents along the Myanmar-Thai border, the Myanmar government and the Tatmadaw are not likely to dismiss their perception that Thailand is sustaining a buffer zone policy between the two countries. As far as the Myanmar government is concerned, the Thai government's policy of building a civilian army and self-defence villages within Thailand is not a major concern. But when it comes to the Thai government's support for insurgent groups, for whatever reasons, it is not acceptable to the Myanmar government. As long as the Thai government and the Thai military continue to support anti-Myanmar insurgent groups and practise a buffer zone policy, increased clashes between troops of the two countries are to be expected and the tension will remain high along the Myanmar-Thai border. The Tatmadaw's determination to crush the SURA that "relies on the army of another nation",<sup>87</sup> no matter what it takes, is likely to have a spill-over effect on Myanmar-Thai relations in the near future.

## NOTES

- 1 General Saw Maung's meeting with General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh on 5 January 1987. This information is provided by a Tatmadaw officer.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's speech at a dinner hosted in honour of General Saw Maung (27 July 1987)
- 4 This information is provided by a Tatmadaw officer.
- 5 *ibid.*
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 My conversations with a number of military officials who served in the Kayin state
- 8 Alfred McCoy. *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. New York: Harper and Row, 1972, pp. 331-343
- 9 Pasuk Phongpaichit, Sungsidh Piriyanarangsana and Nualnoi Treerat. *Guns, Girls, Gambling, Ganja: Thailand's Illegal Economy and Public Policy*. Bangkok: Silksworm Books, 1998, p. 129
- 10 ကပိယာကန်ကော့ဂွံ. “Erratic Scheme with Ulterior Motive” in *Kyemon* (18 February 2001);

11 *The Defence of Thailand* 1994, pp. 15-16

12 *The Defence of Thailand* 1996, p. 8

13 My communication with a number of senior government officials

14 *Nation* (15 August 1996)

15 *ibid.*

16 *Bangkok Post* (7 January 2000)

17 သတင်းစာတစ်စောင်ကဲ့သို့ ခုတင်ပါးပေးခြင်းမရှိ Reporter Thet Shey. "None Other Than This" in *Myanmar Alin* (2 April 2001)

18 *Bangkok Post* (14 April 2000)

19 *Bangkok Post* (13 April 2000)

20 *Bangkok Post* (12 April 2000)

21 *ibid.*

22 ငါတို့အဖို့ အရေးကြီးသောကိစ္စကောင်းကောင်းမရှိဘူး။ ( မြန်မာ့အသံ ၂-၃ မတ် ၂၀၀၁ ) . Nga Khin Nyo. "Only the Stamina is Essential in Time of Emergency" in *Myanmar Alin* (2-3 March 2001)

23 *Bangkok Post* (14 May 2000)

24 ငါတို့အဖို့ အရေးကြီးသောကိစ္စကောင်းကောင်းမရှိဘူး။ . Nga Khin Nyo. "Only the Stamina is Essential in Time of Emergency" in *Myanmar Alin* (2-3 March 2001)

25 This information is provided by a Tatmadaw officer.

26 *ibid.*

27 Sithu Aung. "Internal Insurgency and Outside interference" in *Working People's Daily* (8 March 1993)

28 ပြင်ပမှ (ဒုတိယ) သူ့ကိုယ်သူ့အဖို့မရှိပါ။ ( မြန်မာ့အသံ ၉ မတ် ၂၀၀၁ ) . Myint Soe (Na Ta La). "No Henchman Available for Hire" in *Myanmar Alin* (9 March 2001)

29 *Times of India* (5 March 2001)

30 မိုးခွာမ ပုလင်းတူဘူးဆိုပါလို့ ( မြန်မာ့ ၁၅ မတ် ၂၀၀၁ ) . Po Kwa. "Cork that Fits the Bottle" in *Kyemon* (15 March 2001)

31 1st RBC Meeting minutes

32 15th RBC Meeting minutes

33 16th RBC Meeting minutes

34 *ibid.*

35 တစ်ထပ်တည်းအိမ်နီးဆင်းကပ်နေပါလို့ ( မြန်မာ့ ၅ မတ် ၂၀၀၁ ) . Tin Than Oo. "The Next Door Neighbour" in *Kyemon* (March 2001)

36 အလင်းတိုင်းကောင်းကောင်းမြင်နေကြသည် ( သံသယတပ်ဖွဲ့အဖွဲ့ ၁၈ စွန့်ခွာခဲ့ပြီး ၂၀၀၁ ) . A surrenderer personnel. "Blood Speaks" in *Wunthanu Bulletin* (18

January 2000)

37 *ibid.*; ဇိုလ်ကော့ဒ်း ခုတ်လျှင်ခေါ် ဟုတ်လျှင်ခေ့ဒ် (ရွှေကြွေမှ ၁၂ သော့ကိတ်တိုက် ၁၉၅၉)  
 . Po Kan Kanug. "Truth Cannot be Concealed" in *Kyemon* (12  
 October 1999)

38 2nd RBC Meeting minutes

39 *ibid.*

40 *ibid.*

41 3rd RBC Meeting minutes

42 *ibid.*

43 17th RBC Meeting minutes

44 *Bangkok Post* (18 December 2000)

45 မသောင်းမာဒီး၊ မသောင်းမာဒောင်းသက်မေ့ဖွဲ့မိတ် (ရန်ကင်းဗိုလ်တိုက်ဆန်းကြယ်မိမိမာစင်ပ ၁၉၅၉)  
 . Thaug Wai Oo. *Not Fated to Die, Not Yet Die*. Yangon: Hlowet  
 Sankye Magazine, 1999, p. 424

46 *ibid.*

47 တိုက်လွှတ် အိမ်နီးချင်းတောင်းဆိုလာတွင် (ပြန်မူဆာလင် ၁၅ မတ် ၂၀၀၁) . Bo Kyaw.  
 "To Be a Good Neighbour" in *Myanmar Alin* (15 March 2001)

48 တပ်သန့်ဦး အိမ်နီးချင်းတောင်းဆိုခြင်း . Tin Than Oo. "The Next Door  
 Neighbour" in *Kyemon* (March 2001)

49 *ibid.*

50 *ibid.*

51 *ibid.*

52 My communication with a number of Tatmadaw officers

53 *Bangkok Post* (21 March 1995)

54 This information is provided by a Tatmadaw officer.

55 တပ်သန့်ဦး အိမ်နီးချင်းတောင်းဆိုခြင်း . Tin Than Oo. "The Next Door  
 Neighbour" in *Kyemon* (March 2001)

56 ကရင်ပြည်နယ်သေတစ်ဦး မာတခင် (ရှင်ပုလားယောင်) မှန်ကန်သတင်းချစ်ဖန်နယ်စပ်လူ  
 လိုနန်း၊ သူမည် . A resident of Kayin state. *Whither KNU?*. Yangon:  
 News and Periodical Enterprises, 1995, p. 146

57 တပ်သန့်ဦး အခြေအနေတပ်မတော်အခြေအနေကြားအခြေ (ပြန်မူဆာလင် ၁၂ မတ် ၂၀၀၁)  
 . Tin Than Oo. "Cause of Tension" in *Myanmar Alin* (12 March  
 2001)

58 *ibid.*

59 A picture of the caps could be seen in  
 နှစ်သက်လ်ကော့ဒ်း "အိမ်နီးချင်းတောင်းဆိုခြင်း" မသောင်းမာဒောင်းသက်မေ့ဖွဲ့မိတ်  
 နှစ်သက်လ်ကော့ဒ်း တပ်သန့်ဦး အခြေအနေတပ်မတော်အခြေ (ရှင်ပုလားယောင်) မှန်ကန်သတင်းချစ်

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60 ကရင်ပြည်နယ်သားတစ်ဦး၊ ကာကဆိန်(နီ)၊ ဟိုဘက်ကလေး။ "Whither KNU?". Yangon: News and Periodical Enterprises, 1995, p. 126

61 ibid, pp. 151-152

62 ibid, p. 132

63 ibid, p. 122

64 Desmond Ball. *Burma's Military Secret: Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) from 1941 to Cyber Warfare*. Bangkok: White Lotus, 1999, p. 175

65 ကရင်ပြည်နယ်သားတစ်ဦး၊ ကာကဆိန်(နီ)၊ ဟိုဘက်ကလေး။ "Whither KNU?" in *Kyemon* (27 February 1995), p. 134

66 နဂါးခင်နီ၊ မတူညီသောစုစည်းမှုများ (မြန်မာ့အလင်း၊ ၁၅ ဇူလိုင် ၂၀၀၁)။ Nga Khin Nyo. "Uneven Hearts" in *Myanmar Alin* (19 February 2001)

67 Statement given by Colonel Kyaw Win (DDSI) on 9 May 1995

68 *Asian Defence Journal* 8/2000, p. 19

69 မဟာနီလာ၊ မတူညီသောစုစည်းမှုများ (မြန်မာ့အလင်း၊ ၂၂ ဧပြီ ၂၀၀၁)။ Kaytu Nilar. "I Replied the Truth, Part 3" in *Kyemon* (22 April 2001)

70 မဟာနီလာ၊ မတူညီသောစုစည်းမှုများ (မြန်မာ့အလင်း၊ ၂၁ ဧပြီ ၂၀၀၁)။ Kaytu Nilar. "I Replied the Truth, Part 2" in *Kyemon* (21 April 2001)

71 Press conference reported in *New Light of Myanmar* (13 February 2001)

72 ibid.

73 ibid.

74 *Kyemon* (26 April 2001)

75 ခြေခံကုန်၊ ဆိပ်ကမ်းကိုဆိတ်ဆူစုစည်းခြင်း (မြန်မာ့အလင်း၊ ၃၁ မတ် ၂၀၀၁)။ Sein Lun.

"Covering the Carcass of an Elephant with a Goat Hide" in *Myanmar Alin* (31 March 2001)

76 ibid.

77 Press conference reported in *Myanmar Alin* (26 April 2001)

78 This information is provided by a Tatmadaw officer. See also ခြေခံကုန်၊ ဆိပ်ကမ်းကိုဆိတ်ဆူစုစည်းခြင်း (မြန်မာ့အလင်း၊ ၃၁ မတ် ၂၀၀၁)။ Sein Lun.

"Covering the Carcass of an Elephant with a Goat Hide" in *Myanmar Alin* (31 March 2001 and 1 April 2001)

- 79 2nd RBC Meeting minutes
- 80 Pasuk Phongpaichit, Sungsidh Piriyaarangsana and Nualnoi Treerat. *Guns, Girls, Gambling, Ganja: Thailand's Illegal Economy and Public Policy*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 1998, pp. 134-141
- 81 *ibid*, p. 138
- 82 *ibid*, p. 138
- 83 မိန့်လွှန်း၊ အင်္ဂလိပ်စာအုပ်အဖွဲ့နှင့်အခြား (မြန်မာ့အလင်းစာတိုက်မှ အမှတ် ၂၅၁၁)။ Sein Lun. "Covering the Carcass of an Elephant with a Goat Hide" in *Myanma Alin* (31 March 2001 and 1 April 2001)
- 84 *Bangkok Post* (25 February 1993)
- 85 Pasuk Phongpaichit, Sungsidh Piriyaarangsana and Nualnoi Treerat. *Guns, Girls, Gambling, Ganja: Thailand's Illegal Economy and Public Policy*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 1998, pp. 151-152
- 86 *ibid*, pp. 152-153
- 87 *Kyemon* (6 March 2001)

# 3

## INSURGENCY, COUNTER-INSURGENCY AND REFUGEES

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This chapter discusses how extensive counter-insurgency operations conducted by the Tatmadaw, especially between 1988 and 1996, have contributed to the capture of almost all insurgent strongholds and bases along the Myanmar-Thai border. These counter-insurgency operations have caused an influx of several thousands of refugees into Thailand. However, the Myanmar government's policy of national reconciliation or reconsolidation has led to peace settlements with various insurgent groups and has thus made possible the repatriation of several thousands of displaced peoples. Yet many more remain in the so-called refugee camps along the Myanmar-Thai border. Although the Thai government has occasionally expressed its intention to discuss the refugee issue with the Myanmar government, it appears that the Myanmar government finds it hard to accept that the Thai authorities are sincere and genuinely interested in resolving the refugee issue. Moreover, the Myanmar government seems to hold a view that some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are complicating the problem.

### INSURGENCY

There were four major insurgent organisations operating along the Myanmar-Thai border in the early 1990s. They were the Mong Thai Army (MTA), the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), the Karen National Union (KNU) and the New Mon State Party (NMSP). Several other minor insurgent groups, such as the Wa National Army (WNA), the Ye/Dawei Solidarity Group (the renamed Burma Communist Party - Thanintharyi division) and the Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA), also have bases along the Myanmar-Thai border.



In early 1989 the MTA, led by Khun Sa, had about 4,000 regular troops. It established outposts and strongholds along the Myanmar-Thai border in the north, especially in the areas known as Lwelan, Homein and Lwesansaw.<sup>1</sup> The MTA had (though rudimentary) ammunition factories which produced ammunition for M-16 and M-22 assault rifles, shells for 75mm and 82mm artilleries, anti-personnel mines, hand grenades and launchers of various calibres.<sup>2</sup> The MTA, was formed in 1960 and 1961 as a local pro-government defence organisation (Karkweye). Since then, it had gone through various transformations. Between 1976 and 1985, it was known as the Shan United Army (SUA). In March 1985, the SUA succeeded in amalgamating with the Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA) led by Moe Hein. It was initially renamed the Shan State Army (SSA). However, in order not to be confused with the existing SSA led by Sai Leik (Kalar), the MTA changed its name to the present one. Nevertheless, both the SUA and the SURA retained their separate organisations under the banner of the MTA.<sup>3</sup> In late 1988, Khun Sa contacted the Tatmadaw authorities<sup>4</sup> and proposed that if the Tatmadaw withdrew its troops from the area and left the camps to the MTA, he would fight against the BCP troops. But the Tatmadaw did not make a deal though it withdrew from the area.<sup>5</sup>

In early 1989 about 1,600 SURA troops, grouped in four brigades, were active in the Pan-Maing-Sun, Mong-Pan, Linkhe and Lecha areas. Another 3,300 SUA troops under Khun Sa were active along the Myanmar-Thai border (Homein, Monghtaw, Monghta, Lwelan, Nam-Ruak, Lwemaohn, Lwelay and Lwemakhet). At about the same time, the MTA launched a massive recruitment drive in the Shan State. It opened an officer training school and a basic military training centre in Homein.<sup>6</sup> In early 1991, the Tatmadaw estimated that the MTA had about 7,000 regular troops. Since the MTA had become increasingly powerful and posed a serious security threat to its positions in the area, the Tatmadaw launched military operations against the MTA positions. In March 1994, the MTA attacked the Tatmadaw outpost in Mong Kyut and fought a major battle. Heavy casualties and defeat in battle dealt a psychological blow to the MTA rank and file. A year later, in February 1995, the MTA made another attempt and initiated an artillery attack on Tarchileik. However, that attempt did not boost troop morale. Four months later, about 200 troops led by Kan Wyet defected from the MTA and formed the Shan State National Army (SSNA) which grew by over 3,000 troops within a few months. Several factors contributed to unconditional surrender of the MTA in January 1996.<sup>7</sup>

At the time of surrender, the MTA had over 14,000 troops, both regular and guerrilla. Some MTA troops were demobilised and sent home. A few days later, a group led by Yauk-Sit, who was present at the surrender ceremony, went back to its former outpost on the pretext of having to collect money from former contacts. Later, Yauk-Sit declared that he and his group did not accept the surrender and took up insurgency once again. The group was named the Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA). It later changed its name to the Shan State Army (SSA) but the Myanmar government continued to refer them as the SURA. The SURA absorbed some diehard MTA troops and recruited new followers using narrow racial pretexts. Since the Thai Army started helping the SURA to launch attacks on Tatmadaw outposts along the Myanmar-Thai border, they have become a source of tension and conflict between Myanmar and Thailand.

The KNPP, led by Palyayae as its chairman and Aung Than Lay as its secretary, was active further south of the MTA area. In early 1989, the KNPP headquarters was located in Hweponlaung. It had about 500 regular troops grouped into four columns: Column 1 in the Mawche area, Column 2 in Pale-Narmon, Column 3 in Naeohm and Column 4 in Maesae and Maesaenam.<sup>8</sup> As a result of counter-insurgency operations conducted by the Tatmadaw in July 1989, the KNPP headquarters moved into Thailand. In August 1992, the KNPP was reorganised. Aung Than Lay became its chairman and Khuhte Buhte became the vice-chairman. Although the KNPP's military columns continued to operate in Myanmar, its headquarters was located on the Thai side of the border.

Since 1991, the KNPP leadership had been trying to explore the possibility and terms of a peace settlement with the government. In June 1993, about a hundred village representatives from the Pharuso township went around various KNPP camps and encouraged KNPP leaders to negotiate with the government. For the first time, a meeting took place between the KNPP vice chief of staff, Aung Myat, and a Tatmadaw delegation in October 1993. In the meantime, on 17 November 1993, Secretary-1 Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt publicly extended an invitation to all insurgent groups to discuss peace settlements with the government. After several rounds of negotiations, the KNPP finally returned to legal-fold and reached a peace settlement on 21 March 1995. At the peace settlement ceremony, KNPP vice-chairman Khuhte Bhuphe presented a list of 7,790 personnel and 8,939 weapons.<sup>9</sup> However, after a few months, a faction of the KNPP returned to its jungle bases and resumed fighting. Due to counter-insurgency operations of the Tatmadaw,

KNPP members have been living in refugee camps, especially in Naswe, Nopaa, Huay Nam and Mae Salin.

The KNU was one of the strongest insurgent groups in Myanmar. Over 4,000 heavily armed regular troops operated along the Myanmar-Thai border under the banner of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the military wing of the KNU. Moreover, the KNU/KNLA had built several military strongholds (fortresses) along the Myanmar-Thai border, together with an elaborate network of guerrilla bases. The KNU headquarters was located at Marnepalaw. The KNU had regular forces, district battalions and district guerrillas. The regular forces were organised into divisions, brigades and battalions. KNLA Division No. 1 was located at the headquarters, together with Brigade No. 5 and Special Battalion No. 101. These troops were primarily responsible for the security of the KNU headquarters and its surrounding area. KNLA Brigade No. 1 operated in Thaton district (west of the Thanlwin River), KNLA Brigade No. 2 operated in the Pharpon district while KNLA Brigade No. 3 operated in the Thandaung district. KNLA Brigade No. 4 operated in the Dawei/Myeik area in the Thanintharyi division. KNLA Brigade No. 6 was active near the Phalu (Myawaddy/Kaukareik) area and KNLA Brigade No. 7 operated in the Hlaingbwe area and had its headquarters in Maethawow. There were at least five KNU district guerrilla bands (ခရိုင်တပ်ဖွဲ့များ) in areas adjacent to Thailand. They were the Phapon District Guerrilla Band, the Thaton District Guerrilla Band, the Pa-an District Guerrilla Band, the Kaukareik District Guerrilla Band and the Myeik/Dawei District Guerrilla Band. Moreover, each district had its own battalion of Defence Organisation (DO), known in Myanmar as *Karkweye Tatyin* (ကရင်ဒေသတပ်ဖွဲ့). For example, DO Battalion No. 1 was active in the Thaton district, No. 5 in the Ba-An district, No. 6 in the Kaukkareik district and No. 7 in the Myeik/Dawei district.<sup>10</sup>

For the KNU, 1989 was believed to be the last year of its so-called Karen Revolution, which began in 1949. The KNU had planned to establish an independent state. Since around 1986, the KNU had been fighting with the NMSP over access to the seacoast so that it would not become a landlocked country. Hostilities between the KNU and the NMSP cooled down only in 1989. In the meantime, the Tatmadaw had been launching massive counter-insurgency operations against the KNU since late 1988 until it halted all offensive operations and declared a unilateral ceasefire in April 1992. The Tatmadaw publicly initiated peace negotiations with the KNU.

Bo Mya, chairman of the KNU, sent an open letter dated 23 April 1993 to Senior General Than Shwe, asking the government to declare a general nationwide ceasefire, to release all so-called political prisoners and to begin negotiations. In June 1993, he went to Bangkok and met Colonel Thein Swe, the Myanmar military attaché in Bangkok at that time. Bo Mya outlined his conditions for negotiations.

- The government must extend an official and formal invitation for negotiations.
- Negotiations must be between the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) and the government.
- The meeting must be held on a foreign land.
- UN representatives must be invited.

Bo Mya also wrote a letter to the Secretary-General of the UN to intervene in the process. The Myanmar military attaché explained the government's position that negotiations must be carried out with individual organisations and it would not accept any united front representation. The government would negotiate only on its soil (as was the case with other groups) and wanted no foreign interference.<sup>11</sup> But Bo Mya stuck to his demands.

Meanwhile, growing dissent between the majority Buddhist rank and file (80%) and the minority Christian leadership (20%) within the KNU/KNLA finally led to an open revolt by the Buddhist rank and file who rallied around the charismatic Buddhist monk Sayadaw U Thuzana. Sayadaw U Thuzana has been doing missionary work in the Karen state for more than two decades. Since the local population was predominantly Buddhist, he drew considerable support. One of the major causes for the open split was the religious discrimination against the Buddhist Karen. Moreover, most of the rank and file were quite disappointed with the lack of progress in peace settlements with the government. The Buddhist Kayin formed the Democratic Karen Buddhist Association (DKBA) in December 1994. Over 5,000 former KNU members joined the DKBA. The DKBA requested the Tatmadaw to help protect them from KNU attacks and in their operations against KNLA positions. The Myanmar government complied with the request. In return, the DKBA also helped the Tatmadaw launch major offensives against KNLA strongholds.<sup>12</sup> The Tatmadaw and the DKBA captured almost all the KNLA bases in early 1995, causing an influx of refugees to Thailand.

In March 1995, the KNU sent several letters to the Myanmar government for peace negotiations. At the same time, it also contacted

**Table 3.1 – List of KNU Headquarters and KNU Forces**

No.	Troops	Base in 1988	Base in 1992	Base in 1996
1	KNU HQ	Marnepalaw	Marnepalaw	Hway Kaloke
2	Division 1	Marnepalaw	Marnepalaw	Hway Kaloke
3	Brigade 1	Wintapa/ Laykay/ Myitkyoe	Marnepalaw/ Thaton/ Belin	Maeyamo
4	Brigade 2	Busarche/ Sikaedoe	Busarche/ Sikaedoe	—
5	Brigade 3	Laykawdoe	Laykowdoe	—
6	Brigade 4	Kaukareik (Minthami)	Kaukareik (Minthami)	Banthanhim
7	Brigade 5	Marnepalaw	Marnepalaw	Maeyamo
8	Brigade 6	Worle/ Thaybawbo	Azin/ Kuaikdon	Mawker/ No Pho
9	Brigade 7	Maela	Baekalok	Maela/ Oumpium

a group of peace brokers to facilitate the negotiations. Between 1995 and 1996, three unofficial and four official meetings between delegations from the KNU and the Myanmar government took place. The last meeting was held on 21 November 1996. After the breakdown of negotiations, a number of KNU rank and file exchanged arms for peace.<sup>13</sup>

The NMSP operated further south of the KNU operation zones. The NMSP headquarters headed, by Nai Shwe Kyin, were situated in Payathonezu (Three Pagodas Pass). The NMSP had about 1,000 regular troops. It also had a mobile guerrilla battalion and several other guerrilla bands. Since the Tatmadaw captured its headquarters and other strongholds, in particular Payathonezu, in February 1990, the NMSP had moved its headquarters to Wanka village on the Thai side of the border. Having lost its strongholds, the NMSP began to use hit-and-run guerrilla tactics to target police and military outposts, lines of communication and some population centres. However, the NMSP never succeeded in recapturing its former strongholds and continued to stay in Thailand. In July 1995, the NMSP reached a

peace settlement with the government and returned to legal-fold. At the time of the peace settlement, the NMSP submitted a list of 7,860 persons with 8,346 weapons.<sup>14</sup>

After the 1988 uprising, leaders of the outlawed underground All-Burma Student Union (ABSU) decided to continue their struggle using three prongs.

- The ABSU would remain as an underground organisation.
- The Democratic Party for New Society (DPNS) would become an above-ground political organisation.
- The All Burma Student Democratic Front (ABSDF) would be an armed organisation.<sup>15</sup>

Over 4,200 students had joined insurgent groups along the Myanmar-Thai border.<sup>16</sup> A student seminar was held from 1 to 4 November 1988 at the Wang Kha camp and, on 5 November, the ABSDF was formed with slightly more than a dozen battalions. Within a couple of years, it grew to 22 battalions. But most of these battalions were only battalions in name. They operated in co-ordination with the KNU and the NMSP. Two battalions (101 and 102) operated with the NMSP in the Payathonezu area, thirteen battalions (201 to 212)<sup>17</sup>, with the KNLA (Minthami, Mawtaung, Thaybawbo, Maeletta, Sawhta and Wakha), one battalion (303), with the KNPP (Hweceti), one battalion (401), with the SSA (Mong Kyet),<sup>18</sup> three battalions (501, 701 and 702), with the KIA (Laisin), one battalion (601), with the Pao National Organisation (PNO), one battalion (801), with the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA)<sup>19</sup> and one battalion (901), with the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP).<sup>20</sup> On 26 September 1988, the Myanmar government declared a general amnesty for students hiding in the jungle for fear of being prosecuted for their roles in the 1988 demonstrations. Several thousand leaflets were air-dropped into border areas. With the co-operation of the Thai government, 27 reception camps were opened in the Tak province. As of the end of October 1989, it was reported that 3,375 students had returned home.<sup>21</sup>

The KNU, the KNPP and the NMSP belonged to the National Democratic Front (NDF), an anti-Yangon alliance formed in May 1976. The NDF comprised ten non-communist insurgent groups.<sup>22</sup> In order to build a united front against the Myanmar government, various anti-Yangon organisations formed the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) on 14 November 1988. The DAB consisted of 23 groups altogether, of which ten were members of the NDF.<sup>23</sup> The DAB formed the Democratic Alliance of Burma Army (DABA),



drawing troops from its members. Beginning in 1989, the Tatmadaw and the government had successfully negotiated peace settlements or ceasefire agreements with a number of insurgent groups. The first to come under this arrangement were splinter groups of the former Burma Communist Party. Several other ethnic insurgent groups followed suit. By early 1992, a total of nine groups had come under peace settlement agreements. In April 1992, due to changes within the ruling regime and the Tatmadaw, the government took further steps towards national reconciliation and reconsolidation. The Myanmar government released several hundred political prisoners and prepared to hold a national convention to draft the state constitution. In conjunction with this process, the Tatmadaw declared a unilateral ceasefire with the KNLA front and halted all offensive operations. However, the Tatmadaw continued counter-insurgency operations against the MTA as it had decided to pursue a no-compromise policy towards narco-insurgents. By the end of 2000, a total of 17 major insurgent groups had reached peace settlements with the government while a number of smaller groups exchanged arms for peace. The DKBA also reached a modus operandi and a modus vivendi with the Tatmadaw. All the groups under peace settlements had to withdraw their memberships from the NDF, the DAB and any anti-Myanmar government organisation. Some of the peace settlement arrangements are now over 12 years old. The DKBA in particular has been working together with the Tatmadaw and the government for more than six years.

## COUNTER-INSURGENCY

In terms of counter-insurgency operations, the Tatmadaw usually used a three-phase plan. Phase one transforms a 'black area' into a 'brown area', that is, to transform an area controlled by insurgents but where the Tatmadaw operates to a Tatmadaw-controlled area where insurgents operate. The second phase is to transform from the brown area into a 'white area'. In this phase, the area will be cleared of any insurgent activities. The final phase is to transform it into a 'hard-core area'. In phase one, the objective is to dislodge insurgent troops, capture insurgent strongholds and bases, and introduce a strong presence of government security forces. In this phase, the most common and primary form of fighting is conventional warfare with anti-guerrilla warfare as secondary form. In phase two, mopping-up operations and organisational activities are important. Anti-guerrilla warfare and zoning operations are common while regional development programmes are designed to win the hearts and minds

of the local population. In phase three, more organisational work is necessary and the government forms pro-government militia units for both counter-insurgency and for overall national defence.

In 1988, in the South East Command (SEC) area (Karen state, Mon state and Tharnintharyi division), the Tatmadaw deployed about 39 battalions to conduct counter-insurgency operations. Ten battalions under the SEC and three battalions from No. 22 Light Infantry Division (LID-22) were grouped into four Tactical Operation Commands (TOC) under the SEC. Another 26 battalions under LID-22 and LID-66 were deployed on rotation. Though the headquarters of LID-22 were located in Ba-an, capital of Kayin state, seven of its battalions were busy with security operations in Yangon.

In 1989 and 1990, almost the same number of troops were committed to counter-insurgency operations in the SEC area. In 1991, however, the Tatmadaw sent a few more battalions to the area. Forty battalions under the SEC, LID-44, LID-66 and LID-88 were

**Table 3.2 – The South East Command (SEC) area in late 1988**

No.	TOC	Battalions	Townships	Remarks
1	TOC-1 (SEC)	BRT-17 LIB-101/103	Thanintharyi, Kawthaung, Myeik, Thayet Chaung, Pulaw, Bokeyyin	
2	TOC-2 (SEC)	BRT-31/61	Thanphuzayat, Ye	
3	TOC-3 (SEC)	BRT-25/LIB-104	Yepyu, Dawei, Lounglone	
4	TOC-4 (SEC)	BRT-32/62/81 LIB-208/209/210	Mawlamyaing, Mudon, Kyeikmaraw, Kyainseikgyi	LID-22
5	LID-44	LIB-1 to 10 KRIF-2/BRT-28/97	Hlaingbwe, Ba-an, Kaukkareik, Myawaddy	
6	LID-66	BRT-75 to 84 BRT-19/35/48	Phapon, Belin, Thaton, Ba-an	TOC-1 (CC)

engaged in counter-insurgency operations. Three more battalions from the Yangon Command reinforced them in the Mawlamyaing, Mudon, Kyainseikgyi and Kyeikmaraw areas. By then, some Tactical Operation Command Bases (TOC-B) (တactical operation command base) had been established in Bokepyin and Phapon.

In 1992, over 80 battalions were committed to counter-insurgency operations in the South East Command area. Troops under LID-22, LID-33, LID-44, LID-88 and LID-99 were sent into the area. These battalions engaged in securing lines of communication and making assaults on KNLA positions. A Regional Operation Command (ROC) was opened in Myeik with ten new infantry battalions. Since late 1991, the Tatmadaw had launched major operations to capture KNU/KNLA strongholds and to dislodge insurgents from the area. Since the declaration of unilateral ceasefire by the Tatmadaw in April 1992, some Tatmadaw battalions had been involved in mopping-up operations to consolidate the operational zones (လက်နက်ကိုင်နယ်များ), with a special emphasis on securing lines of communication.

Since 1996, several new infantry battalions have been opened in the SEC area. A new regional command known as the Coastal Region Command Headquarters was opened in Myeik. The Tatmadaw opened two new Military Operation Commands (MOC) in Dawei and Kawkareik. New TOC-Bs were also opened in Kalein Aung, Yephu, Thayet Chaung, Kawthaung, Thanintharyi and Maw Taung. A new MOC was opened in Bokepyin in 2000. As a result of these new establishments, nearly 70 infantry battalions were permanently deployed with their headquarters. They were known as local battalions (အရပ်ရပ် တပ်ဖွဲ့).<sup>24</sup> An additional 20 infantry battalions have been continuously deployed on a rotation basis.<sup>25</sup> About 20 support battalions (လက်နက်ကိုင်) are also present in the area. Twenty infantry battalions under two LIDs (LID-22 and LID-44) in the SEC area are also involved in security operations, and are ready for combat duty.

In the Eastern Command (EC) area, which comprised eastern Shan state and Kayah state, about 30 infantry battalions were deployed in late 1980s. In the early 1990s, a Regional Operation Command (ROC) was established in Kengtung with 10 new infantry battalions. A few years later, another ROC was established in Loikaw. In 1996, while the ROC (Kengtung) was being transformed into

the Triangle Region Command (TRC) to oversee operations in the eastern bank of the Thanlwin River, two new MOCs were introduced in Loilin and Phekhon. By early 2000, one MOC and one ROC have been opened in Mong Hast and Mong Khet respectively. Moreover, several TOC-Bs have also been established. As a result, by the year 2000, over 80 infantry battalions were permanently deployed, along with another 20 or so support/corps battalions, in the area close to the Myanmar-Thai border, in the northern sector.

It appears that the Myanmar government and the Tatmadaw believe in the sustained deployment of troops as a means of eliminating insurgent guerrillas and improving the public image of the military in formerly contested zones. It was hoped that better communications and contact between Tatmadaw troops and the local population would increase mutual understanding between the two and help the government win the hearts and minds of the local people. The sustained deployment of troops would also give the Tatmadaw a chance to prove to the local population that they are humane, kind and caring, and not the kind of people they were made out to be in anti-government propaganda.

The Tatmadaw have given much more attention to counter-insurgency operations targeting ethnic insurgencies since the mid 1980s. More operations were conducted with greater intensity against Kachin, Shan, Mon and Kayin insurgents. The capture of the Pajo and Narphaw strongholds of the KIA and the Mawpokay stronghold of the KNU were well publicised. Despite the fact that the Tatmadaw launched attacks and occupied some insurgent strongholds, many of them were left ultimately unattended and unmanned. The situation became worse when troops were withdrawn from the area after the 1988 uprising for security operations in urban centres. As a result, for example, Tatmadaw outposts in the Lwelan area were taken over by the MTA. Sudden rise in casualties since 1984 indicated that the Tatmadaw had begun to engage more extensively with KNU insurgents. In 1984, the Tatmadaw opened a new military division (LID-44) in Thaton. Three years later, another military division (LID-22) was established in Ba-an. These two divisions were the strike and assault forces while troops under the SEC would provide security for lines of communication and engage in mopping-up operations. By 1987, the Tatmadaw confidently declared that it would eliminate KNU insurgency within two years.

Soon after the military takeover in September 1988, the Tatmadaw fought two major battles with insurgents. One was in the north-east border region with the BCP and the other was in the south-

**Table 3.3 – Casualty report in the South East Command area (1979 – 1987)**

No.	Year	Tatmadaw		Insurgents		
		Dead	Wounded	Dead	Captured	Surrendered
1	1979	167	467	201	46	90
2	1980	136	399	162	64	102
3	1981	60	342	141	25	22
4	1982	206	698	292	148	64
5	1983	235	515	374	119	76
6	1984	661	2,286	369	69	108
7	1985	304	1,018	519	108	122
8	1986	306	1,045	554	93	112
9	1987	592	1,666	413	84	77
Total		2,667	8,436	3,025	756	773

east region with the KNU. A major battle between the Tatmadaw and the KNU took place in Maethawow. On 26 September 1988, the KNU launched an attack on the Maethawow outpost. The outpost was originally a stronghold of the KNU. Since it was located on the black market trade route from Thailand (Darsaungyan), the outpost had been an important source of revenue for the KNU. In 1980, the Tatmadaw drove the KNU out from the stronghold. When Tatmadaw troops were withdrawn because of a shortage of manpower, the KNU retook the stronghold, only to be recaptured in 1984 by the Tatmadaw. This time, a battalion was posted to the stronghold and its surrounding area. The No. 76 Infantry Battalion, which was on security operations at Maethawow and the nearby hillocks, came under attack from the KNU. Troops from several outposts and hillocks retreated. Then, after reinforcements arrived, the Tatmadaw launched its counter-offensive. The whole operation lasted for about three months. When the operation ended on 24 December 1988, the Tatmadaw had fought 85 major engagements and 145 minor engagements. In the course of the operation, the Tatmadaw suffered 242 dead and 922 wounded. The Tatmadaw estimated that over more than 700 KNU soldiers were killed and more than 1,000 wounded in the battle.<sup>26</sup>

As counter-insurgency operations against the MTA, the KNPP and the NMSP has already been discussed earlier, the discussion here will focus more on the KNU/KNLA. The Tatmadaw had been

**Table 3.4 – Military operations in the South East Command**

No.	Operation	From	To	Remark
1	Zwe Aung Lin	1 Jan 1987	31 Dec 1991	Special Operation
2	Nga Min	1 Jan 1992	30 Apr 1992	
3	Than Hlet	1 May 1992	31 Dec 1993	
4	Nay Min	1 Jan 1994	30 Apr 1995	
5	Pyay Zarni	9 Jan 1995	21 Feb 1995	
6	Pyay Zarni (stage-2)	1 May 1995	30 Apr 1997	
7	Aung Nay Lin	1 May 1997	-	
8	Aung Naing Hein	1 Jan 1997	-	

launching major offensives in the South East Command area to capture and clean up insurgent strongholds since 1989. During the Maethawow battle, the Tatmadaw recaptured Point-1778, Ant Kyaw Hillock, Kasanali Hillock and Yeikkar Hillock. In 1989, the Tatmadaw captured a number of KNLA strongholds: Kalaedae, Mawphokay, Maela, Uthuta, the Darkwin logging camp, the Khokyakho logging camp and the Kyauknyut logging camp. The most well known victory for the Tatmadaw was the capture of the Wakha Haung camp. In subsequent years, the Tatmadaw captured Mawthawow, Maetare, Phalu, Worle, Mawtaung, Thaybowboe, Payathonezu, Ywahaylu, Azin, Khwe Eik Taung and Nat Ein Taung. In the period between April 1992 and January 1995, Tatmadaw battalions were engaged mostly in security operations. During this period, the KNLA launched attacks on Umukhe and some other outposts manned by the Tatmadaw. Beginning in January 1995, with the help of the DKBA, the Tatmadaw captured almost all the KNU bases and strongholds. It captured Marnepalaw, Wakha Thit and other KNU posts. By 1996, phase one of the counter-insurgency in the SEC had been somewhat accomplished. For the first time in history, the Tatmadaw took nearly full control of the area.

During the fighting throughout phase one, the Tatmadaw applied two different forms of counter-insurgency warfare: the conventional warfare and the 'four cuts' strategy based on anti-guerrilla warfare. Until 1996, the primary form of warfare was conventional war as the KNU had built fixed defence lines, trenches and bases, and applied static and positional warfare. In some areas, it had built long trench lines stretching about two miles. A Tatmadaw column discovered a well-built trench linking the Umukhe outpost and the Thaungyin River, nearly two miles long, during their operations in that area in 1992. The counter-insurgency warfare

**Table 3.5 – Casualty report in the South East Command area (1989 – 1997)**

No.	Year	Tatmadaw		Insurgents		
		Dead	Wounded	Dead	Captured	Surrendered
1	1989	870	3,621	1,069	85	154
2	1990	336	1,424	503	22	69
3	1991	474	1,409	703	42	259
4	1992	750	3,372	853	84	227
5	1993	228	459	456	192	293
6	1994	111	305	328	158	401
7	1995	235	699	581	132	543
8	1996*	61	166	328	32	264
9	1997*	202	605	622	17	972
	Total	3,267	12,060	5,443	764	3,182

\* includes the Coastal Region Command Area

against positional defence usually drew artillery fire. Both the KNLA and the Tatmadaw used heavy artillery. The KNLA troops were equipped with 120mm artillery, 3.5" rocket launchers, 82mm artillery, 81mm artillery, 60mm artillery, 3" mortars and 57mm recoilless guns. The Tatmadaw troops used 60mm, 61mm, 75mm, 81mm, 105mm, 120mm, 155mm artillery as well as 84mm recoilless guns. The Tatmadaw also used aircraft for bombing KNLA targets but this proved ineffective because of their close proximity to Thai air space. The Tatmadaw estimated that its bombing campaign of Marnepalaw in early 1992 only resulted in 56 dead and 350 wounded.<sup>27</sup>

In the period between 1992 and 1995, some troops were deployed to do cleaning-up operations. Yet most of the security operations were designed to secure a line of communication for the Tatmadaw troops and outposts. In some areas, some measures relating to the 'four cuts' strategy were introduced to dislodge the KNU's district guerrilla bands and district battalions.

The 'four cuts' strategy was adopted to cut off:

- food supply to insurgents;
- protection money from villagers to insurgents;
- contact (intelligence) between the local people and insurgents; and
- the insurgents' head (not literally but referring to the people involved in the fighting, particularly the encirclement of



Map 3.1 – The South East Command Area



insurgents).

The Tatmadaw realised that unless it could capture all the insurgent strongholds along the border and seal off the area, it would not be able to make sustained troop deployment to implement the 'four cuts' strategy and zoning operations.

However, there were apparent limitations to the 'four cuts' strategy in this case. As a result, cutting off intelligence was the only option for the Tatmadaw. Although there were some reports on the destruction of paddy fields in the operation zones, it did not affect the insurgents very much. In some cases, such action backfired on the troops as it hurt the local populace. Having operated in the region for more than thirty years, the KNU was familiar with the terrain and had a significant influence among the population. The KNU built its influence through persuasion, terror and propaganda. Since the KNU operated among the Karen population, it won their sympathy. Many Karen villagers served in the KNU. At the same time the KNU also applied what Mao Zedong called "controlled terror". Those who were not co-operative with the KNU or those who were believed to be sympathisers of the government were eliminated. These measures were supported by the extensive propaganda of the so-called Bamar chauvinism and hate campaigns. A Tatmadaw colonel wrote in his memoirs that "in Laykay area, insurgents and our troops were wrestling and fighting, and since they were locals they were very familiar with terrain and had plenty of relatives, let alone the language advantage. Therefore, they could easily get lost among the villagers. They were far better than we were in guerrilla warfare and manoeuvres. They controlled the local population through the use of terror and organised them through propaganda campaigns."<sup>28</sup>

In early 1994, for example, Colonel Thaung Wai introduced the 'four cuts' strategy in the Laykay area (west of the Thanlwin River). In his memoirs, Col. Thaung Wai wrote:

Farm huts in the nearby area of Laykay village were destroyed and (we) made people stay in the village. A census and household registration system was introduced. Sector chiefs were appointed in the village. Curfew was introduced from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Frequent surprise checks were conducted day or night (to check anybody missing or staying without reporting the authorities). All the approaches to the villages were planted with anti-personal landmines. The minefields and nearby areas were declared out-of-bound areas for all villagers.<sup>29</sup>

Houses situated either close to village entrances or which

blocked the view of insurgent approaches were relocated.<sup>30</sup> These measures were designed to cut intelligence reports from reaching the insurgent guerrillas. However, the insurgents continued to receive food supplies from other sources. In his memoirs, Colonel Thaung Wai acknowledged the difficulty of getting intelligence from KNU-sympathetic villagers. In this context, signal intelligence (SIGINT) operation (interception) played an extremely important role. So did the signal security.

The Tatmadaw's main campaign was to secure a line of communication. Even during the major offensives, the Tatmadaw deployed several battalions just to protect the lines of communication. In 1994, for example, the Tatmadaw deployed 4 TOCs (12 battalions) between Theinseik and Pharpon (about 60 miles) for that purpose.<sup>31</sup> The situation improved substantially after the DKBA co-operated with the Tatmadaw. Since many local villagers were Buddhist and, being sympathisers or supporters of the DKBA, the security operations became much smoother.

From 1996, the Tatmadaw started phase two of their counter-insurgency operations, transforming some areas from brown to white. Border region development programmes helped to facilitate the process. The government assisted all peace settlement groups – the NMSP and various former KNU troops, as well as the DKBA in rehabilitation. New satellite towns and cities have been built. Myaing-gyi-ngu was upgraded from a village to a full-fledged town. The government publicised such regional development programmes in areas affected by war. The government provided social services such as health and education facilities. At the same time, it also encouraged local people (Karen, Mon and others) to have more contact with other nationalities, particularly the Bamars. For example, the DKBA runs a daily shuttle coach service between Yangon and Myaing-gyi-ngu, which was unimaginable six years ago. Many Tatmadaw officers acknowledge that the situation is much improved nowadays. Though hit-and-run warfare still take place from time to time in the area adjacent to the Myanmar-Thai border, the security of the environment in general is very much improved. In some areas, the Tatmadaw carry out joint security operations with the DKBA. In areas where the DKBA is not present, especially the central command area, Tatmadaw troops introduced the 'four cuts' strategy. The future success of all these activities in transforming brown areas to white areas, however, will depend on a number of factors. One factor will be the future status of the groups under peace

settlements or ceasefire agreements.

## REFUGEES

Since 1976, some Kayin families from the Second and Third Brigades of the Karen National Union Party (KNUP)<sup>32</sup> who used to live near Bago Yoma, which was cleaned up by the Tatmadaw in 1975, had been taking refuge in Thailand. For security reasons, the Thai authorities allowed them to settle in a village named Sawhta. Later, it came to be known as the Sawhta Camp. Since 1980, the Thai government, under pressure from the NGOs, had allowed refugee camps to be established on the Thai side of the Myanmar-Thai border. According to a press release by the Thai Ministry of Interior in 1982, there were 12 refugee camps along the Myanmar-Thai border. Most of the people staying in these refugee camps were members and families of the KNU and the NMSP. Various international NGOs provided funds to maintain and run the camps. Due to extensive counter-insurgency operations conducted by the Tatmadaw in the period between 1988 and 1992, more and more people had been crossing the border and more refugee camps emerged. By 1995, the number of refugee camps had risen to 23. By late 2000, there were 42 refugee camps along the Myanmar-Thai border. It has been estimated that there are more than 120,000 refugees living in these camps.

To the Myanmar government, there are three different types of refugees. The first are genuine refugees. They are innocent villagers living in the war zones or areas controlled by insurgents. Although some of them have their relatives and family members in the KNU, they are not active supporters of the insurgents. Some of them are in the camps against their wills.<sup>33</sup> Some were taken by force by KNLA troops.<sup>34</sup> According to a commentator in a Myanmar newspaper, "they have never heard of Yangon or seen Myanmar currency. They are thoroughly brainwashed by the KNU that the Tatmadaw would cut their chests open and eat their hearts and livers."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the KNU's propaganda of Bamar chauvinism has made simple innocent villagers run away whenever the Myanmar Army appears in their villages. They were in genuine fear of being killed.

The second group are the so-called political refugees. They are leaders, activists and families of the KNU and other insurgents such as the ABSDF and the NMSP. The Myanmar government claims that they take refuge in Thailand because they have been defeated in the battles. Another reason is that they can launch attacks (hit and run)

on Tatmadaw positions safely from the so-called refugee camps.<sup>36</sup> They exploit the refugee issue for their own political purposes and survival. For that reason, the Myanmar government media describes the refugee camps as “the place full of noises from four-wheel drives and motorbikes, sounds of Thai music, and noises from Thai traditional kick boxing and cock-fight as well as mountains of Singha beer cans and Mekhong rum bottles.”<sup>37</sup> In the view of the Myanmar government, these refugees are making a living out of collaborating with NGOs.

The third group of refugee are the rank-and-file and family members of insurgent groups. An article in a Myanmar newspaper stated that “the refugee camps along the Myanmar-Thai border were just for the namesake. Those who live in the camps are nobody other than the members and families of the KNU and its allied insurgents as well as illegal odd-job workers.”<sup>38</sup>

Another article in a Myanmar newspaper explains that a would-be refugee has to pay 50 baht a day per person as admission fee to go into Thailand. A ‘border pass’ bearing the name, age and sex with a serial number and the stamp of the KNU is issued by the KNU upon payment of cash. Local Thai authorities collect the border passes and register the pass holders as refugees. Then the Thai authorities collect their share of the fee from the KNU, in this case, the KNU representative in Mae Sot.<sup>39</sup> The author asked: “Therefore, are the cohorts and families of the KNU, who have been encamped by the Thai authorities and labelled as Myanmar refugees, those who tried to escape from war and running from tanks, artillery and bombing? Or are they the people who, prompted by persuasions and lures, entered in fright the readily opened gates after paying certain fees? No answer is necessary.”<sup>40</sup>

In the view of the Myanmar government, the so-called refugee camps are “a safe haven or shelter for insurgents (KNU) when it appears that they are going to be crushed in the Tatmadaw’s offensives.”<sup>41</sup> As armed raids on the Tatmadaw’s positions came from the refugee camps from time to time,<sup>42</sup> the Myanmar government has never been convinced that these so-called refugee camps are safe places or shelters for genuinely displaced people. The Myanmar government confirmed this view when SPDC leaders met Professor Sadako Ogata, the high commissioner of the UNHCR, in October 2000. The SPDC leaders told Professor Ogata that “Myanmar refugees living in the camps on the Thai side of the Myanmar-Thai border were either members of the ethnic insurgent groups or their

relatives, and not displaced persons.”<sup>43</sup> A commentator in a Myanmar newspaper said that he “believed that a refugee camp where armed guards and armed insurgents could take refuge could be found only in Thailand.”<sup>44</sup>

The issue of the repatriation of refugees had come up at various bilateral meetings. It had drawn more attention after the capture of the KNU headquarters by the Tatmadaw and the DKBA in early 1995. At the 11th RBC meeting in April 1995, the repatriation of refugees was on the agenda.<sup>45</sup> Apparently, it has been difficult for the Myanmar government to accept the sincerity of the Thai government in resolving the refugee issue. To the Myanmar government, if the Thai government is sincere, the issue could be resolved within a week. Take a comment made by Thai Supreme Commander General Wimol Wongwanich, for example. On 29 April 1995, General Wimol Wongwanich said:

The best solution to the problems surrounding Karen refugees along the border was to push them all back into Burma (Myanmar). If we were not afraid of being criticised by the world community on humanitarian grounds and if it would not give the country problems, then this Army chief would take only one week to push them all out regardless of how many hundreds of thousands of Karens were now in the country. I used to do this with over 40,000 Cambodian refugees. If we were able to do the same with the Karen, I would finish the task in just one week.<sup>46</sup>

The Myanmar government had come to believe that, by keeping the refugee issue as evidence of alleged human rights violation by the Myanmar government, the Thai government is using it as a political and diplomatic leverage on western governments to keep pressure on the regime. Moreover, the Myanmar government believe that, by establishing refugee camps along the Myanmar-Thai border, the Thai government not only had a buffer zone but also exploited cheap labour from the refugees and made money in collaboration with NGOs.<sup>47</sup> According to a commentary which appeared in the government controlled media, “the Thai government, which has from time to time lavishly claimed that it provides temporary shelter for the displaced persons on humanitarian grounds, has accepted refugees because it yields economic profit and political favour (from the west) and gains certain strategic importance (buffer zone).”<sup>48</sup> The article further stated:

It is safe to assume that since the beginning of civil war in Cambodia, Thailand came to realise that hosting refugees is a lucrative business and know the savour of profits accrued from accepting refugee camps.<sup>49</sup>

At the 15th RBC meeting (August 1997), the Thai delegation sought Myanmar's advice on measures to repatriate refugees from Thailand and proposed to establish a joint committee. The Myanmar delegation presented its policy on refugees, such as verifying whether or not the person repatriated is a Myanmar national. It also stated that the TBC was the most appropriate forum to handle such matters.<sup>50</sup> This issue was further discussed at the Fourth JCBC meeting held in December 1997.<sup>51</sup>

The 16th RBC meeting (July 1998) discussed the possibility of setting up a sub-committee under the JC as a mechanism to jointly resolve the question of illegal immigration and displaced persons along the Myanmar-Thai border. The Myanmar delegation reaffirmed its policy on repatriation of people who had crossed into Thailand illegally due to various reasons and reiterated that TBCs were the most appropriate bodies to effectively handle such matters with sincere co-operation and co-ordination from both sides. Since there were people being displaced from their original dwellings against their will under the influence of various armed insurgents, the Myanmar delegation requested co-operation from the Thai side in arranging for the safe and secure repatriation from the camps for those who want to return to their homes on their own free will. The Myanmar delegation said that it would always welcome (genuine) refugees and be ready to provide them with food, shelter, normal peaceful living conditions and security inside Myanmar territory.<sup>52</sup>

With regard to Myanmar's policy on refugees in Thailand, Secretary-1 Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt stated at the 50th Anniversary of the UNHCR on 14 December 2000:

We are aware that our neighbouring country (Thailand) is hosting Myanmar's so-called refugees in temporary shelters on the eastern borders, and that it is not without the displacement of affected local villagers. In this regard, I wish to underscore that the so-called refugees are fugitives, illegal migrants, insurgents and their families are members of unlawful associations opposing the government. If one should recognise and protect them as refugees, it would be rather unfair to the country of origin. The activities of armed groups who remained underground for decades and



who took refuge in the border areas hindered development of the country. If these insurgents are to be repatriated and reintegrated as refugees, it would be harmful to the peace and stability of the nation. Myanmar is grateful to its neighbouring country for its concern for the displaced persons across the border, but Myanmar is of the opinion that this issue should be resolved by bilateral means. The assistance of international NGOs is also welcomed and highly appreciated but their endeavours should be limited solely to humanitarian purposes and not directed towards political interference.<sup>53</sup>

The repatriation of refugees is further complicated by the interference of NGOs. The Myanmar government has always been quite sceptical about the role of NGOs in resolving the refugee issue. It has no trust in many of the NGOs and believes that they are prolonging the issue to interfere in Myanmar domestic political affairs.<sup>54</sup> The Myanmar government, from time to time, has accused NGOs of being involved directly or indirectly in supporting insurgents. Some funding for refugees has gone into the purchase of weapons and ammunition, as well as for rations and other expenses, for the insurgents. Their help is mainly superficial and they are not above exploiting the situation to project themselves as saviours. However, the Myanmar government does recognise that some NGOs are doing good. An exception is the Medicine San Frontier (MSF) which really does help the needy.<sup>55</sup> Generally speaking, conditions in refugee camps are very poor. During her visit to the Htanhin refugee camp, which housed over 8,200 Karen refugees, in October 2000, Professor Ogata was rather shocked by the poor conditions. She said that the camp was overcrowded and the standard of living was very low.<sup>56</sup> According to a Thai official who wanted to remain anonymous, living conditions were far worse in some other camps.<sup>57</sup>

The most prominent NGO active along the Myanmar-Thai border is probably the Burma Border Consortium (BBC). It coordinates activities of various other NGOs in Thailand. The funding comes from various sources. The more important contributors are the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Catholic Care Service (CRS). These contributors are also involved in other organisations. For example, the CCT, the JRS and the IRC are active members of the Burma Co-ordinating Group (BCG).<sup>58</sup> The Myanmar government believes that, though it provides rice, salt,

fish paste, yellow beans, stationery for schooling and some building materials such as bamboo for refugees, some of the BBC funding goes to various committees formed by insurgents, such as the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) formed by the KNU, for buying arms and ammunition. According to an article which appeared in the state controlled newspaper, "as the funding or money usually goes to the KRC, rather than directly to the civilian (genuine) refugees, it is just to keep insurgency prolonged."<sup>59</sup>

However, repatriations of refugees has taken place from time to time. Two major repatriations took place in 1995 and 1996. After the break-up of the DKBA from the KNU in early 1995, about 10,000 Karen refugees returned to Myanmar. At about the same time, there was a series of raids on refugee camps by DKBA troops as their families were kept in the camps as hostages. This led to serious clashes between the DKBA and the Thai authorities, especially the border police and army. The Myanmar government allowed the DKBA families to resettle in Myaing-Gyi-Ngu, which grew from a small village to an urban centre. In 1996, about 10,000 Mon refugees were repatriated into Mon state, after a ceasefire agreement was reached between the NMSP and the government. The Myanmar government provided all these resettled refugees with developmental assistance and offered facilities for business ventures.

There had also been some cases of repatriation of refugees from camps. One example is a group of thirty Karen families led by Naw Phawmu. The group wanted to return to their home village. In 1996, the leader of the group approached a monk and asked the latter to explore the possibility with the Myanmar authorities. The Myanmar representative at the local level advised the monk to send the group leader to see the Myanmar authorities. The representative guaranteed safe return if anything were to go wrong. Naw Phawmu went and discussed the matter with local Myanmar authorities who had a frank discussion with her. She explained the situation and her group's desire to return to their native village. When the local authorities determined that she was telling the truth, especially to questions they had raised, the former agreed to help her group resettle in Myanmar. The group was repatriated into Myanmar territory in October 1996. The Myanmar government built a new village for them and provided material and financial assistance for them to start new lives.

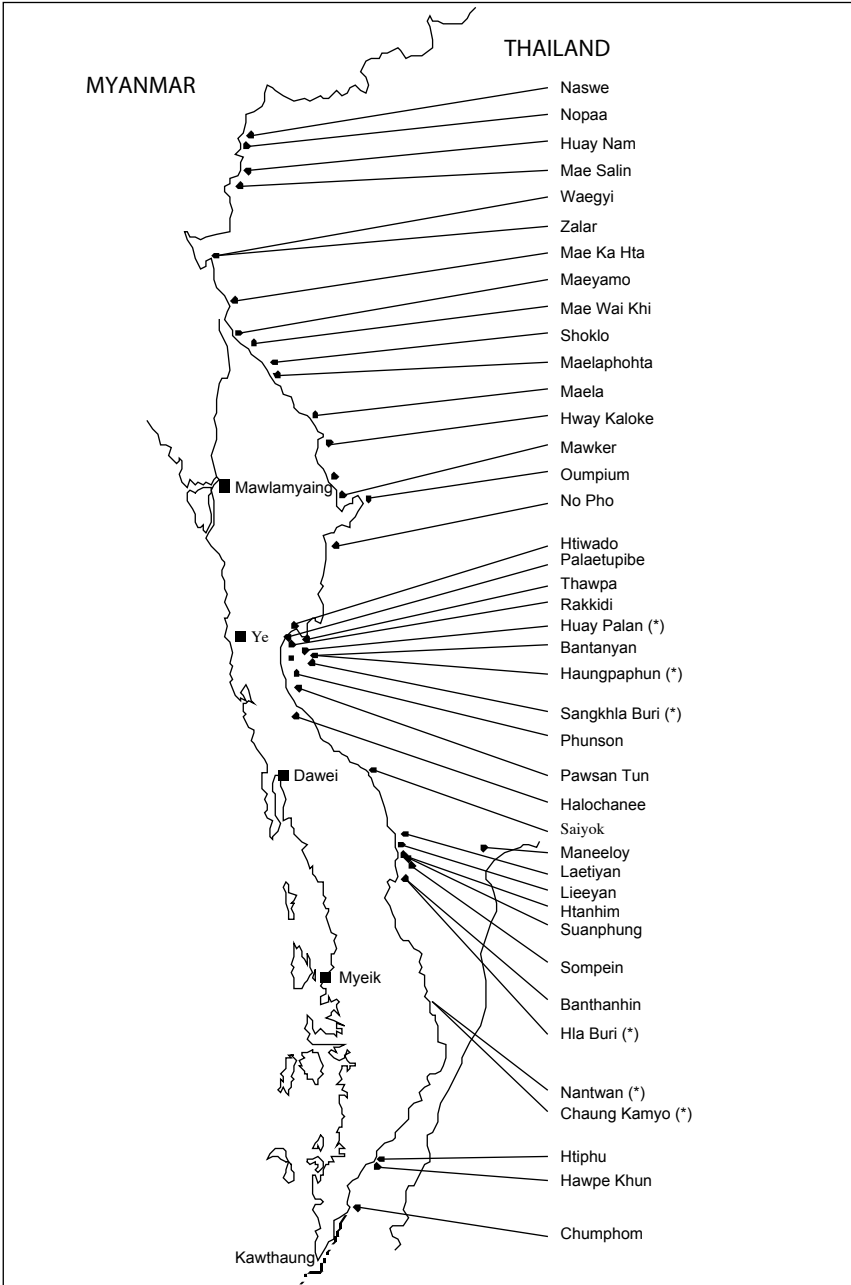
One problem faced by refugees in some cases of repatriation is that their former villages are now filled in with new settlers. Some of

these new settlers are people who had been familiar with the region during their involvement in the black market trade. They had taken over property such as houses and farms from the villagers (now refugees) who had left. Some of the villages were even renamed.

On the issue of the repatriation of Myanmar refugees from Thailand, the Myanmar government told Professor Ogata during her visit to Yangon in October 2000 that it would agree to consider her wish to see refugees return to Myanmar safely and with dignity. However, a timeframe was not given. But Professor Ogata believed that her talk with the regime leaders was frank and constructive.<sup>60</sup> The Myanmar government agreed to examine Professor Ogata's proposal for the UNHCR to monitor the repatriation of refugees, starting with a special mission to a conflict-free area like Mon state.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, the Thai authorities asked the UNHCR to convince Myanmar to take their refugees back as soon as possible. They believed that the UNHCR's presence in eastern Myanmar would facilitate the process and pave the way for the eventual repatriation of all refugees.<sup>62</sup> However, Professor Ogata told the Thai authorities that UNHCR could not go into the conflict zone but it would be ready to assist in the repatriation when the situation improved. At the same time, she admitted that conditions which guaranteed the safe return of the refugees were not imminent, especially in the Karen state.<sup>63</sup> But she would like to try it in the Mon state where conditions were more favourable.<sup>64</sup> Professor Ogata was confident that, based on its role in the successful repatriation of hundreds of thousands of so-called Rohingya Muslims from Bangladesh, the UNHCR should be able to play a role in the repatriation of Myanmar refugees in Thailand. She also explained that the Myanmar government was very much concerned about security.<sup>65</sup>

The repatriation of Myanmar refugees will not be easy or simple. Unless there is no more fighting along the Myanmar-Thai border and the Myanmar authorities are convinced that there are no more active insurgents living in the camps, the issue cannot be solved. The Thai authorities need to offer assistance to those who are genuinely interested in resettling in Myanmar. Some mechanism to monitor the activities of NGOs may also be necessary. Although critics have accused the Myanmar government of insincerity, the successful repatriation of Rohingya refugees from the Bangladesh border was good proof that the Myanmar government has been willing to work with the UNHCR and other international organisations in repatriating refugees. Repatriated refugees are treated well and with dignity. There is no credible evidence to indicate that the Myanmar

Map 3.2 – Location of refugee camps



\* Location unconfirmed

**Table 3.6 – Myanmar refugees in Thailand**

No.	Camp	Strength	Source
1	Naswe	3500	KNPP
2	Nopaa	750	KNPP
3	Huay Nam	200	KNPP
4	Mae Salin	2000	KNPP
5	Waegy	60	ABSDF (Battalion 2/4)
6	Zalar	10855	ABSDF
7	Mae Ka Hta	N.A	N.A
8	Maeyamo	7553	KNU (Brigade 1/5)
9	Mae Wai Khi	N.A	N.A
10	Shoklo	N.A	N.A
11	Maelaphohta	1899	KNU (Battalion 21)
12	Maela (a) Baekalok	32618	KNU (Battalion 20/22/24)
13	HwayKalo	6156	KNU HQ (Battalion 101)
14	Mawker	8714	KNU (Brigade 6) Mutu
15	Oumpium	15141	KNU (Brigade 7)
16	No Pho	8371	KNU (Brigade 6) Sarmi
17	Htiwado	800	KNU (Brigade 6)
18	Palaetupibe	500	Mon (NMSP)
19	Thawpa	600	From No Pho camp
20	Rakkidi	1000	Mon
21	Huay Palan*	N.A	KNU
22	Bantanyan	1700	KNU
23	Haungpaphun*	N.A	Mon/Kayin
24	Sangkhla Buri*	N.A	N.A
25	Phunson	100	Mon/Karen
26	Pawsan Tun	N.A	Mon
27	Halochanee	2000	MNSP
28	Saiyok	N.A	KNU
29	Laetiy	800	KNU (Brigade 4)
30	Lieeyan	1000	N.A
31	Htanhim*	8200	KNU
32	Suanphung	600	KNU
33	Sompein	6000	N.A
34	Maneelay	4500	Various (ABSDF)
35	Bathanhin	N.A	KNU (Brigade 4)
36	Hla Buri**	N.A	N.A
37	Nantwan**	40	Muslim insurgent (Hussein)
38	Chaung Kamy**	200	N.A
39	Htiphu	200	KNU (Brigade 2)
40	Nawpe Khun	260	N.A
41	Chumphom	600	Mon (break-up)/ KNU
42	Lukhanee	2000	Karen/Mon/Dawei

\*Camp visited by Professor Sadako Ogata

\*\*Location unconfirmed

government will not accord the same treatment to the refugees from Thailand.

General Wimol Wongwanich once suggested that the Thai Army should move the refugees from the various camps and put them together in one large camp located deeper inside the country. He also said that not much money would be needed to carry out the relocation as only one or two companies (between 200 and 300 soldiers) would be sufficient to provide security for them so they would not need to fear that their camp would be attacked. The camp would be well protected with a fence and landmines. But although his plan had the support of the Ministry of Interior, the Foreign Ministry and National Security Council disagreed.<sup>66</sup> In a similar situation, there was an outcry from various NGOs when General Chettha Thanajaro, Commander-in-chief of the Thai Army, began to push back about 3,000 Karen refugees in February 1997.<sup>67</sup>

If the Thai government is serious about resolving the refugee issue, it should make information on successful resettlements available to refugees living in Thailand. There have been successful resettlements of more than 100,000 Rohingya refugees, more than 10,000 Mon refugees, 10,000 Karen refugees (the DKBA), several hundred refugees led by Phado Aung San (Central Committee Member of the KNU) and Saw Thamuhe (commander of KNU 16th Battalion) and some other separate refugee groups. Anyone who visits the resettlement places can see for himself that the Myanmar government has not only treated them with dignity but also provided security for their well-being.

To the Myanmar government, the Thai government should follow General Wimol's advice and the Thai authorities should separate those who are really interested in resettlement within Myanmar from those who want to continue their political and military adventures. For those who want to continue their political and military struggle, the Thai government should push them out of Thai territory if it sincerely wants to show the Myanmar government that Thailand follows a good neighbourly policy. This will allow the situation in the border area to be more stable. It will also be able to convince the Myanmar government that refugee camps are not insurgent sanctuaries. Once the situation in the border area becomes stable and security increases, then the UNHCR and other international organisations can go in and facilitate resettlement.

# CONCLUSION

It is clear that extensive counter-insurgency operations conducted by the Tatmadaw had created an influx of refugees into Thailand. It has become a source of tension between the two countries as the Myanmar government holds the view that the Thai government is exploiting the situation and has never been sincere about resolving the issue. Although the successful resettlement and rehabilitation of several thousand refugees is a point in the Myanmar government’s policy of refugee repatriation, this matter will remain unresolved for some years to come. The refugee issue is closely related to other political issues. As long as both countries do not genuinely trust each other, the refugee issue will remain a source of tension and conflict in the relations between them.

# NOTES

- 1 မြောက်ပိုင်းတိုင်းစစ်ဌာနမှ ရခိုင်နယ်တွင် ၁-၅-၁၉၇၉ ခုနှစ်မှ ၃၁-၅-၁၉၈၁ ခုနှစ်အတွင်း ဖက်ဒရယ်စစ်ရေးအဖွဲ့များ ပူးပေါင်းချီတက်  
. *Assessment of Military Operations in Eastern Command HQ Area (1 January 1989 to 30 April 1989)*, p. 125
- 2 မြောက်ပိုင်းတိုင်းစစ်ဌာနမှ ရခိုင်နယ်တွင် ၁-၉-၁၉၇၉ မှ ၃၁-၅-၁၉၈၁ ခုနှစ်အတွင်း ဖက်ဒရယ်စစ်ရေးအဖွဲ့များ ပူးပေါင်းချီတက်  
. *Assessment of Military Operations in Eastern Command HQ Area (1 September 1989 to 31 December 1989)*, pp. 220-230
- 3 ကော်မတော်ချုပ်ချုပ်ချယ်မှုရေးရာမဏ္ဍိုင်တွင် မြောက်ပိုင်းတိုင်းစစ်ဌာနမှ အဖွဲ့များ ပူးပေါင်းချီတက်ခြင်းအကြောင်း၊ လမ်းဆုံသွင်းရွက်ခြင်း  
မူဝါဒ (ရန်ကင်း၊ ဒီပဲယင်းတော်၊ ၁၉၈၅). *Endeavours of the Tatmadaw Government for National Reconsolidation*. Yangon: U Aung Zaw, 1999, pp. 133-134
- 4 Commanding Officer (CO) of the No. 99 Infantry Battalion and the Officer-in-command (OC) of No. 2 Military Intelligence Depot
- 5 မြောက်ပိုင်းတိုင်းစစ်ဌာနမှ ရခိုင်နယ်တွင် ၁-၉-၁၉၇၈ မှ ၃၁-၅-၁၉၈၁ ခုနှစ်အတွင်း ဖက်ဒရယ်စစ်ရေးအဖွဲ့များ ပူးပေါင်းချီတက်  
. *Assessment of Military Operations in Eastern Command HQ Area (1 September 1988 to 31 December 1988)*, pp. 100-126
- 6 မြောက်ပိုင်းတိုင်းစစ်ဌာနမှ ရခိုင်နယ်တွင် ၁-၉-၁၉၇၉ မှ ၃၁-၅-၁၉၈၁ ခုနှစ်အတွင်း ဖက်ဒရယ်စစ်ရေးအဖွဲ့များ ပူးပေါင်းချီတက်  
. *Assessment of Military Operations in Eastern Command HQ Area (1 September 1989 to 31 December 1989)*, pp. 198-199 and pp. 220-230
- 7 လမ်းဆုံသွင်းရွက်ခြင်းမူဝါဒချုပ်ချယ်မှုရေးရာမဏ္ဍိုင်တွင် မြောက်ပိုင်းတိုင်းစစ်ဌာနမှ အဖွဲ့များ ပူးပေါင်းချီတက်ခြင်းအကြောင်း၊ လမ်းဆုံသွင်းရွက်ခြင်း  
*Endeavours of the Tatmadaw Government for National Reconsolidation*, p. 136



- 8     အရှေ့တိုင်းတိုင်းစစ်ဌာနချုပ်၏ ၁၉၈၈-၁၉၈၉ ခုနှစ်ကမ္ဘာ့စစ်ရေးအခြေအနေအထားကို  
    . *Assessment of Military Operations in Eastern Command HQ Area (1*  
    *September 1988 to 31 December 1988)*, pp. 94-126
- 9     တပ်မတော်အစိုးရ၏အစိုးရသစ်ပြန်လည်တည်ထောင်ရေးအတွက်အစိုးရ၏အစိုးရသစ်ပြန်လည်တည်ထောင်ရေး  
    . *Endeavours of the Tatmadaw Government for National*  
    *Reconsolidation*, pp. 115-119
- 10    အရှေ့တိုင်းတိုင်းစစ်ဌာနချုပ်၏ ၁၉၉၅-၁၉၉၆ ခုနှစ်ကမ္ဘာ့စစ်ရေးအခြေအနေအထားကို  
    *Record of*  
    *Military Operations in the South East Command HQ Area*
- 11    တပ်မတော်အစိုးရ၏အစိုးရသစ်ပြန်လည်တည်ထောင်ရေးအတွက်အစိုးရ၏အစိုးရသစ်ပြန်လည်တည်ထောင်ရေး  
    . *Endeavours of the Tatmadaw Government for National*  
    *Reconsolidation*, pp. 153-157
- 12    For detail, please see ကချင်ပြည်နယ်ဒဂုံတိုင်းဒေသကြီး၊ ဇာတိစစ်ရေးအဖွဲ့ချုပ်  
    . *A resident of Kayin state. Whither KNU?.* Yangon: News and  
    *Periodical Enterprises, 1995*
- 13    Between 1997 and 1999, 866 KNU members returned to legal-  
    fold with 391 weapons in four separate groups.
- 14    တပ်မတော်အစိုးရ၏အစိုးရသစ်ပြန်လည်တည်ထောင်ရေးအတွက်အစိုးရ၏အစိုးရသစ်ပြန်လည်တည်ထောင်ရေး  
    . *Endeavours of the Tatmadaw Government for National*  
    *Reconsolidation*, pp. 125-127
- 15    မောင်မောင်ကျော်စွာ၊ 'ရှစ်စွာကွယ်လွန်သည့်အဖွဲ့ချုပ်တပ်သား'၊ မြန်မာ့စွယ်စုံစာအုပ်  
    သတင်းစာ (၁၉၉၉)။ Maung Pauk Kyaing. "Whose Sacrifice is  
    Nobler?" in *Myet-Khin-Thit* No. 115 (November 1999), p. 129
- 16    မောင်မြတ်သူ၊ 'တပ်မတော်၏အစိုးရသစ်ပြန်လည်တည်ထောင်ရေးအတွက်အစိုးရ၏အစိုးရသစ်ပြန်လည်တည်ထောင်ရေး  
    အဖွဲ့ချုပ်တပ်သား'။ Maung Pyithu. *CRDB or the Rebirth of*  
    *Expatriate Group.* Yangon: News and Periodical Enterprises, 1990,  
    p. 125
- 17    No. 212 ABSDF Battalion was also known as the "Shit-Lay-Lone"  
    Battalion.
- 18    Commissar Than Lwin and Commander L. Zaw Naung  
    surrendered to the Tatmadaw on 8 February 1992.
- 19    Some sources say that the 801 Battalion was with the Shan State  
    Nationalities Liberation Organisation.
- 20    Some sources say that the 901 Battalion was with the National  
    United Front of Arakan.
- 21    မောင်မြတ်သူ၊ 'တပ်မတော်၏အစိုးရသစ်ပြန်လည်တည်ထောင်ရေးအတွက်အစိုးရ၏အစိုးရသစ်ပြန်လည်တည်ထောင်ရေး  
    *CRDB or the Rebirth of Expatriate Group.* Yangon: News and  
    *Periodical Enterprises, 1990, p. 133*
- 22    They were the Arakan Liberation Party, the Karen National  
    Union (KNU), the Karenni National Progressive Party, the Lahu

National United Party, the Palaung State Liberation Army, the Pao National Organisation, the Shan State Progressive Party, the New Mon State Party, the Kachin Independent Organisation and the Wa National Organisation.

23 The remaining 13 organisations were the Committee for Restoration of Democracy in Burma (CRDB), the People’s Patriotic Party (PPP), the All Burma Student Democratic Front (ABSDF), the Kawthulai Muslim Front, the Arakan National United Front, the Chin National Front, the Burma-Muslim Liberation Organisation, the General Strike Committee, the National Democracy Unity Party, the Overseas Burma Liberation Front, the Overseas Karen Organisation, the People’s Liberation Front (Ranong) and the Rahanpyo (Young Monk) Organisation (28 November 1989)

24 During his tour of the Thanintharyi Division, Senior General Than Shwe visited several local battalions. For example, local battalions in Palauk, Khamaukgyi, Laynya and Mawtaung were reported in the press (see *Kyemon*, January 2000).

25 During Senior General Than Shwe’s tour of the Thanintharyi division, he was received by Brigadier General Hla Myint from MOC-9 (Kyauktaw) (see *Kyemon*, January 2000).

26 တပ်မတော်သားလူတွေက သိကမ်းရိုး၊ ကုလသမဂ္ဂ၊ အရှေ့တောင်အာရှဒီမိုကရေစီအဖွဲ့အစည်းတို့ကို ကာလအကြာမှာ အဖွဲ့အစည်းတို့ကို ဖျက်ဆီးပစ်ခဲ့သည်။ တပ်မတော် (ရန်ကင်း) သတင်းနှင့်ဆက်သွယ်ရေးဌာန (ဇူလိုင် ၁၉၉၁)။ A Tatmadaw researcher. *A Brief History of Myanmar Between 1948 and 1988 and the Role of the Tatmadaw*. Yangon: News and Periodical Enterprises, 1991, pp. 273–242

27 အရှေ့တောင်အာရှဒီမိုကရေစီအဖွဲ့အစည်း၏ ၁-၁၉၂၊ ၈-၃၀-၄-၉၂ ဟုခေါ်တွင်ခဲ့သည့် အစီအစဉ်များနှင့်ပတ်သက်၍ . *Assessment of Military Operations in South East Command HQ Area (1 January 1992 to 30 April 1992)*

28 စာမေးပွဲအစဉ်: စာမေးပွဲအစဉ်အတွက် အဖွဲ့အစည်း (ကုလသမဂ္ဂ၊ ရန်ကင်း) နှင့် နယ်စပ်ဒေသများကို ကြည့်ရှုရန်။ သူတို့၏ . *Thaung Wai Oo. Not Fated to Die, Not Yet Die*. Yangon: Hlowet Sankye Magazine, 1999, p. 513

29 *ibid.*, pp. 514–515

30 *ibid.*, pp. 520–521

31 *ibid.*, p. 519

32 The KNUP was the name of the KNU during its leftist orientation in the 1960s and 1970s.

33 ပေါက်ကွဲ “အိမ်နီးချင်းကောင်းမွန်လှောင်ကောင်းရန်” (မူကြမ်းစာအုပ်အစီအစဉ်၊ ၂၀၀၀) . Pauksa. “There Will be a Good Husband Only When There be a Good Neighbour” in *Kyemon* (10 Oct 2000)

- 34 နိဗ္ဗာန်၊ 'ဟာမလိနီတံ'၊ သဘာဝဗိသုဒ္ဓိကဏ္ဍမင်္ဂလပတ်၊ ဇန်နဝါရီလ ၂၃၊ ပထမထပ်၊ အတွင်းအပိုင်း၊ ဝါဒအဖွဲ့အစည်း  
 အဖွဲ့အစည်း၊ သဘာဝဗိသုဒ္ဓိကဏ္ဍမင်္ဂလပတ်၊ ဇန်နဝါရီလ ၂၃၊ ပထမထပ်၊ အတွင်းအပိုင်း၊ ဝါဒအဖွဲ့အစည်း  
 . Po Khwa. "The Next Door Neighbour" in *Nyan Win Kyaw's Good Neighbours and Other Articles*. Yangon: News and  
 Periodical Enterprises, 1995, p. 108. It first appeared in the daily  
 newspapers in May 1995.
- 35 ဇမ္ဗူဒီပ၊ 'ကမ္ဘာ့သားတော်များ' (နိဗ္ဗာန်၊ ၉-၅-၂၀၀၀) . Nga Khin Nyo.  
 "Creators of Refugees" in *Kyemon* (9 May 2000)
- 36 နိဗ္ဗာန်၊ 'ဟာမလိနီတံ' . Po Khwa. "The Next Door Neighbour" in *Nyan  
 Win Kyaw's Good Neighbours and Other Articles*. Yangon: News  
 and Periodical Enterprises, 1995, p. 107
- 37 ရွှေသင်္ဂဟ၊ 'ကလေးတစ်ဦး'၊ ရွှေသင်္ဂဟ၊ ဝါဒအဖွဲ့အစည်း၊ ဝါဒအဖွဲ့အစည်း၊ ဝါဒအဖွဲ့အစည်း၊ ဝါဒအဖွဲ့အစည်း၊  
 ဝါဒအဖွဲ့အစည်း၊ ဝါဒအဖွဲ့အစည်း၊ ဝါဒအဖွဲ့အစည်း၊ ဝါဒအဖွဲ့အစည်း (နိဗ္ဗာန်၊ ၉-၅-၂၀၀၀) . Myo Thit Tun,  
 "Saviour" in *World Renowned Notoriety and Other Articles*.  
 Yangon: News and Periodical Enterprises, 2000, p. 121
- 38 *ibid.*, p. 120
- 39 ဇမ္ဗူဒီပ၊ 'ကမ္ဘာ့သားတော်များ' . Nga Khin Nyo. "Creators of  
 Refugees" in *Kyemon* (9 May 2000)
- 40 *ibid.*
- 41 နိဗ္ဗာန်၊ 'ဟာမလိနီတံ'၊ 'အိမ်နီးချင်းဟာမလိနီ' . Nyan Win Kyaw. "Good  
 Neighbour" in *Nyan Win Kyaw's Good Neighbours and Other  
 Articles*. Yangon: News and Periodical Enterprises, 1995, pp.  
 68-71
- 42 မလိက၊ 'အိမ်နီးချင်းဟာမလိနီတော်များ' . Pauksa. "There Will be a  
 Good Husband Only When There be a Good Neighbour" in  
*Kyemon* (10 Oct 2000)
- 43 *Nation* (18 October 2000)
- 44 မလိက၊ 'အိမ်နီးချင်းဟာမလိနီတော်များ' . Pauksa. "There Will be a  
 Good Husband Only When There be a Good Neighbour" in  
*Kyemon*, 10 Oct 2000)
- 45 နိဗ္ဗာန်၊ 'ဟာမလိနီတံ'၊ 'အိမ်နီးချင်းဟာမလိနီ' . Nyan Win Kyaw. "Good  
 Neighbour" in *Nyan Win Kyaw's Good Neighbours and Other  
 Articles*. Yangon: News and Periodical Enterprises, 1995, p. 51
- 46 *Bangkok Post* (30 April 1995)
- 47 ဇမ္ဗူဒီပ၊ 'ကမ္ဘာ့သားတော်များ' . Nga Khin Nyo. "Creators of  
 Refugees" in *Kyemon* (9 May 2000)
- 48 *ibid.*
- 49 *ibid.*
- 50 15th RBC Meeting minutes

- 51 4th JCBC Joint Communiqué
- 52 16th RBC Meeting minutes
- 53 *Kyemon* (15 December 2000)
- 54 နိယွန်ဝင်းကျော်စွာ. "The Next Door Neighbour" in *Nyan Win Kyaw's Good Neighbours and Other Articles*. Yangon: News and Periodical Enterprises, 1995, pp. 115-116
- 55 The Myanmar government accepts allows the MSE to operate on the western border area.
- 56 Vorapun Srivoranart. "Shocked Ogata slams officials over refugee camp" in *Nation* (18 October 2000)
- 57 Saridet Marukatat. "Refugees: Karen camp disappoints Ogata" in *Bangkok Post* (18 October 2000)
- 58 နိယွန်ဝင်းကျော်စွာ. "Good Neighbour" in *Nyan Win Kyaw's Good Neighbours and Other Articles*. Yangon: News and Periodical Enterprises, 1995, pp. 49-76
- 59 *ibid*, p. 76; နိယွန်ဝင်းကျော်စွာ. "Saviour" in *World Renowned Notoriety and Other Articles*. Yangon: News and Periodical Enterprises, 2000, p. 122
- 60 Vorapun Srivoranart. "Shocked Ogata slams officials over refugee camp" in *Nation* (18 October 2000)
- 61 *Bangkok Post* (19 October 2000)
- 62 Vorapun Srivoranart. "Shocked Ogata slams officials over refugee camp" in *Nation* (18 October 2000)
- 63 *ibid*.
- 64 *Bangkok Post* (19 October 2000)
- 65 *Nation* (19 October 2000)
- 66 *Bangkok Post* (30 April 1995)
- 67 *Nation* (27 February 1997)

# 4

## MYANMAR-THAI BOUNDARY ISSUES

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Here I will try to present the argument that as the Myanmar government became increasingly capable of transforming the de facto frontier between Myanmar and Thailand into the de jure boundary, it led to a direct confrontation between the two nations. In geopolitical and geo-strategic terms, boundaries “indicate the territorial integrity of the state and the extent of the government authority”.<sup>1</sup> The distinction between a frontier and a boundary is that a boundary has a spatial extent whereas the latter does not have a horizontal dimension.<sup>2</sup> Lord Curzon once remarked that “frontiers are indeed the razor’s edge on which hang suspended the modern issue of war and peace, of life or death to nations”. In fact, transforming a frontier into a boundary could also be a matter of war and peace between nations. In the case of Myanmar, the area between Myanmar and Thailand had been a frontier for some time. When the Myanmar government began to transform its frontier into a boundary as a means to assert political control and legal influence of the state, tension between the two nations arose over the poorly demarcated and delineated boundary.

The Union of Myanmar shares a 1,314-mile long border with the Kingdom of Thailand. It extends from the confluence of the Mekhong River and the Nam Ruak River (the tri-junction of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand) to Bayin Naung Point (formerly known as Victoria Point).<sup>3</sup> Myanmar and Thailand also share a maritime boundary in the Andaman Sea. Generally speaking, the Myanmar-Thai boundary is a demarcated and delineated international boundary that Myanmar and Thailand have inherited in accordance with the Law of State Succession. Applying the morphological classification, the Myanmar-Thai boundary could be described as a physiographic boundary as it follows some conspicuous features of landscape such as mountain ranges, watershed areas and river channels.<sup>4</sup>

The sector of the Myanmar-Thai boundary between the

tri-junction of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos in the east and the Thanlwin (Salween) River in the west was formally delineated and demarcated by the Burma-Siam Boundary Commission of 1892–93. For the purpose of carrying out the actual on-ground demarcation, the Commission was split into two parties – the Eastern Party and the Western Party. The Eastern Party demarcated the 117-mile long boundary from Loi Un eastwards to the Mekhong-Mae Huak Junction. The Western Party demarcated the 257-mile long boundary from Loi Un westwards to the Thanlwin River. Unfortunately, the Eastern Party did not erect any boundary pillars as it was considered unnecessary because the boundary mostly followed conspicuous watersheds or the courses of streams. On the other hand, however, the Western Party erected boundary markers, mainly at places where roads or paths crossed the boundary. In all, 16 boundary markers were erected at an average interval of about 15 miles between Loi Un and the Thanlwin River.

The Siam-Burma Boundary Commission of 1894–1896 fixed the 940-mile long boundary from Victoria Point to the junction of the Thanlwin River and the Hpa Chaung River according to a previous settlement of the boundary made in 1864–66 on the basis of a treaty which was signed at Bangkok in 1868. From the junction of the Thanlwin River and the Hpa Chaung River, the boundary follows the course of the Thanlwin River up to its junction with the Thaungyin River and thence along the Thaungyin River up to the source of the Gawli Chaung. No boundary markers were erected in this sector. From the source of the Gawli Chaung to the southern extremity, the boundary follows natural features except near the Payathonezu (Three Pagodas Pass) where the boundary was artificially fixed. There were 49 boundary chains erected on the main watershed on conspicuous hilltops. However, there are cases where local authorities and residents alike are unsure of the exact location of the Myanmar-Thai boundary.

In order to facilitate the demarcation of the border, the Thai and Myanmar governments formed the Joint Boundary Committee (JBC), co-chaired by deputy ministers for foreign affairs of both countries, on 21 January 1993. JBC meetings were held every two years. The first JBC meeting was held in Yangon in February 1993. A wide range of boundary issues was discussed, including the hottest issue at that time, the disputed Hill Point 1542 in the south-east corner of Myanmar. A further discussion on demarcation of the border took place at the second JBC meeting held in Bangkok in March 1995. A general agreement was reached on the demarcation

of the entire Myanmar-Thai boundary at the third JBC meeting held in Bangkok again in August 1997. The meeting agreed that the boundary would be divided into ten sectors. Two joint survey teams would be formed – one for the land boundary and the other for the maritime boundary (including water channels of rivers). It was also agreed that a team of experts would be formed to inspect the border posts along the Mae Sai-Nam Ruak River sector. The meeting also decided to look into issues such as disputed meanders in the Phalu and Kyundaw areas as well as three islands at the mouth of the Pakchan River. The fourth JBC meeting held in May 1999 reviewed the progress made over the past two years.

An agreement on the demarcation of the maritime boundary between Myanmar and Thailand was signed on 25 July 1980 and the instruments of ratification were exchanged in April 1982. The demarcation of the Mae Sai-Nam Ruak River sector was agreed in January 1987 and the process was completed in June 1991. Apart from these two achievements, the rest of the Myanmar-Thai boundary remains undemarcated. There have been some disputes over the land and maritime boundaries, most notably over the following five areas.

- The Hill Point 1542 area
- The three islands at the mouth of the Pakchan River
- Meanders and an islet in the Thaungyin River
- The Three Pagodas Pass area
- The Lwelan areas

## **DEMARCATIION OF A FIXED BOUNDARY IN THE MAE SAI-NAM RUAKE RIVER SECTOR**

The total length of the Mae Sai River and the Nam Ruak River is only about 36 km but these two rivers have been a cause of concern and difficulty for both Myanmar and Thailand. One of the problems is that, since 1929, these rivers, especially the Mae Sai River, have changed their courses occasionally due to floods. Manmade barriers built by local Thai residents also created problems. Barriers in the Mae Sai River in the form of irrigation weirs, dams and the like has caused the river to change its course and at times even resulted in the erosion of river banks and severe floods, damaging crops and inflicting huge loss of property to the Myanmar side of the river. To overcome these problems, the Myanmar government took an initiative to fix a boundary along the Mae Sai-Nam Ruak Rivers Sector.

According to an agreement reached between the Thai



government and the British government in Myanmar in 1939, the water channel was to be the boundary. However, due primarily to changes in the course of the river and the construction of water gates and weirs by local Thai people, the Myanmar government claimed that it had lost about two-and-a-half square miles of land in the area.<sup>5</sup>

A Myanmar delegation led by Colonel Kyi Maung went to Bangkok on 7 May 1968 to discuss Myanmar-Thai boundary matters, especially the Mae Sai River area, with Thai officials. An agreement was reached in principle to fix the boundary in the Mae Sai-Nam Ruak Rivers sector in accordance with the established geographical facts and to erect border posts.<sup>6</sup> However, all measures for demarcation of the Mae Sai-Nam Ruak Rivers sector had been suspended by the Myanmar government for some years, probably because of Thai support for anti-Yangon insurgent groups led by former Myanmar Prime Minister U Nu. The issue was brought up again only at the Third Joint Meeting of the Myanmar-Thai High Level Committee held in Yangon on 16 August 1973.<sup>7</sup> More steps were taken during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Finally, after a series of negotiations and discussions, an agreement was reached in January 1987 for a fixed boundary along the Mae Sai-Nam Ruak Rivers. The survey and demarcation of the river boundary started in April 1987 and concluded in 1988 though there are some minor problems in the area. At the Fourth RBC meeting held in August 1990, the Myanmar delegation briefed its counterpart from Thailand on certain construction activities carried out by the Thai side along the Mae Sai River, particularly the construction of revetments. The Myanmar delegation expressed its concern as the activities could cause erosion on the Myanmar side of the riverbank. Nevertheless, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) relating to the fixed boundary on the Mae Sai-Nam Ruak Rivers sector was signed on 18 June 1991.

### **HILL POINT 1542 (CALLED HILL 491 IN THAILAND)**

The issue of which country Hill Point 1542 (also known as Hill 491 in Thailand) is in first came up when the Myanmar military captured the hill in late February 1992. The Thai government protested, claiming that it was inside Thai territory and asked for the Myanmar troops be withdrawn immediately. The Myanmar government responded by pointing out that Thailand had consistently confirmed at various meetings, including RBC meetings, that there was no (anti-Myanmar government) insurgent camps or strongholds on the Thai soil, and Hill Point 1542 was a KNU insurgent stronghold that Myanmar troops had just captured. Part of the problem was the use of different

maps by both sides. According to the 1868 agreement, the watershed in the area constitutes the border. But the interpretation of the limit of the watershed had been complicated by the two sides using different maps.

The Myanmar military launched an offensive in the Boke Pyin township in early January 1992. Four infantry battalions under No. 1 TOC of the Yangon Command attacked the Ywahaylu insurgent stronghold which had been a KNU camp for about eight years. Shortly before that, the ABSDF and other insurgent groups had also built their outposts in Ywahaylu. The Ywahaylu camp was situated in the disputed Hill Point 1542 area. At the time of the offensive, the hill was manned by troops from the No. 12 KNU battalion. The Tatmadaw captured Ywahaylu and its adjacent area on 18 February 1992 after incurring the loss of 20 lives and 65 wounded.<sup>8</sup> Within half an hour of the capture of Ywahaylu, the Thai military in the local area contacted the Myanmar military column in Ywahaylu through the Tatmadaw signal channel and said that the hill was part of Thailand (a part of the Thu Sae district in Chumphon province). They demanded the immediate withdrawal of Myanmar troops from the area. A few hours later, about fifty Thai troops, accompanied by two APCs, came to an area near the hill and raised a Thai flag. The APCs fired several rounds near the Ywahaylu camps.<sup>9</sup> The action was interpreted by Myanmar troops as the Thai Army's signal of its protection of KNU troops in case of hot pursuit by the Tatmadaw. This interpretation was further confirmed by the fact that retreating KNU troops were allowed to take refuge in a double storey school building and move around freely with their weapons on Thai soil.<sup>10</sup>

That dispute escalated the tension between the troops from both sides. Several rounds of negotiations between the two countries at the local level failed to produce a solution. A special RBC meeting in August did not make a breakthrough either. At the 7th RBC meeting held in Chiangmai in mid November 1992 the head of the Myanmar delegation, Lieutenant General Maung Aye, said that "as the Thai government has repeatedly reassured Myanmar that it did not allow any Myanmar insurgent groups to establish bases on Thai territory, Myanmar armed forces had the right to move in and occupy Hill Point 1542 (Hill 491) on which the KNU had maintained a stronghold for eight years."<sup>11</sup> The parties agreed to meet again in two weeks to set up a joint survey team to inspect the area under dispute.

In the meantime, Thai Army Chief General Wimol Wongwanich

said that if negotiations in Yangon were to fail, Thailand would resort to force.<sup>12</sup> General Wimol thought that it was “the most suitable way to resolve this dispute if negotiations fail and Rangoon does not withdraw its troops.”<sup>13</sup> Air Force Chief General Gun Pimarnthip also said that he “guaranteed that the air force would not disappoint the people if the government ordered the military to flush out Burmese (Myanmar) troops from the disputed Hill 491 (Hill Point 1542) in Chumphon.”<sup>14</sup> It was something the Thai armed forces needed to improve its public image among the Thai population, after having suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Laotian forces about five years ago.<sup>15</sup> Some politicians, including former Prime Minister General Chatichai Chunchavan who passionately advocated the policy of turning battlefields into market places, also called for military action to resolve the issue.<sup>16</sup>

On 30 November 1992, Defence Minister General Vijit Sookmark briefed members of the Thai Parliament on the details of the development of the conflict and measures taken by the Thai government to resolve the problem. He reported that the problem arose since “the Burmese (Myanmar) forces seized the hill on 19 February after they succeeded in dislodging Karen guerrilla fighters from the area.”<sup>17</sup> Interior Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh also took a conciliatory approach and advised Chumphon provincial authorities to be prepared to compromise in the local level talks with the Myanmar authorities.<sup>18</sup>

Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai was cautious and preferred to take non-military measures to resolve the issue.<sup>19</sup> With the recent fiasco in mind, the Thai Prime Minister said that he “hoped the problem would not escalate into something like the Baan Romklaio dispute.”<sup>20</sup> Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai was fully aware of the nature of the problem and the claim made by the Myanmar government. He explained his government’s position on the issue in a historical perspective and said that “Myanmar troops didn’t just seize the hill recently but they had been fighting the KNU for quite some time and in February they overran the rebels’ position on the hill after suffering heavy casualties.”<sup>21</sup> He highlighted the main argument of the Myanmar government that if the hill had truly been in Thai territory, then how the Thai authorities could have allowed the KNU to set up military posts on it. Moreover, the Thai government had not protested to the Myanmar military during its offensive in the area. That also led the Myanmar authorities to believe that Thailand recognised Myanmar’s claim on the hill which, according to maps used by the Myanmar military, was on its side of the border.<sup>22</sup>

Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai stated on 2 December 1992 that

he preferred diplomatic measures rather than drastic military action to resolve the conflict.<sup>23</sup> The Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs also agreed to meet at the negotiation table. As a result, a special Regional Border Committee meeting was organised later in the month in Yangon, on 8 December 1992, and both sides agreed to withdraw troops from the disputed area in order for a joint survey team to be set up to inspect the area and to organise a meeting of a joint border demarcation committee co-chaired by deputy ministers of the two countries.<sup>24</sup> The Hill Point 1542 issue was brought up at the second Joint Commission for Bilateral Co-operation (JCBC) meeting held in Bangkok in December 1994 and both parties agreed to conduct a survey and demarcate the border with special reference to the hill. This dispute, however, remains unsettled to the present.

### **THREE ISLANDS AT THE MOUTH OF THE PAKCHAN RIVER**

An agreement to delineate the maritime boundary was signed on 25 July 1980 and ratified on 14 February 1982 but the sovereignty over three islands at the mouth of the Pakchan River has remained unsettled. During negotiations on the delimitation of the territorial sea boundary and Continental Shelf cum Exclusive Economic Zone between Myanmar and Thailand from 1977 to 1980, the two sides had agreed that the precise delineation of the boundary in Myanmar-Thai internal waters should be carried out after the issue of ownership of the three islands at the mouth of Pakchan River had been settled on the basis of historical evidence. The three islands in question are Ginga Island (known in Thailand as Ko Lam), Ko Khan Island and an unnamed rock cliff (known as Ko Ki Nu in Thailand).

According to a treaty signed between the British government in Myanmar and the Thai government in 1868, the three islands belonged to Myanmar. Subsequent British maps, Indian hydrographic charts and Myanmar national charts indicate that the three islands are indeed Myanmar's. However, in 1975, based on information provided by Thailand and the Thai-American Joint Mapping Operation, the British Naval Headquarters published Naval Chart No. 216 in which the three islands were identified as part of Thailand, even though the Thai national chart published in 1973 had identified the three islands as Myanmar's.

In its search for historical evidence, the Myanmar government

managed to uncover pertinent records of marine surveys, old charts, tracings and correspondences since 1980. Subsequently, the Myanmar government indicated to the Thai government its readiness to hold talks on the question. A Thai Foreign Ministry team headed by the Director-General of the Department of Law and Treaties held preliminary discussions on this question with officials from the Myanmar Foreign Ministry in Yangon in 1985. At the discussions the Thai delegation, in view of its claims on the three islands, cited *inter alia* a request made by the British Government when the British naval expedition carried out hydrological survey at the mouth of Pakchan River in 1937 to land on six Thai islands as evidence. The Thai side asserted that the three disputed islands were among the six islands mentioned in the British note.

With the help of old charts and official papers, the Myanmar authorities pinpointed the location on modern charts all the six islands named in the British note of 20 March 1937 and proved conclusively that all six of them are located far to the south of the three disputed islands. In response to a request made by the head of the Thai delegation, the Myanmar authorities forwarded the note (Note 44 11 4/7) dated 12 July 1985 with photocopies of official records concerning the three islands obtained from the India Office Library and Records, London, and from the National Archive of India, New Delhi.

In April 1989, a Thai Delegation headed by the Deputy Foreign Minister paid an official visit to Myanmar. The agreed minutes issued on the occasion, taking note of the question of the three islands, mentioned to commence negotiations on the settlement of the question of ownership of the three islands at the mouth of Pakchan River as soon as possible. During a visit to Thailand in May 1990, the Myanmar delegation again raised the question of the three islands. The Thai government responded by saying that they would submit the matter to higher authorities.

The first meeting of the Myanmar-Thailand Joint Boundary Committee was held in Yangon from 18 to 21 February 1993. In the agreed minutes it was mentioned that the two sides agreed that the issue had been pending for quite some time and it would be taken up at an appropriate forum in due course. The second meeting of the Myanmar-Thailand Joint Boundary Committee was held in Bangkok on 29–30 March 1995. The meeting urged officials on both sides should concerned to convene a technical meeting to discuss

and exchange views on the subject.

In March 1995 the Thai side furnished documents relating to the status of the three islands and handed over their findings to the Myanmar authorities. In order to make an assessment of the documents, a meeting was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 8 June 1995. Officials from the Naval Hydrographic Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attended the meeting. After much scrutiny, the meeting came to the unanimous opinion that the documents have no relevance whatsoever to the islands in question. The meeting further decided to make an exhaustive appraisal of the past developments with regard to the three islands. This decision was intended to get the Thai side to resume technical level talks on the question of the three islands and the alignment of the inner sector boundary between Myanmar and Thailand.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, based on British and Indian naval charts, the Central Hydrographic Unit of the Myanmar navy undertook a task to produce a naval chart. Chart No. 12 (Myeik Archipelago – Myanmar Sakhanthit to Taungsune Island), drawn by the Central Naval Hydrographic Unit, accompanied by relevant documents, was sent to the British Hydrographic Department on 2 October 1996 in accordance with the decision taken at the Foreign Affairs Committee meeting on 6 September 1996. The British Naval Hydrographic Department subsequently corrected its naval chart. Therefore, the British Naval Chart No. 216, published in 1997, placed the three islands on the Myanmar side of the maritime boundary. Although there was no specific meeting and negotiations on the issue of the three islands, it was brought up from time to time at the various meetings. The two countries finally declared the three islands a “no man’s land” and the issue remained a source of tension which had led to a series of naval clashes in late 1998 and early 1999.<sup>26</sup>

On 19 December 1998, a Myanmar naval vessel on patrol sighted fifteen Thai fishing trawlers illegally poaching in Myanmar waters near Zadadgyi Island (North 9° 50.5” by East 98° 7.5”). When the Myanmar patrol signalled the trawlers to stop for inspection, they fired upon the Myanmar naval vessel and escaped into Thai waters. A Thai naval boat in the nearby area came to rescue the Thai trawlers and exchanged fire with the Myanmar vessel. Three Myanmar naval personnel were wounded. The Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Thai ambassador in Yangon and handed over an aide memoire on 24 December 1998.<sup>27</sup> In the incident, the Thai navy also lost two naval officers.<sup>28</sup>



Another serious naval clash took place on 12 January 1999 when a Myanmar naval vessel named *Yan Naing 510* was on patrol. When the Myanmar vessel reached west of Tha Htay Island (North 9' 57" by East 98' 27") it was hit by a Thai naval boat and was slightly damaged. According to a Myanmar source, the Thai vessel was well within Myanmar waters (North 9' 55" by East 98' 25'). The Myanmar aide memoire said that "it is presumed that the Thai Navy vessel, upon sighting the Myanmar naval vessel *Yan Naing 510* leaving Kawthaung, sailed from the vicinity of the lighthouse towards Myanmar territorial waters and fired upon it." It also stated that "the Myanmar government hopes that a recurrence of a similar nature will not take place again".<sup>29</sup> It added that the "Myanmar naval patrol vessel did not retaliate despite the unprovoked attack, in the spirit of goodwill and friendship of the two nations and also to avoid further aggravation of the situation".<sup>30</sup> The Myanmar government lodged a protest note through the Kawthaung Township Border Committee with its Thai counterpart in Ranong and delivered an aide memoire to the Thai ambassador on the same day.<sup>31</sup> However, according to the Thai version reported in the *Bangkok Post*, "a Thai navy patrol boat clashed with two Burmese frigates after it fired upon a Burmese vessel chasing two Thai trawlers off Ranong". Fleet commander Admiral Narong Yuthawong said that the *Tor 99* (the Thai naval boat) had responded to a distress call from the crew of the *Duang Sap 9* (the Thai fishing trawler) and two other trawlers that were being chased by an armed fishing boat (referring to the Myanmar naval boat?). At about 12:20 p.m. the *Tor 99* came across an armed fishing boat that had clashed with the patrol boat *Tor 98* on 19 December off Ranong. According to the Thai admiral, as the *Tor 99* was under machine gun fire by the Myanmar vessel, it responded with cannon and machine gun fire. As a result, the (armed) fishing boat retreated into Myanmar waters. The report further stated that "according to a Thai naval source, two Hinan-class frigates of the Myanmar navy, which were near the clash site, moved in to the rescue of the damaged boat. Then the frigates opened fire on the Thai naval boat, triggering another round of firing, before the outgunned *Tor 99* ran to safety. Tension mounted high as Myanmar sent 10 naval vessels and Thailand sent its reinforcements, including the warship *Chao Phraya*, to the clash site."<sup>32</sup>

On 18 January 1999, the Thai Foreign Ministry summoned the Myanmar ambassador in Bangkok and the Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs delivered a note of protest concerning the alleged intrusion of Myanmar vessels into Thai territorial waters on 12 January 1999. On the same day, the Myanmar Foreign Ministry summoned the Thai ambassador in Yangon for a second time and



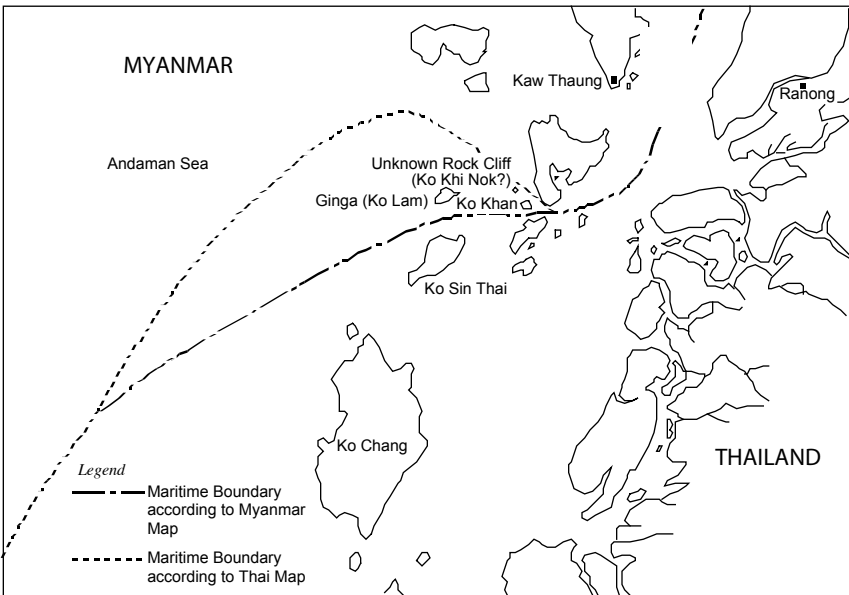
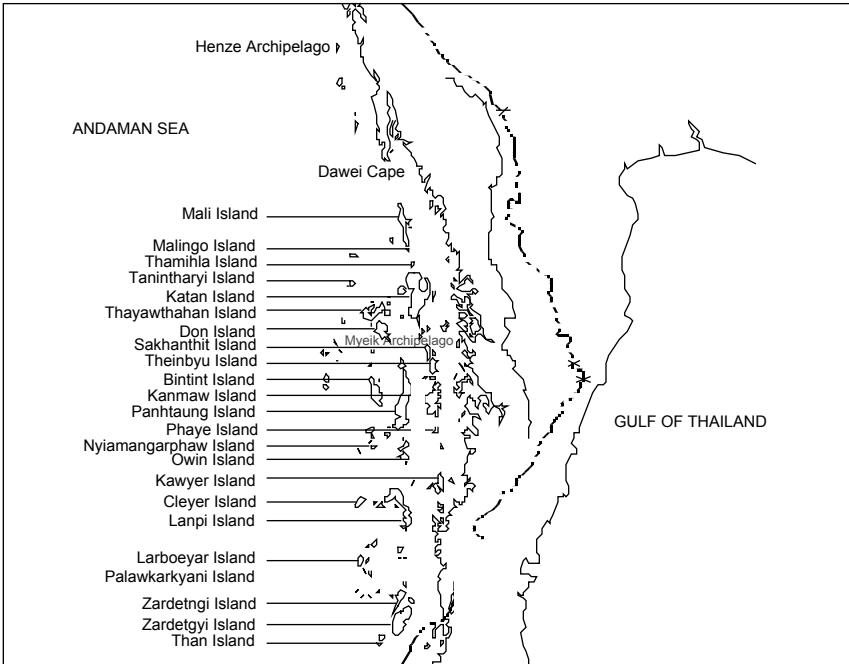
handed over another protest letter, this time on an alleged intrusion of two Thai Navy vessels into Myanmar territorial waters on 16 January 1999. Thailand denied the allegation. The Myanmar government regarded the incursion on 16 January 1999 as provocative and deliberate.<sup>33</sup>

According to Thai sources, two armed boats, one of them identified to be of Myanmar origin, chased and fired upon a Thai fishing trawler, *Tuang Sap 9*, in the north-west of Ranong's Koh Chang on 7 February 1999. The warship *Chao Phraya* went to the rescue as it received a distress call from the fishing trawler.<sup>34</sup> Tension mounted high and the Thai military even considered deploying some of its F-5 interceptors if it became necessary.<sup>35</sup> The four naval clashes claimed lives on both sides. Although the disputed area had been a haven for Thai fishing trawlers engaged in illegal poaching for many years, it became a source of conflict only when the Myanmar navy became more capable of patrolling and monitoring the territorial waters.

Since the first naval clash on 19 December 1998, the Thai government had been proposing to the Myanmar government to conduct joint patrols in the disputed waters as well as initiate a joint survey team. Thailand also suggested the setting up of a hotline between the two foreign ministries. The proposal was to be discussed at a Thai-Myanmar Joint Commission meeting in Yangon in January 1999 and an RBC meeting in Thailand in March of the same year.<sup>36</sup> The Supreme Commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, General Mongkol Ampornpisit, asked Thai Army Commander-in-chief General Surayud Chulanont to discuss the possibility of demarcating territorial waters and setting up joint patrols to guard the disputed waters while the latter paid a visit to Yangon on 15 February 1999.<sup>37</sup> A hotline was also set up in late January 1999.

Meanwhile, General Maung Aye received General Yoodhana Yampundhu, Adviser to the Minister of Defence, on 1 February 1999.<sup>38</sup> On 17 February 1999, a delegation led by Thai Army Commander-in-chief General Surayud Chulanont arrived in Yangon at the invitation of General Maung Aye. The delegation was received by Senior General Than Shwe.<sup>39</sup> On 7 March, Thai Naval Commander-in-chief Admiral Theera Haocharoen paid a visit to Yangon with an aim to improve relations between the two countries in general and the two navies in particular.<sup>40</sup> It was reciprocated by a visit of Myanmar Commander-in-chief (Navy) Vice-Admiral Nyunt Thein from 27 April to 1 May 1999.<sup>41</sup> To further strengthen relations and understanding between the two armed forces, Thai Air Force Commander-in-chief, Air Chief Marshal Tananit Niamtan, visited

**Map 4.1 – Three disputed islands at the mouth of the Pakchan River**



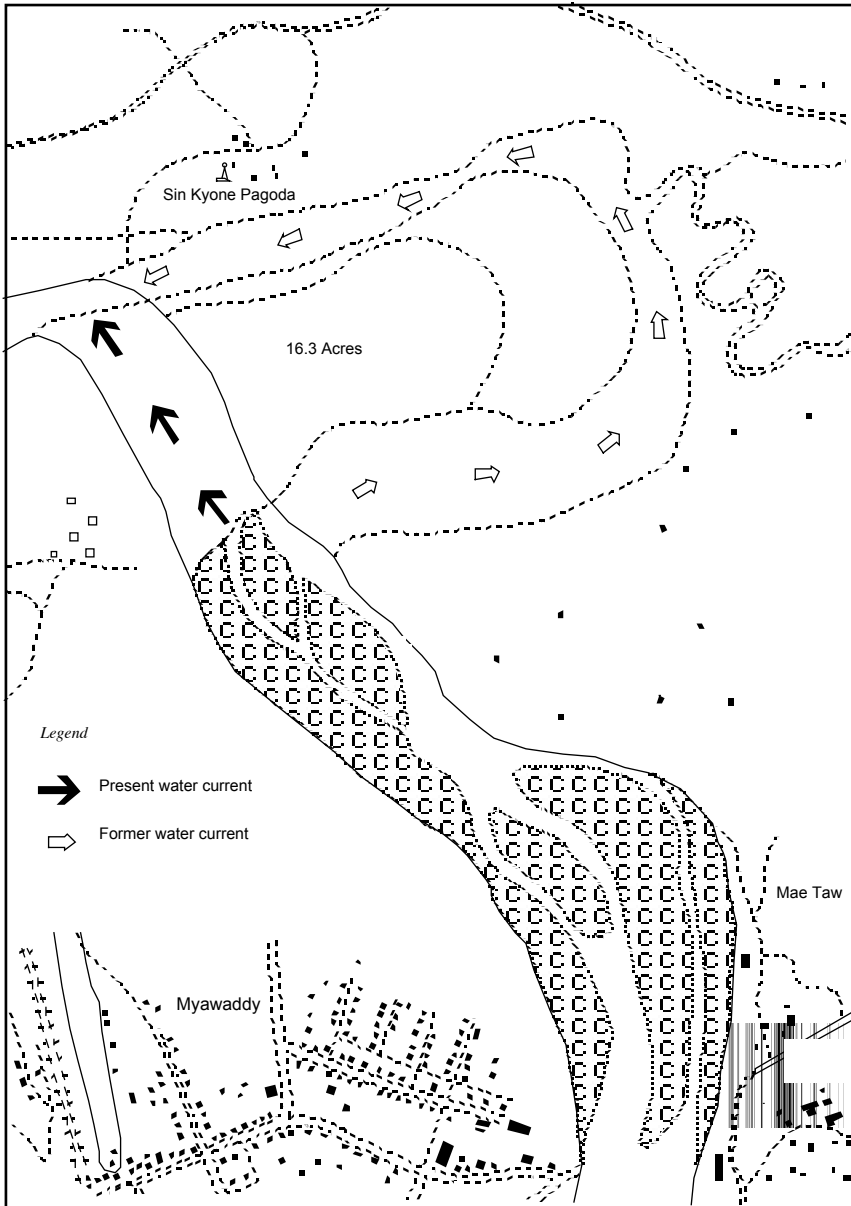
Myanmar on 6 May 1999.<sup>42</sup> The recent clash in the disputed area was in December 2000 when a Myanmar navy vessel fired on two Thai fishing boats off Ranong.<sup>43</sup> Up to the present, the overlapping claim of territorial waters remains a major source of tension between the two countries.

### **KYUNDAW MEANDER, PHALU MEANDER AND AN ISLET NEAR THE THAI-MYANMAR FRIENDSHIP BRIDGE IN THE THAUNGYIN (MOEI) RIVER**

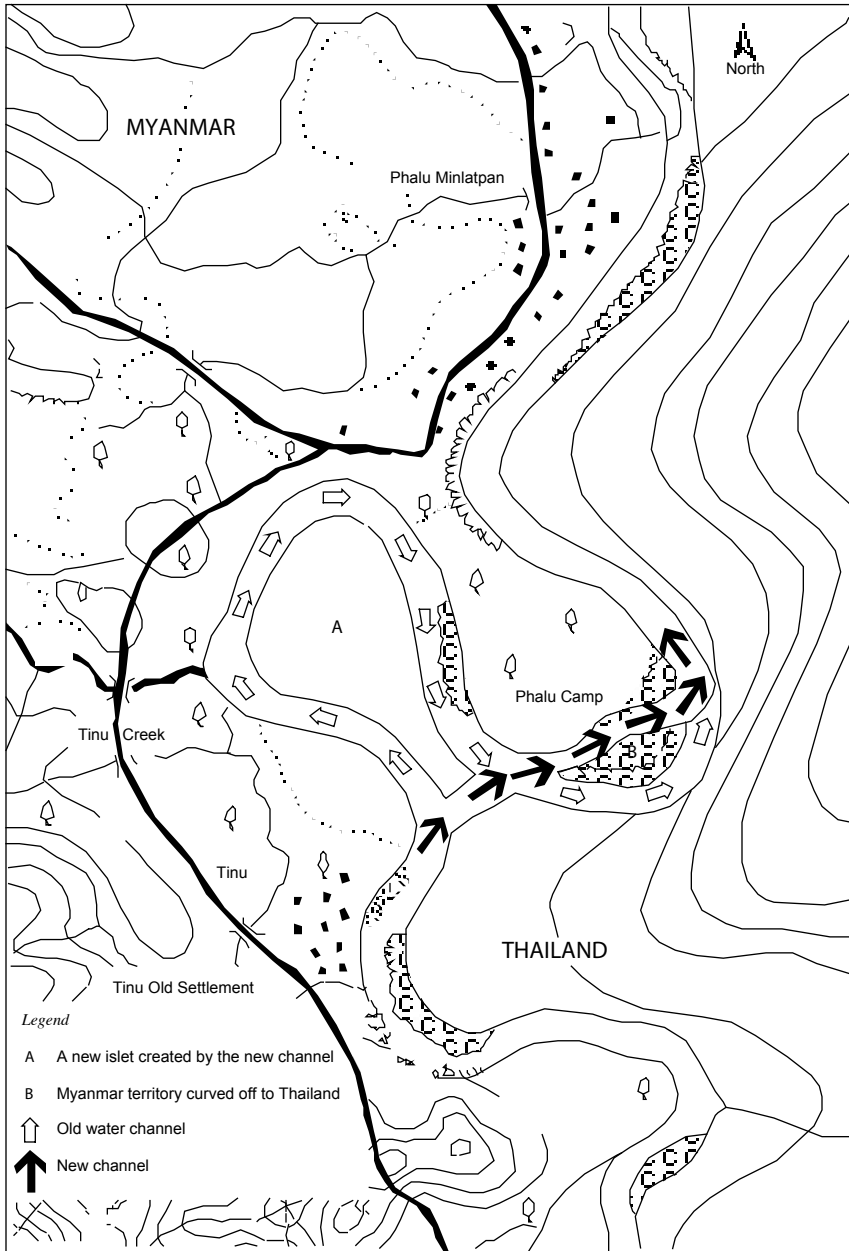
About half a mile north of Myawaddy town, near Kyundaw, owing to a flood in July 1994, a new water channel developed in the Thaungyin River. The flood made a new 120-metre wide water channel and it carved off about 16 acres of land from the Myanmar side of the border. Some Myanmar farmers had been growing seasonal crops in the area. To restore the original water channel, Thai and Myanmar delegations met in March 1997. The Myanmar delegation proposed that it would dig up and restore the original water channel on the basis of 1989 aerial photographs. The Thai side, however, proposed to use 1994 aerial photographs taken before and after the flood and handed them over to the Myanmar delegation. There was a confrontation of troops between the two countries in 1997. Meanwhile, the Myanmar Ministry of Hotel and Tourism negotiated with a Thai company to build a hotel on the land, an islet. But the Thai government told the Thai company not to do so. Although there has been no more serious clashes to date, Myanmar has raised its flag and kept a military outpost there.

In a similar case, the flood of 1994 caused a sudden change of water channel of the Thaungyin River in the Phalu area. The new water channel carved off about 142 acres of land from the Thai side to Myanmar and about 12 acres from the Myanmar side to Thailand. About fifteen local Myanmar farmers rushed into the area and grew seasonal crops on the newly formed islet. The Thai authorities informed their Myanmar counterparts that Thailand had rights to restore the original water channel in accordance with international law. In December 1997, the Thai authorities informed Myanmar that it had begun digging and construction works in the Phalu area to restore the original water channel and invited Myanmar to send a team of experts to inspect the restoration. The Myanmar government summoned the Thai charge d' affaires and delivered a note of protest on 17 December 1997. As a result, the construction works stopped on

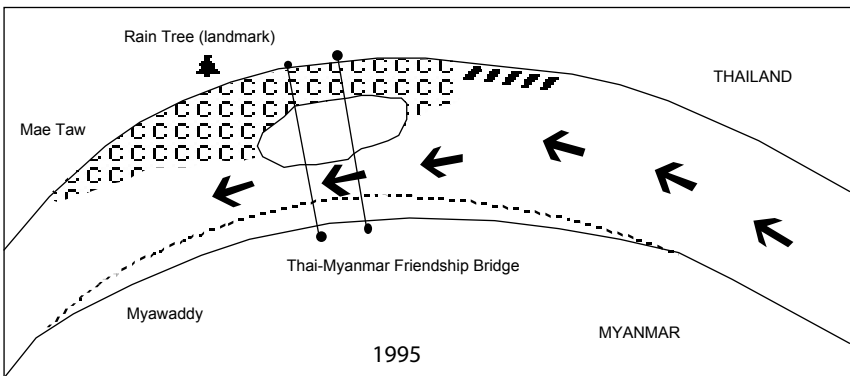
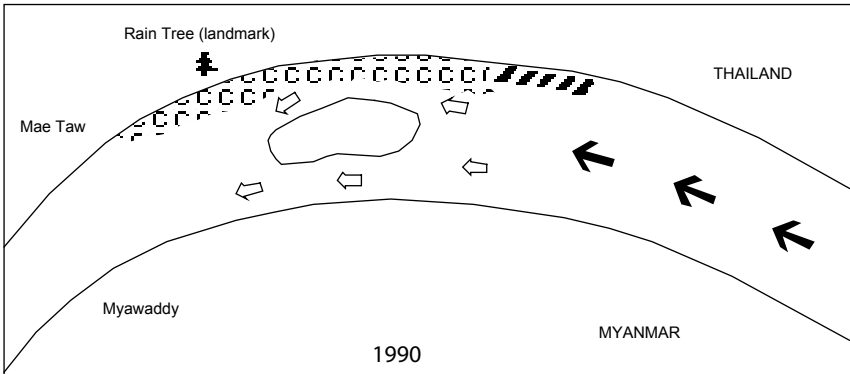
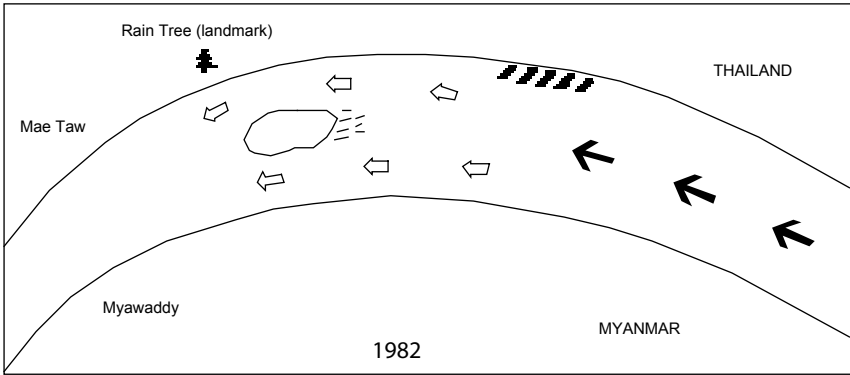
**Map 4.2 – Kyundaw Meander after the flood of the Thaungyin (Moei) River in 1996**



Map 4.3 – Phalu Meander



**Map 4.4 – An islet near the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge in Myawaddy**



19 January 1998. At the 16th RBC meeting, the Myanmar delegation told its Thai counterpart that the Thai government should have first discussed the matter within the Joint Boundary Committee and formed a joint team if it wanted to restore the original water channel.

A meeting of the steering committee of boundary affairs (of the Myanmar government) held on 12 August 1998 decided that if Thailand began its work in the Phalu area, Myanmar would also carry out its work in the Kyundaw area. On 14 September 1998, the Myanmar government informed the Thai government by a diplomatic note, stating that it would carry out the digging and restoration of the original water channel if conditions required and favoured it. However, the use of different aerial photographs became an issue at various bilateral meetings. At the 13th RBC meeting held in Phitsanulok in June 1996, Thai Supreme Commander General Viroj Saengnsit said, with regard to the restoration of the original water channel, that "Yangon had agreed to use a map based on 1989 aerial photos to demarcate the border."<sup>44</sup> In May 1997, during his visit to Yangon, Thai Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh gave his consent to the use of a 1989 map for the restoration of the original water channel.<sup>45</sup> When the Thai delegation led by the Director-General of the Treaties and Legal Affairs Department and the Myanmar delegation led by the Director-General of its Treaties and Legal Affairs met on 10 June 1997, the Thai side rejected Myanmar's proposal to use the 1989 map for the restoration. According to the Director-General of Thailand's Treaties and Legal Affairs Department:

The talks failed as the Myanmar side used the 1989 aerial photograph while the Thai delegation insisted on using the 1994 photograph. Thailand could not accept Burma's proposal because the river channel which was used to mark the border changed only slightly after 1989, but an abrupt change took place in 1994.<sup>46</sup>

It was exactly the point that the Myanmar delegation had argued. Due to the excessive logging of Thai firms in the area, there had been continued soil erosion and flood-type high water volume in the Thaungyin River since the early 1990s. The aerial photographs taken in 1989 showed a stable channel that was more consistent with past photographs.

In 1982, the Myanmar Timber Corporation left about 2,000 logs near an islet claimed by Myanmar in the Thaungyin River where the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge was to be built. The Thai authorities had also erected some stakes, concrete walls and



diversion spurs along the stretch of its riverbank, particular along the river meander south of the islet. This situation caused erosion on the Myanmar side of the river and created a soil settlement between the islet and the Thai side of the riverbank. As a result, the water channel between the islet and the Thai side of the riverbank became shallower. About eight years later, the islet became bigger due to new settlement and the river channel between the islet and the Thai side of the riverbank was barely visible in the summer. In 1994, the Thai government proposed to build a friendship bridge. At this stage, the islet of alluvial land was about 25 acres and some local Myanmar farmers had started growing seasonal crops on it.

When the Thai side drafted a blueprint for the bridge, the islet was indicated as Myanmar's. The landmark on the Thai side of the border was a rain tree on the bank of the Thaungyin River. A concrete pile was to be built on the islet to support the bridge. However, during the construction, Thailand dumped some truckloads of earth between the islet and the Thai side of the riverbank for the heavy machines needed to transport concrete piles to the islet for the building. As the Thai construction site threw more concrete blocks into the water channel, the islet and the Thai side of the riverbank became contiguous. Enterprising local Thai authorities began to build shop-houses and issued land lease grants to Thai citizens.

As a result, on 4 March 1995, the Myanmar authorities, through the local TBC, protested the illegal encroachment and demanded that the Thai authorities restore the original water channel, halt all construction activities and dismantle all buildings on the islet. Myanmar also demanded that the islet be declared a "no man's land" for the time being. At that time, the Friendship Bridge was almost 90% complete. At the same time, the Myanmar authorities closed the Myawaddy-Mae Sod checkpoints. Only after several rounds of meetings at the local TBC between March 1995 and March 1997 did the Myanmar authorities finally agreed to resume construction work on the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge and revive cross border trade. On 12 March 1997, General Maung Aye and General Khin Nyunt inspected the bridge construction site and discussed with the Thai Army chief to resume construction. Although the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge was formally opened in late 1997, the dispute over the islet in the Thaungyin River remains unsettled.

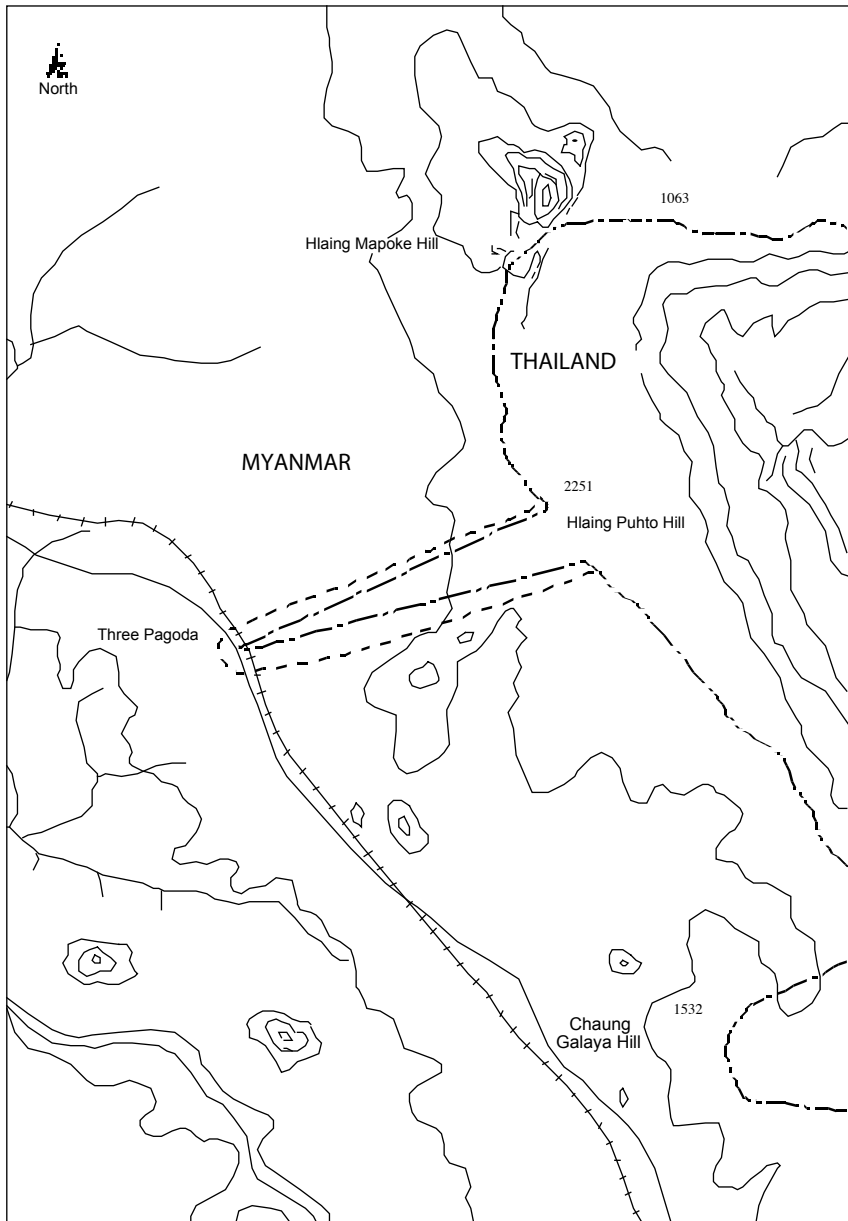
## **THE PAYATHONEZU (THREE PAGODAS PASS) AND NEARBY AREAS**

In 1864, the British government decided to delineate the boundary

between Myanmar and Thailand and asked Commissioner O'Riley of Thanintharyi and Lieutenant Bagge from the Royal British Engineering Corps to conduct a survey and draw a map based on the watershed of the area. As a result, authorities from Thailand and British Burma (Thanintharyi) signed the Convention of 1868 in Bangkok on 3 June 1868. According to the convention, the boundary line was along the watershed of the area. On 25 March 1894, a Mr. Merrifield, representing the British government, and a Mr. Collens, representing the Thai government, discussed the issues on the demarcation of the boundary in the Three Pagodas Pass area. On 24 December 1894, a Mr. Rawling from the British side and Mr. Collens began their work on ground survey and map drafting. A few months later, the survey was called off due to bad weather. It was resumed on 30 December 1895. By 1896, the survey team was able to make landmarks and draft a map in the Three Pagodas Pass area. In Mr. Rawling's report, the boundary lines are straight lines from the middle pagoda (of the three pagodas) to the highest peak of Hlaingpahto Hill on the one hand and to the Menitield's pole (located on the mound of the same hill) on the other. It was agreed and signed in 1897 by both sides.

Before 1992, taking opportunity of the prevailing insurgency and the lack of security presence and authority from the Myanmar government in the area, the Thai government built motor roads and erected some buildings in Myanmar territory by extending the boundary lines. At the 4th RBC meeting held in August 1990, the Myanmar delegation discussed the issue with its Thai counterparts. The Myanmar government found that even local authorities and residents were unsure of the exact boundary line in the vicinity of the Three Pagodas Pass. The Myanmar delegation explained that the Three Pagodas Pass had been the headquarters of the NMSP until early 1990.<sup>47</sup> About three years later, on 2 September 1993, the Myanmar government delivered an aide memoire to the Thai ambassador, protesting Thai construction activities in the Payathonezu. Then, at the 14th RBC meeting in December 1996, the Myanmar government reminded its Thai counterpart of the protest note in September 1993. When the Thai side protested the construction of buildings by Myanmar, the delegation defended that it was on Myanmar soil. Again, on 21 December 1998, the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a letter of protest to the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok in connection with the construction of buildings and the land lease issued by the Myanmar government. The Myanmar Foreign Ministry also sent a note to the Thai embassy to defend its actions and asked the Thai authorities to remove buildings

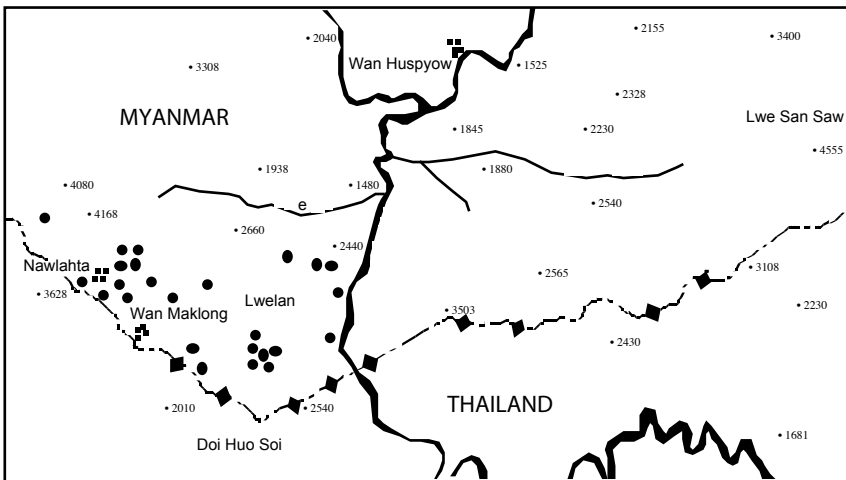
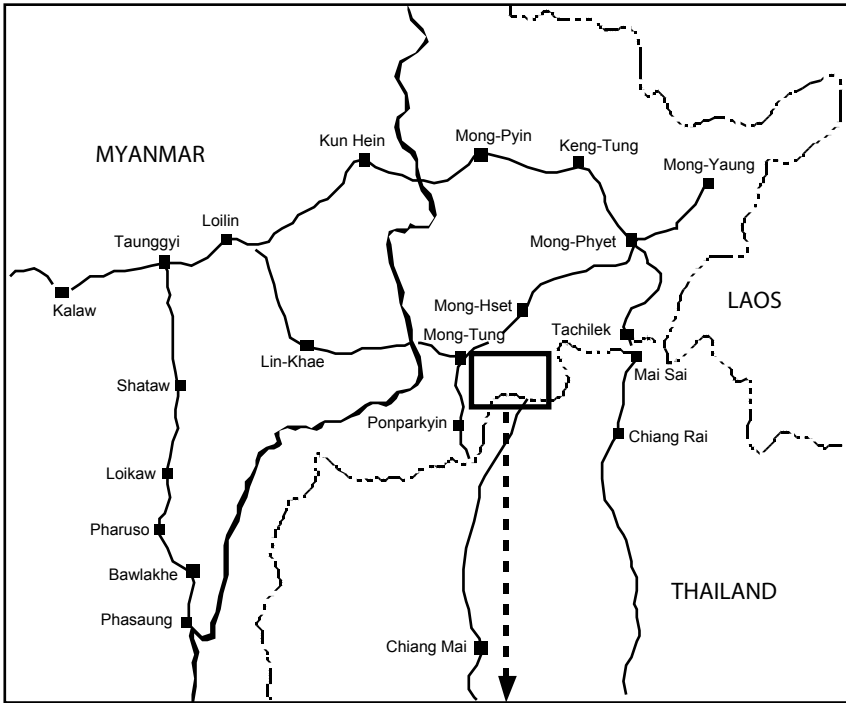
**Map 4.5 – Disputed area in the Three Pagodas Pass**



**Legend**

- — — — — Border Line according to Myanmar Map
- - - - - Border line according to Thai Map
- +++++ Old Railway

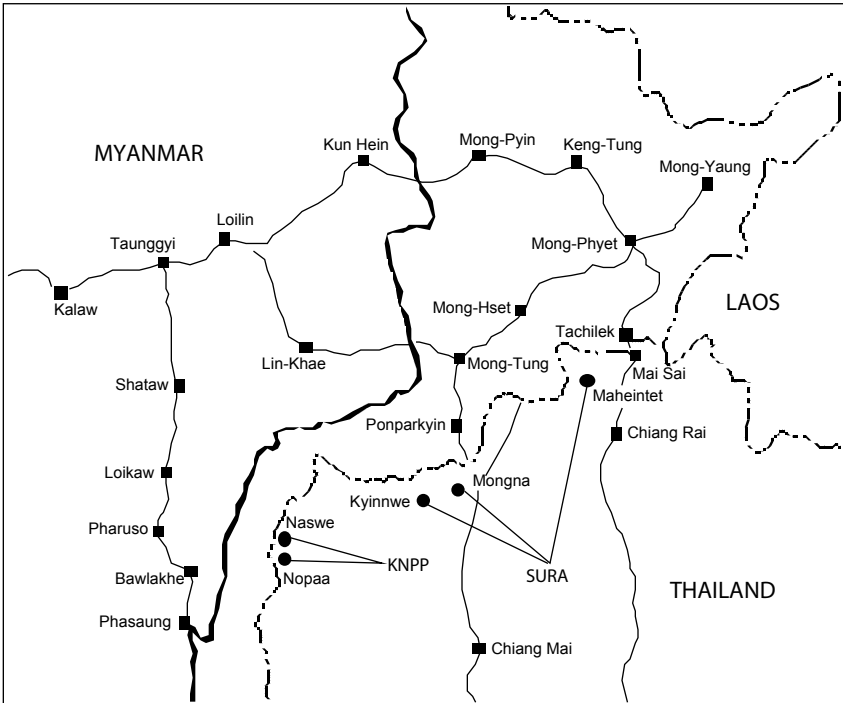
**Map 4.6 – Thai military camps inside Myanmar and along the Myanmar-Thai Border**



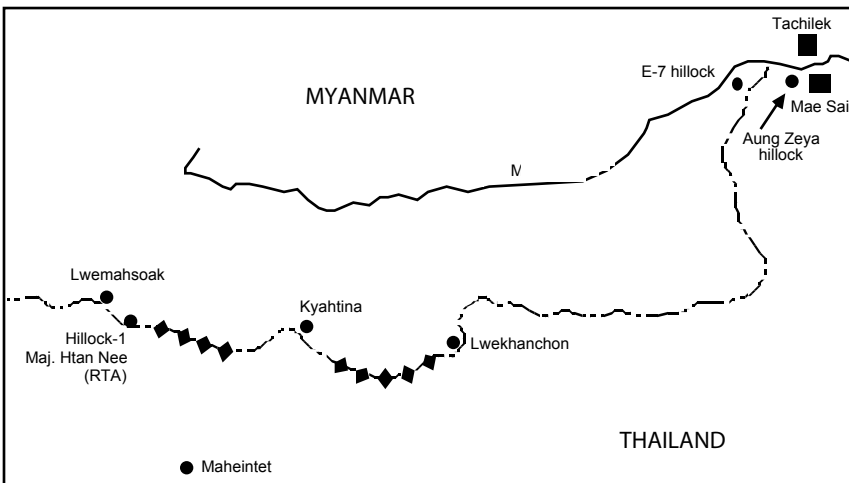
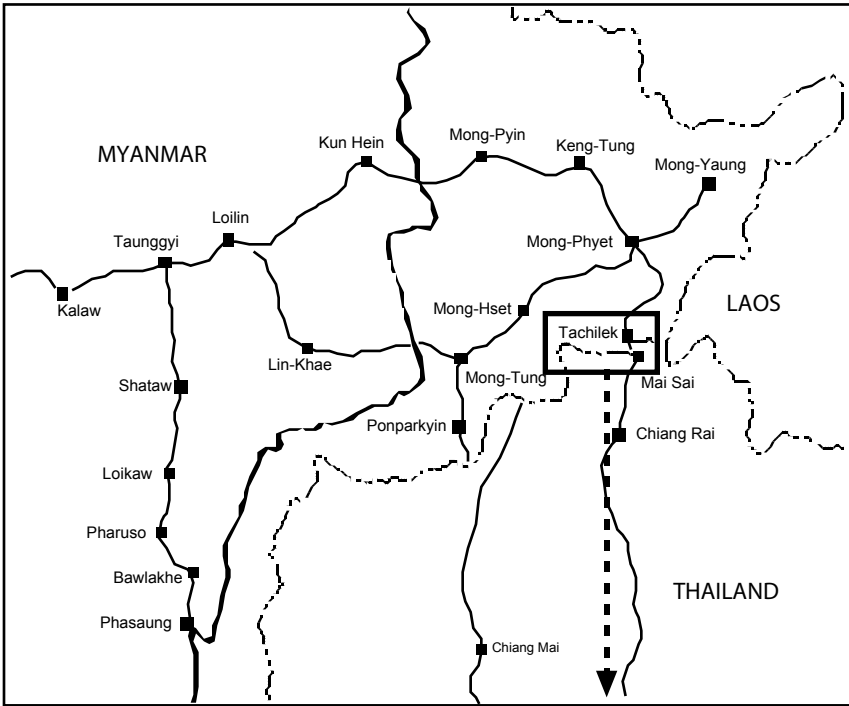
**Legend**

- Thai Military Camps inside Myanmar Territory
- Village
- Border Line
- ◆ Thai Military Camp along the Thai-Myanmar Border

**Map 4.7 – Location of insurgent camps inside Thailand**



**Map 4.8 – Clash sites between Myanmar Armed Forces and the Royal Thai Army (February 2001)**



◆ SURA Camps

and roads built by the Thai government in the area.

In addition to this problem, there are some acres of land in the nearby Payathonezu area which are now claimed by local Thai people. Before the Myanmar government regained control over the area in 1992, the area had been under anti-Yangon insurgent groups. Without a security presence and any government authority, local villagers engaged in business out of the legal framework. Some local Myanmar (Mon) villagers sold their plots of land and farms to Thai farmers without realising the consequences. Unlike the Kayin area, part of the problem was that there was no clear boundary line, such as a river, in the area. After some years, many Thai villagers now own land on the Myanmar side of border. Territorial disputes over land owned by Thai villagers usually come up as a result of the Thai authorities providing security for them and keeping a police post there.

### **TERRITORIAL DISPUTE IN THE LWELAN (DOI LANG) AREA**

After the surrender of Khun Sa's Mong Thai Army (MTA) to the government, an area of land of about 32 square km in the Lwelan area has been a source of tension since early 1996. The area had been under the Tatmadaw's control and LID-55 had maintained military outposts there until late 1988. As Myanmar troops were withdrawn, the MTA took over some positions, as did the Thai Army in the nearby areas. These places were identified as Myanmar's in maps use by the Tatmadaw. When Khun Sa surrendered, the Tatmadaw retook the area and established military outposts. In early 1996, the Thai military maintained seven military outposts, manned by about 550 troops, in the area. Some outposts were almost five miles inside Myanmar territory, according to Myanmar sources. The dispute arose from the use of different maps by the two countries. While Myanmar troops used the 1938 map drawn by the British based on the 1911 survey, Thai troops used the 1986 map.

At the 12th RBC meeting held in Mawlamyaing in February 1996, the Myanmar delegation protested against the presence of Thai outposts inside Myanmar territory and discussed the demarcation of the border. At the 13th RBC meeting in Phitsanulok in June 1996, the Myanmar delegation asserted again that the disputed area belonged to Myanmar. On 21 June 1996, Major General Ket Sein, head of the Myanmar delegation, told Thai generals that General Maung Aye built a pagoda on Lwelan when he was the regional commander of



the Eastern Command.

With regard to the presence of Thai troops in the area, Thai Supreme Commander General Viroj Saengsnit said that it cost the Thai Army 100 million baht a year to keep two battalions of soldiers at Lwelan “to protect the territory.”<sup>48</sup> The Thai Army had set up a special command task force under the 7th Infantry Regiment to guard the disputed area since 2 January 1996.<sup>49</sup> In February 1997, General Chettha Thanajaro, the Thai Army Commander-in-chief, suggested that the area be turned into a military-free zone.<sup>50</sup> However, it was never realised. Although both sides had built up their troops along the border, the area under dispute was remarkably peaceful. Soldiers from both sides played volleyball and *chinlone* (*takraw*) together in the evenings on a playground jointly constructed for daily sports activities, and officers dined together from time to time. Myanmar soldiers were also allowed to buy daily fresh food from Thai villages.

In the meantime, on the night of 26 October 1997, a group of Thai officials removed the temporary landmark pillar with a bulldozer from the Thai-Myanmar border near BP-1. The Myanmar government did not make any public protest or statement on the incident. It was resolved peacefully. Although the Myanmar government interpreted it as a forced cession of Myanmar territory, it never exploited the situation to sensationalise the issue to make the other party look bad. Instead, the Myanmar government planned to make a formal protest at the local TBC meeting. Five days later, as the Thai authorities came to realise that the issue would be brought up at the local TBC meeting, a group of Thai soldiers led by Colonel Watanachai, Commander of 7th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Division of the Third Army, returned the pillar to the Myanmar authorities.<sup>51</sup>

In December 1997, the Thai Army decided to deploy a battalion of rapid deployment force (RDF), comprising special warfare, artillery personnel and paratroopers, to the disputed area of Lwelan (Doi Lang). Army Chief General Chettha Thanajaro argued that “it was necessary as Thailand and Myanmar had yet to reach an agreement on the withdrawal of troops from both sides of Doi Lang (Lwelan)”.<sup>52</sup> He said such a decision was not to provoke Myanmar but just to strengthen Thailand’s defence capability in the area.<sup>53</sup> In July 1998, Lieutenant General Sommai Vichavorn, commander of the Third Army, said that the Thai Army had maintained seven military posts along the border as “part of the measures to prevent intrusion”.<sup>54</sup> In late 1998, about 775 Thai troops were still present in the area. Since 1 October 1998, a special task force of the Third Cavalry Regiment had been in charge there while the 138th Cavalry Battalion had been

working as an operations unit.<sup>55</sup> By early 2000, the Thai Army had already established 11 military outposts manned by cavalry soldiers and paramilitary rangers, numbering 500 to 800, in the disputed area.<sup>56</sup> The Thai Army was aware that Myanmar had also deployed several battalions in the area. Colonel Akradet Songworawit, commander of the Third Cavalry Regiment, mentioned that Thai troops in the disputed area were outnumbered by Myanmar troops.<sup>57</sup> On 31 March 2000, Thai Army Commander-in-chief General Surayud Chulanont came to the disputed area and inspected the troops.<sup>58</sup> As of January 2001, according to a Myanmar source, there were 34 Thai military outposts inside Myanmar territory, with nine of them situated along the border.<sup>59</sup>

In early 2001, a military clash took place in the area. Almost five years after the Tatmadaw had re-established its outpost on E-7 Hill, a group of Thai troops led by Captain Yohtin from the 138th Cavalry Battalion came to the hill on 5 January 2001 and demanded that Tatmadaw troops withdraw from their positions and threatened that Thailand would use force if the Myanmar troops had failed to do so. The Myanmar troops on the E-7 were cautious not to escalate a conflict. As the E-7 Hill was well within Myanmar territory, there was no point in disputing its ownership at all. It was on the E-7 Hill that the Myanmar military had set up an artillery battery during its offensive against the KMT in 1961.<sup>60</sup> However, E-7 had become a source of tension and conflict when the Myanmar military launched routine counter-insurgency operations in the nearby area to dislodge SURA insurgents.

In February 2001, the Myanmar military launched a routine dry season offensive in the area. The operations targeted the newly built SURA outposts along the Thai-Myanmar border. During the fighting, the Tatmadaw seized a Thai military outpost manned by paramilitary rangers and cavalry soldiers on 9 February 2001, along with a SURA camp contiguous to it. Regional Commander Major General Thein Sein met with Major Htawat from the Chiangrai military (district) command in Tachilek and explained that Myanmar troops had attacked only the SURA camps and had no intention of trespassing into Thai territory. The withdrawal of Myanmar troops from the hill (Thai camp) was delayed due to an artillery attack from the Thai military.<sup>61</sup> Instead of resolving the issue through diplomatic means, Thailand released the news to its media. That worsened the situation. The Thai military had allowed the SURA to use its territory (Aung Zeya Hillock) to launch an artillery attack on the Myanmar military outpost on E-7 Hill, some distance from the SURA camps, on 11 February 2001. A total of 48 shells fell on E-7 Hill and another 10 shells inside Tachilek. The Myanmar military retaliated and fired

back on the SURA artillery position. As a result, a few shells landed in Mae Sai and killed and injured some Thai citizens. The shells that landed in Tachilek also resulted in three civilian casualties and 15 wounded. While the Thai Foreign Ministry protested the incident bitterly and accused the Myanmar government of “total disregard for the danger to the lives and safety of innocent civilians”, it was completely silent about its role in the death of Myanmar civilians due to SURA artillery attack which came from Thai territory and supported by the Thai Army. The Thai government accused the Myanmar military of shelling Mae Sai but the Myanmar government denied any intentional shelling.<sup>62</sup>

Taking advantage of the situation, the Thai government, its military and the media began to accuse the Myanmar government of protecting the drug trade, describing routine counter-insurgency operations as fighting to defend drug cartels. A simple counter-insurgency operation had turned into an ugly border conflict. A ceasefire agreement was reached on 12 February 2001. Meanwhile, tension mounted high as both sides sent reinforcements to the area and the media in both countries engaged in a war of words. At a press conference hosted by the Myanmar government on 12 February 2001, the government spokesman said that “the Thai Army not only assisted the SURA in attacking E-7 Hill but they also fired heavy weapons into Tachilek. A Thai military unit, putting the SURA to the front and giving them covering fire from the rear, launched the attacks.”<sup>63</sup> The SURA continued to launch attacks on the Tatmadaw’s outposts from inside Thailand, making full use of the shelter provided by the Thai Army. The negative comments on the Myanmar government and military made by the Thai government in general and Lieutenant General Watanachai Chaimuenwong in particular fuelled the situation. Finally, a local TBC meeting was held on 26 February 2001 and a joint statement was issued. The Thai version of the statement said that Myanmar was to blame for the incident. But the Myanmar version and, most importantly, the English version said it was the fault of Thailand. The coming of a new Thai government led by Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra paved the way to resolve the issue peacefully. The new Thai government adopted a conciliatory position in dealing with the Myanmar government. Finally, the 18th RBC meeting was held in Kengtung in early April 2001 and the tension between the two countries was somewhat scaled down.

## CONCLUSION

It is apparent that all the boundary disputes, except those involving the meanders and an islet in the Thaungyin River, arose primarily from the transition of frontiers into boundaries. Although the use of

different maps by the two countries contributed to the problem, it became an issue only when the Myanmar government gained and consolidated its control over its former frontiers. As in the cases of the Lwelan area, Hill Point 1542 and the three islands at the mouth of the Pakchan River, the transition from frontier to boundary has led to bilateral tension and finally escalated into some armed clashes.

NOTES

- 1 Ewan W. Anderson. "Geopolitics: International Boundaries as Fighting Places" in *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy*, edited by Colin S. Gray & Geoffrey Sloan. London: Frank Cass, 1999, p. 125
- 2 *ibid.*, p. 128
- 3 Victoria Point was renamed Aung Zeya Point. However, since some Thai people felt quite irritated with the name Aung Zeya, the Myanmar government renamed it Bayin Naung Point at a later stage.
- 4 The other two classifications are "geometrical boundary", based on straight lines following lines of latitude and longitude as in the case of many African countries, and "anthropomorphic boundary", based on cultural elements such as language, religion or ethnology as in the case of the Indian subcontinent.
- 5 Economic Intelligence Unit. *Country Report Burma* (1986), p. 31
- 6 *The Guardian* newspaper (17 May 1968)
- 7 *The Guardian* newspaper (17 August 1973)
- 8 စစ်သမိုင်းရုံးတိုက်နှင့်ကပ်ဆက်သွယ်ရေးဌာနချုပ်၊ ကရင်ပြည်နယ်၊ ဘရားကန် (ရန်ကင်း၊ စစ်သမိုင်းရုံးတိုက်နှင့် ကပ်ဆက်သွယ်ရေးဌာနချုပ်၊ ဘရားကန်)
- 9 Directorate of Defence Services Museum and Historical Research Institute. *History of the Myanmar Armed Forces* Vol. 7. Yangon: DDSMHRI, 2000, pp. 150-151
- 10 မိုးမိုးရေခဲလက်ခံတိုက်ဖွဲ့ရာတွင် (ပြန်လည်လေ့ကျင့်ရေးစခန်း)။ Bo Kyaw. "To Be a Good Neighbour" in *Myanma Alin* (15 March 2001)
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 7th RBC Meeting minutes
- 13 *Bangkok Post* (4 December 1992)
- 14 *Bangkok Post* (3 December 1992)
- 15 *Bangkok Post* (4 December 1992)
- 16 In 1988, a dispute over the ownership of Baan Romklat in Phitsanulok province between Thailand and Laos led to an outbreak of war on the border. The Thai Army suffered heavy casualties and finally resorted to the negotiation table. Only after a series of negotiations for ceasefire agreements did the Laotian

- troops withdraw.
- 16 Editorial in the *Nation* (3 December 1992)
  - 17 *Bangkok Post* (1 December 1992)
  - 18 *Bangkok Post* (2 December 1992)
  - 19 *Bangkok Post* (4 December 1992)
  - 20 *Bangkok Post* (3 December 1992)
  - 21 Editorial in the *Nation* (3 December 1992)
  - 22 Editorial in the *Nation* (3 December 1992)
  - 23 *Bangkok Post* (3 December 1992)
  - 24 Minutes of the 2nd Special RBC meeting on 8 December 1992
  - 25 Background Paper prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Myanmar
  - 26 *ibid.*
  - 27 မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု (မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု) in *Kyemon* (30 December 1998)
  - 28 *Bangkok Post* (23 December 1998)
  - 29 *Nation* (15 January 1999)
  - 30 *ibid.*
  - 31 Press release by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ( မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု (မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု) ) in *Kyemon* (15 January 1999)
  - 32 Wassana Nanuan and Archathaya Chuennirn. "Navy Clash Erupts off Ranong" in *Bangkok Post* and *Nation* (14 January 1999)
  - 33 *Nation* (19 January 1999 and 20 January 1999)
  - 34 *Bangkok Post* (8 February 1999)
  - 35 *Bangkok Post* (11 February 1999)
  - 36 *Bangkok Post* (23 December 1998)
  - 37 *Bangkok Post* (29 January 1999)
  - 38 မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု (မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု) in *Kyemon* (2 February 1999)
  - 39 မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု (မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု) in *Kyemon* (18 February 1999)
  - 40 မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု (မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု) in *Kyemon* (8 March 1999)
  - 41 မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု (မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု) in *Kyemon* (2 May 1999)
  - 42 မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု (မြန်မာ့ပြည်ထောင်စု) in *Kyemon* (7 May 1999)
  - 43 *Nation* (21 December 2000)
  - 44 *Bangkok Post* (22 June 1996); minutes of the 13th RBC meeting
  - 45 Nussara Sawatsawang and Supamart Kasem. "Thailand-Burma: Boundary Talks Test Rangoon's Regional Resolve" in *Bangkok Post* (30 June 1997)
  - 46 Supamart Kasem. "Border" in *Bangkok Post* (22 June 1997)
  - 47 Minutes of the 4th RBC meeting
  - 48 *Bangkok Post* (22 June 1996)
  - 49 Wassana Nanuan. "Confrontation Remains in Western Disputed Zone" in *Bangkok Post* (20 December 1998)
  - 50 *Bangkok Post* (24 February 1997)

- 51 ဝေင်္ခါတို့ ရာဇဝင်အရှိင်အခြား (မြန်မာ့သမားတော်၊ ၂၁ အောက်တိုဘာ ၂၀၀၁) . Nga Khin Nyo. "Let's Not Make the History Look Bad" in *Myanma Alin* (21 February 2001)
- 52 *Bangkok Post* (29 December 1997)
- 53 *Bangkok Post* (30 December 1997)
- 54 *Bangkok Post* (20 July 1998)
- 55 Wassana Nanuam. "Confrontation Remains in Western Disputed Zone" in *Bangkok Post* (20 December 1998)
- 56 *Bangkok Post* (1 March 2000)
- 57 Wassana Nanuam. "Confrontation Remains in Western Disputed Zone" in *Bangkok Post* (20 December 1998)
- 58 *Bangkok Post* (1 April 2000)
- 59 မြန်မာ့ (၁၃ အောက်တိုဘာ ၂၀၀၁) in *Kyemon* (13 February 2001)
- 60 မြန်မာ့အစိုးရ၏ အစိုးရအဖွဲ့အစည်း၏ ရာဇဝင်အရှိင်အခြား (မြန်မာ့သမားတော်၊ ၂၁ အောက်တိုဘာ ၂၀၀၁) . Momotaro-San. "Mekhong Operation Point 3115 and Winmanaw Battle" in *Golden Jubilee of the Myanmar Armed Forces*. Yangon: DDSHMRI, 1995, pp. 196-213
- 61 မြန်မာ့ (၁၃ အောက်တိုဘာ ၂၀၀၁) in *Kyemon* (13 February 2001)
- 62 *ibid.*
- 63 *ibid.*

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## OTHER ISSUES IN BILATERAL RELATIONS

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There are several other issues that affect relations between Myanmar and Thailand. Most notably among them are illegal logging, illegal fishing, illegal migration (labourers), trafficking in humans and animals as well as trafficking of narcotic drugs.

### ILLEGAL LOGGING

Illegal logging has been going on along the Myanmar-Thai border for several decades. It has been one of the most important sources of revenue for insurgent groups along the border. Insurgent groups grant illegal logging concessions to Thai firms at a very low prices. One report stated that while the international market price for one ton of teak is more than U.S. \$2,000, insurgent groups usually sell teak to Thai firms at about U.S. \$100 per ton. Several hundred thousand tons of timber are illegally cut and exported to Thailand. Places like Darkwin, Khokyarkho, Kyauknyut and Mawtaung along the Myanmar-Thai border are well known for illegal logging activities. When Mawtaung was captured by the Tatmadaw, there were so many illegally felled logs that it took more than a month using several dozen trucks to clear up the ground.<sup>1</sup>

Recently, on 19 May 2001, Lieutenant General Wattanachai Chaimuenwong from the Third Army made a comment on the Myanmar military personnel in connection with illegal logging. He said:

Illegal logging and drug trafficking are the major causes of concern for residents along the Burmese (Myanmar) border. Illegal wood was being supplied to more than 100 sawmills along the border, 60% of which are foreign-owned. Those benefiting from the illegal businesses are mostly military



personnel on the Burmese (Myanmar) side of the border. When the people have a conflict of interest, they fight, thus affecting peoples' livelihoods.<sup>2</sup>

On the contrary, almost all sawmills along the border (both sides) are run by insurgents and Thai businesses who have been in the illegal logging business for decades. One Myanmar military officer asked why General Wattanachai Chaimuenwong did not take any action if he believed that most of the beneficiaries of illegal logging were Myanmar military personnel.<sup>3</sup> The Myanmar military has nothing to do with any illegal logging. In some areas, when Myanmar troops captured insurgent strongholds, they found plenty of illegally felled logs and facilities for sawmills.<sup>4</sup> Between March 1989 and May 1990, during the its counter-insurgency operations against the KNLA strongholds, the Tatmadaw seized 109,906 logs of various sizes and 1,367 cubic tons of wood.<sup>5</sup> In 1992, some Thai timber smugglers were arrested by the Myanmar authorities.<sup>6</sup>

## ILLEGAL FISHING

Illegal fishing in Myanmar waters by Thai trawlers is an old story. Cases of arrest of Thai fishermen fishing illegally in Myanmar waters are not uncommon. Between September 1988 and 1992, the Myanmar government seized 231 illegal Thai fishing trawlers with a total of 2,346 crew. The Myanmar government estimated that the amount of fish seized with the trawlers was worth well over 345 million kyat.<sup>7</sup> In 1989, the Myanmar government issued permits to Thai fishing trawlers to fish only in certain areas. One permit was issued for a single trawler and it was subjected to annual renewal. Soon afterwards, the Myanmar authorities found out that many Thai trawler operators had been cheating. Between late 1989 and early 1993, 81 Thai fishing trawlers were fined a total of more than U.S. \$1.5 million for violation of fishing contracts.<sup>8</sup> However, illegal fishing in Myanmar waters continued. Between 1990 and 2000, a total of 621 Thai fishing trawlers were seized. The Myanmar government protested to the Thai government against Thai trawlers fishing in restricted areas as well as the duplicating and making of forged permits. Illegal fishing has become a major source of tension between the two countries since the Myanmar Navy became more effective in patrolling Myanmar waters and pursuing illegal trawlers. Between 1993 and 2000, out of the 582 Thais arrested for various illegal activities, more than 450 were arrested for illegal fishing.

## ILLEGAL MIGRATION

The illegal migration of labourers was not a serious problem between the Myanmar and Thai governments until the Thai economic crisis in 1997. In a way, both countries benefited from illegal migration. Myanmar people living along the border usually worked in Thai factories. They received very low wages. Many Thai fishing trawlers in the Ranong area employed Myanmar fishermen. Factories producing garments, soft drinks and beverages, footwear, canned food, other foodstuffs such as candy and monosodium glutamate (MSG), and furniture were usually staffed with illegal Myanmar workers. According to the Thai immigration office, a survey done in August 1995 found that out of an estimated 525,480 illegal workers in Thailand, 334,123 were from Myanmar. In 1996, the Thai Ministry of Labour estimated that two thirds of the 728,137 illegal workers in Thailand were from Myanmar. By mid 1997, the Thai government estimated that there were around one million illegal workers. According to a study by scholars in Chularongkorn University, two thirds of these illegal workers, about 650,000, were from Myanmar. A number of illegal female workers were involved in the sex industry. In 1993, a study concluded that about 20,000 prostitutes in Thailand were from Myanmar. Most of the Myanmar sex workers work in brothels and clubs in cities along the Myanmar-Thai border. Most of the illegal workers, including sex workers, from Myanmar are people living in the border areas. A study by Thai scholars revealed this.

Burmese (Myanmar) prostitutes often work in underground brothels. They service lowly paid males and have to provide many services a day.... The women usually service two to six clients a day. But on festive season, such as Songkran (Thingyan), or when the fishing boats are in dock, a girl may have to service up to twenty clients a day. After that many will have to see a doctor.<sup>9</sup>

Before June 1996, the Thai government allowed Thai employers to hire Myanmar migrants legally if they registered the workers and paid a deposit. But only a few hundred workers registered as the procedure was complicated and cumbersome. In June 1996, the Thai government relaxed the rules and permitted Myanmar migrants in 43 provinces who had entered Thailand before June 1996 to work for two years in selected occupations, mostly in manual labour, construction, mining factories, the agricultural sector and sea fisheries.<sup>10</sup> However, owing to the economic crisis in 1997, the Thai government began to take serious measures against illegal workers in Thailand. This led to

the deportation of many illegal Myanmar workers. But the problem remained unsettled. As Thai scholars wrote:

Burmese (Myanmar) male migrants near the border areas may be prepared to accept wages of twenty to twenty-five baht a day. In the hinterland areas, the wages rise to forty to seventy baht, around half the wages for local Thais. Burmese (Myanmar) crewmen in fishing boats earn around 700 to 750 baht a month while local Thais get between 1,800 and 3,000 baht. Employers of Burmese migrants save 50 to 70 percent of their labour cost.<sup>11</sup>

A Myanmar author pointed out that Thais build fishing trawlers with illegal wood from Myanmar, with cheap labour provided by illegal Myanmar workers and then fish illegally in Myanmar waters by employing illegal and lowly paid Myanmar crewmen. Then, through illegal and underpaid Myanmar sex workers, they take the earnings of the Myanmar workers back. It is a vicious circle and only the Thais benefit mostly from it.<sup>12</sup>

Another issue closely related to illegal workers is the trafficking in humans, particularly women and children. This trans-national crime draws more and more attention nowadays. According to a survey by Pasuk Phongpaichit and colleagues, about 78 percent of Myanmar sex workers in Thailand had to pay fees to agents.<sup>13</sup> This points to a sizeable human trafficking trade along the Myanmar-Thai border. The Myanmar government takes a serious view of this crime and imposes heavy prison terms on those caught. Myanmar newspapers, journals and magazines published by law enforcement agencies from time to time report cases of human trafficking between Myanmar and Thailand. There have been some reports of child trafficking, especially in the border areas. It has been reported that children were sold in Thailand to beggars, pimps and greedy businessmen for the exploitation of child labour.

## ANIMAL TRAFFICKING

Illegal trade in animals and other raw materials is a major concern for the Myanmar government. For example, a bamboo shoot canning factory on the Thai side of the border near Myawaddy was found to not only hire Myanmar labourers but it also exploited Myanmar resources, illegally importing the bamboo shoots. The Myanmar government is worried that uncontrolled and illegal importation of bamboo shoot would not only lead to the scarcity of raw materials

for paper factories in Myanmar but also destroy the natural habitat of animals. The trafficking of thousands of cows and buffaloes into Thailand also depletes Myanmar resources.<sup>14</sup> As these activities are beneficial to Thai industries, the Thai government has not paid much attention to them.

## ILLEGAL DRUG TRADE

One of the most serious issues affecting Myanmar-Thai relations in recent years is the cross-border illegal drug trade. Thailand has been a major market and transit for opium and heroin for several decades. The best book on this subject is *Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* by Alfred McCoy. Another influential book by three Thai scholars from Chulalongkorn University came out a few years ago. *Guns, Girls, Gambling, Ganja: Thailand's Illegal Economy and Public Policy* is an important work in understanding the illegal economy of Thailand, including drug trafficking. In the Thai context, drug trafficking involves two major groups of products. One group encompasses natural and semi-synthetic drugs like opium and heroin. The other group comprises synthetic drugs (amphetamine-type-stimulants) such as methamphetamine.

Without going into the details of how opium arrived in the Golden Triangle region and who are involved in the drug trade, I will only mention that poppy growing, opium production, heroin refining and drug trafficking has flourished in the Golden Triangle areas of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos for years. Owing to the Cold War and various insurgencies in the region (mainland Southeast Asia), drug trafficking has virtually become institutionalised. For the Union of Myanmar, suppression of the narcotic drug trade involves dealing with multiple issues. The drug issue has political and ethnic implications. Most organisations involved in drug production and trafficking have been at war with the Myanmar government for more than two decades. The lack of resources for crop substitution and rehabilitation has also hampered the Myanmar government's efforts to eliminate drug trafficking.

I will present here a few salient features of Myanmar's drug suppression efforts. Since 1973, the Tatmadaw, the police and other law enforcement agencies have collaborated in combating drug trafficking and abuse. In 1974, the Pyithu Hluttaw (People's Assembly) enacted the Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Law. On 2 March 1976, the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) was formed to take effective action for the prevention and

suppression of narcotic drugs. Between 1974 and 1988, the Myanmar government had received more than U.S. \$86 million from the U.S. government under bilateral aid programmes for its anti-narcotic operations. However, all foreign assistance stopped after 1988 owing to the new political development in Myanmar.

Since 1989, the Myanmar government has negotiated successfully with several major insurgent groups for peace settlements or ceasefire agreements. Some of these groups had been involved in drug trafficking. They have also been fighting with the Myanmar government for at least two decades. As a result, it was a challenge for the Myanmar government to regain the trust and confidence of these groups. Under the peace settlement arrangements, various groups are allowed to carry their weapons as well as to have a free hand in their businesses while the government provides regional development funding and social services.<sup>15</sup> The Myanmar government has given priority to the goals of implementing border area development and attainment of national reconciliation as it believes that these measures are the most effective and best means of reducing and ultimately eradicating narcotic drug production in the border area. With this in view, the Myanmar government has laid down two strategies, three tactics and three methods for the eradication of illicit drug in Myanmar.

### **Strategies**

- To designate drug eradication a national task to be achieved with every endeavour and with all possible means
- To work for the development of the border areas, to raise the standard of living of the national races and to undertake measures for the total eradication of opium cultivation

### **Tactics**

- Interdiction
- Elimination of opium production
- Elimination of drug abuse

### **Methods**

- For the producer and abuser of narcotic drugs to enlighten their belief, conviction and their psychological make-up for the better
- For the easy accessibility and communication between those national races on the highland and those at various other places
- To develop the socio-economic condition of the national races and border areas

The Myanmar government provides assistance for development

and has persuaded groups that depended on drug production and trafficking to do more legitimate business.<sup>16</sup> Since the early 1990s, the Myanmar government has persuaded these groups to introduce drug-free zones. The first to come under the drug-free programme was Special Region 4 of the eastern Shan state in 1997.<sup>17</sup> Special Region 1 of the Northern Shan state was declared a drug-free area in 2001. The Wa group promised to declare itself drug-free area by 2005. At the same time, the Myanmar government also sought international co-operation in its efforts in drug eradication. Some international organisations, such as the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and some Japanese NGOs have lent their support. After collecting baseline data, the Myanmar government drew up a master plan for drug eradication in Myanmar. The 15-Year Drug Elimination Plan commenced in 1999. The Myanmar government was also a signatory to the Drug Free ASEAN 2015 agreement. The Myanmar drug-free programme, estimated to cost the government 33588.136 million kyat (about U.S. \$200 million, based on the 1999 market exchange rate) and U.S. \$150 million in foreign exchange, is a self-help effort. On 23 March 2001, at a press briefing on the release of the *World Drug Report 2000*, Mr. Sandro Calvani from the UNDCO stated:

The Myanmar government has carried out the fight against narcotic drugs with all-out effort, although newspapers are reporting and portraying as if Myanmar as a whole is producing drugs, that is not the case as drugs are produced only in some areas in the border areas. Poppy farmers in the border areas are earning only U.S. \$100 per year and that narcotic drugs could be eliminated by crop substitution to obtain alternative income and the UNDCP is lobbying funds to provide assistance to Myanmar's crop substitution programmes. However, the UNDCP is unable to secure sufficient funds to implement projects wholly because of political blockade. During the last three years, the ratio of drug control assistance funds received from donor communities by Myanmar and Thailand is 1 to 300 (1:300).<sup>18</sup>

While the Myanmar government tries to cope with poppy growing by crop substitution and regional development programmes, it faced another problem—synthetic drugs. At the opening ceremony of the Ministerial meeting of signatory countries to the 1995 Memorandum of Understanding of Drug Control in East Asia and the Pacific Sub-region on 11 May 2001, Secretary-1 of the SPDC, Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, explained:



Even as fight against opium-based narcotic drug is attaining significant success, a new menace has emerged in recent years. This is the threat posed by ATS, amphetamine-type stimulants. Previous to 1996, there were no cases of methamphetamine stimulants in Myanmar. However, since that year, our law enforcement personnel began to make significant seizures of the drug. Investigations show that the origins of the problem came from other countries and then spread into Myanmar. The raw materials, the precursor chemicals, the required equipment and machinery, the producers, chemists and technicians as well as the funds all came from outside the country.

We are very aware of the menace posed by the new drug. We are determined to stop the spread of the stimulants and are taking vigorous actions to suppress them. But our effort alone is not enough since this is a trans-border issue. It is utmost important to control the flow of ephedrine, precursor chemicals and the equipment that can be used in the production of the stimulants. Likewise, demand reduction measures should be implemented simultaneously. Making allegation and accusation against each other will serve no purpose. We must get our act together and work with each other if we are to achieve significant success in combating this new enemy. On our part, I wish to assure that, even as Myanmar is doing everything possible internally, we are ready to co-operate with the neighbouring and regional countries in trying to eliminate this threat.<sup>19</sup>

The Myanmar government stated that seizures of ATS in Myanmar were made in late 1996. Subsequently, ephedrine used for the production of stimulants was seized in 1997. Police Major General Soe Win explained that "the ATS tablets were produced for the international market inside and along the Myanmar border areas with precursor chemicals and paraphernalia trafficked illegally from neighbouring countries." He further explained that stimulants had a limited market in Myanmar and precursor chemicals were neither produced nor available in Myanmar. Moreover, chemists and skilled technicians were not readily available either.

For Thailand, both amphetamines and methamphetamine have been listed as prohibited drugs since 1975. Amphetamines are known locally as *ya ma* (horse pill) as the pills were imprinted with the picture of a horse head. In 1996, under the administration of



Banharn Silpa-archa, the Thai government substituted the name *ya ba* (mad pill) to warn the public about the danger of the drug.<sup>20</sup> ATS abuse has been a problem in Thailand since the mid 1970s and it became almost a crisis by the mid 1990s. According to one estimate, nearly 800 million tablets have been used by Thai addicts. In March 2001, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra claimed that 6% of Thailand's 62 million population were drug addicts.<sup>21</sup> If the estimate is correct, then Thailand has about 4 million drug addicts.

Since the early 1990s, the Thai government has been taking serious actions against ATS trafficking and abuse. But instead of solving its own problem, the Thai government and Thai media blamed the Myanmar government for all that had gone wrong in Thailand. Since mid 1999, the Thai media has accused the Myanmar government of harbouring drug traders. A Myanmar newspaper wrote:

The *Nation* and the *Bangkok Post* said in effect that along the Thai-Myanmar border stimulant tablets and heroin were being produced within Myanmar and that the government was feigning the drug trade perpetrated by armed ethnic groups. The newspapers also claimed that Khun Sa had resumed the drug trade and that the Myanmar Armed Forces were involved in it. The Myanmar government Carrier Airline was transporting narcotic drugs and that about 90% of the drugs that entered Thailand were from Myanmar. The Myanmar Armed Forces are involved in illicit drug venture.<sup>22</sup>

The Thai media has often tried to implicate Myanmar government leaders in the drug issue. For example, a normal entourage of Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt to the border area, such as Mong Yun, was portrayed as a proof of links between drug runners and the regime in the *Bangkok Post*.<sup>23</sup> For the Myanmar government, eradication of drug is closely related to the national reconsolidation process, which involved confidence building and trust.

One of the causes of bilateral tension in early 2001 was Thailand levelling blame on the Myanmar government for its own drug problems. Thai government officials accused the Myanmar government of a lack of co-operation, turning a blind eye to and supporting illegal drug trafficking along the border. By mid 2000, the problem had become serious and the Myanmar government took a media offensive and rebutted the Thai accusation. In May 2000, when

Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand Paribatra stated at an inter-agency meeting (among the Office of Narcotic Control Board, the National Security Council, the Interior Ministry, the Foreign Ministry and the Defence Ministry) that the Foreign Ministry would support the Thai Army if it raided suspected drug laboratories inside Myanmar at the expense of Myanmar-Thai relations<sup>24</sup> and accused the Myanmar government of protecting drug trafficking such as methamphetamines, the Myanmar newspaper responded as follows:

They (the Thais) have never dared to shout about the narcotic drug problem for long the way as a thief being bitten by a dog dared not shout but now they say the problem poses a danger to the nation. It is absurd for a nation where no law has been introduced to seize precursor chemicals used in manufacturing narcotic drugs to suggest so. If the Thai government authorities are perturbed by the production of narcotic drugs along the borders of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos and would like to announce it to the world in an attempt to make themselves heroes, they should recall the nation's history concerning production, sale and distribution of narcotic drugs. The government of Thailand permitted the Chinese merchants to monopolise the opium trade beginning in 1852 but in 1907 it revoked the opium licence granted to the Chinese merchants. From then on the (Royal) government took charge of the business itself (as a monopoly). Deny if it dares to do so. Then I shall reveal all those involved including members of the Royal Family.<sup>25</sup>

Several articles followed suit. As the drug issue came to the centre stage of tension between the two countries in early 2001, a series of articles in Myanmar newspapers attacked the Thai government for blaming the Myanmar government for all that had gone wrong in Thailand. This finally led to a strong diplomatic protest from the Thai government as some articles implicitly accused a Thai king (in the 18th century) of being responsible for the opium trade in Southeast Asia. Three articles, namely "In spite of our goodwill" (ဆုတောင်းချက်နှင့်အတော်အတိုင်း), "How did opium arrive at the Golden Triangle region?" (ဤဒေသသို့မိုက်ဆိုးချိုင်းသောမိုက်ဆိုးပုဂံလေသဘင်) and "Never been enslaved, but real slaves" (မြန်မာပြည်စွဲမဲ့သော်လည်းကောင်း၊ မြန်မာလူမျိုးများကောင်း), by Dr. Ma Tin Win, a well known Myanmar historian, which consecutively appeared in Myanmar newspapers from 16 to 18 May 2001, drew serious protest from the Thai government.

One article revealed that the British and Siam signed a Treaty of Friendship and Commercial Agreement in 1855, before the former fought the Second Sino-British (Opium) War. In the treaty, the royal government of Siam allowed the British to import opium without customs duty or tax, a concession that could not be found in the Anglo-Burmese Treaty of 1826 or even in the Sino-British Treaty concluded at the end of Opium War, fought for the sale of opium. But the Siamese government allowed tax-free opium trade. In addition to the tax-free opium trade, treaties with various colonial powers included a clause that allowed citizens of those countries to travel freely in Siam, including along the Mekhong River. This situation gave the British access to the Golden Triangle region for growing poppy. The author concluded:

I would like to tell the Siamese (Thai people) who are accusing Myanmar of refining opium that even the most inferior king of our nation had never let the nation fall under total subjugation without a fight though your king Maha Mongkut had done so. We had never signed any agreement with any nation to import opium.

In early 2001, the Thai media and Lieutenant General Wattanachai Chaimuenwong accused the Myanmar government and the Myanmar Armed Forces of being involved in drug trafficking. For example, in February 2001, he even remarked that drug trade along the border area had the support of Myanmar security forces.<sup>26</sup> He also accused Myanmar officers of being involved in and gaining from taxes on drug trafficking.<sup>27</sup> However, on the contrary, the *World Drug Report 2000* released by the U.S. State Department in March 2001 stated:

There is no evidence that the government, on an institutional level, is involved in the drug trade. There are persistent and reliable reports, however, that officials, particularly corrupt army personnel posted in outlying areas, are either directly involved in drug production and/or trafficking or are paid to allow others to engage unhindered in drug activities. The government of Burma (Myanmar) has said that it welcomes information on corruption within its ranks, and a few personnel were arrested for narcotic related offences in 1999.<sup>28</sup>

In the same report, with regard to Thai enforcement activities, it stated that “despite the good track record within the counter-narcotics community, many Royal Thai Government elements are

still rampantly corrupt." It also cited the *Bangkok Post* article of 4 June 2000, entitled "Mr. Bigs Remain Untouchable", and opened with the line: "Illegal lotteries, brothels, gambling and methamphetamine dealers in Thailand rake in 200–400 billion baht annually, but cannot be stopped because rich and powerful figures are involved."<sup>29</sup>

The point is both countries have problems. But accusing or blaming each other will not serve any purpose. In this case, the Thai government has accused Myanmar of a failure to co-operate in drug suppressing efforts. The Myanmar government was also aware of the problem and had asked the Thai authorities for understanding. During Thai Supreme Commander General Sampao Chusri's visit to Myanmar in December 2000, the Commander-in-chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces admitted to the Thai general that it was difficult to get rid of methamphetamine factories along the border, especially in areas under the influence of ethnic minorities. In fact, the Myanmar leaders asked for understanding and requested the Thai government to take action against trafficking in ephedrine, an important precursor for the production of methamphetamine, which was not available in Myanmar.

The Myanmar government, for its part, did not blame anybody for its own problems. Millions of methamphetamine pills have been seized in Myanmar and most of these seizures have been reported in newspapers. But the news never mentioned where these pills originated and where the chemicals for these tablets came from. The simple reason is that finger pointing would not resolve the problem. As one law enforcement officer explained: "Of course, Myanmar authorities knew where these drug and heroin originated. Instead of accusing others of producing narcotic drugs, the Myanmar authorities tried to take action by all possible means. It is also important to understand that some of the groups involved in narcotic production and trafficking are under peace settlements and ceasefire agreements and in the process of confidence building."<sup>30</sup>

In the view of the Myanmar government, insurgencies along the Myanmar-Thai border is the most important reason for prolonging of drug trafficking. It stated:

With the return of various armed groups to legal-fold and the unconditional surrender of the MTA, the illegal drug trade at the Myanmar-Thai border should have been totally wiped out. But the MTA group of Mong Hta / Mong Hta region led by Yod Suek, a Shan national, had refused to surrender and instead set up his own headquarters under the name of SURA in Pein Lon of Thailand. Likewise,

another MTA remnant group led by Kyauk Sitt Hsu Laing established his headquarters in Maw Aw in Thailand. There was also the WNA led by Maha Hsan with its headquarters in Mae Aw. These renegade groups joined up with the KMT remnants along the Thai border to continue terrorist activities and the illegal drug trade. Another group, the KNPP had also set up an encampment at Mae Hong Song on the Thai side of the border to trade illegally in narcotic drugs. Thus, as long as these MTA remnants, KMT remnants and armed terrorists continue to survive and flourish along the Myanmar-Thai border, the illegal trade in narcotic drugs in these areas will surely continue to thrive.<sup>31</sup>

The State Department report also claimed that:

Most heroin in Burma (Myanmar) produced in small, mobile labs located near the borders with Thailand and China in Shan State areas controlled by former insurgent groups. An increasing amount of methamphetamine is reportedly produced in laboratories co-located with heroin refineries in the Wa region and in the territory of the former SURA in southern Shan State.<sup>32</sup>

In April 2000, a leader of the SURA (SSA), the insurgent group that Lt. Gen. Wattanachai Chaimuenwong praised so much for its anti-drug efforts, told the *Bangkok Post*:

Burmese (Myanmar) ethnic groups were not the sole producers of methamphetamine sold in Thailand. Domestic producers, among them influential figures and politicians, were playing a major role. Thais were supplying chemicals being used in their production in Burma (Myanmar). Burmese (Myanmar) production bases along the border amount to a handful. In fact, production bases exist in Thailand. The Thai authorities are getting lost in the suppression by deploying many forces in border areas.<sup>33</sup>

A month later, the *Nation* and the *Bangkok Post* reported that drug gangs had shifted their labs from border areas to Bangkok and nearby areas. According to Thai Police Major General Somchai Charoensap, methamphetamine-making machines were made in Thailand, the operation was highly mobile, Thai crooks were manufacturing stimulants in and around Bangkok and the operation bases were now near Bangkok.<sup>34</sup>

According to Sompong Jitradub, a lecturer in Chularlongkorn University who researched on drug issues, of the 500 to 600 million methamphetamine tablets smuggled into Thailand from neighbouring countries each year, only 50 to 60 million had been confiscated. There was a high level of involvement in the drug trade by officials, particularly the police, at local and international levels. He explained that the "Thai police usually target only small-time dealers, to make news or earn themselves a promotion, while letting the drug kingpins off the hook. The problem of methamphetamine would be cut by half if the police stop corrupt practices and take serious steps against drugs."<sup>35</sup>

In a similar way, the *Thai Post* editorial wrote that "no matter how hard he tries, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra will never be able to solve the drug problems as long as the big people behind the drug trade are not brought before justice. It is unreasonable to blame Burma (Myanmar) alone for the drug problems in our country."<sup>36</sup>

The illegal drug trafficking became an issue that compounded the tension between Thailand and Myanmar when the Thai government blamed the Myanmar government for its own drug problems and supported anti-Myanmar insurgents allegedly in the name of anti-drug operations. On 12 March 2001, at a press conference, a Myanmar government spokesman said that "putting all blame on a neighbouring country for everything that goes wrong in Thailand is not the way to solve any problems." The Myanmar government also released an information sheet (No. B-1746 I/L) dated 13 March 2001, which stated:

It is disappointing to learn that the Red Wa is being used as a scapegoat and the whole narcotic problem Thailand is encountering today seems to be very conveniently thrown on the UWSA. One begs to know that if the UWSA ceases to exist today, will the narcotic problem in Thailand disappear? If not, then, who will be the next target and finger-pointed as the problem maker for convenience sake. To be realistic, the Thai authorities should first examine the internal drug distribution system in Thailand and how these organised crime syndicates and individual big dealers are not only surviving but thriving and being protected. Truth is painful but we have to be realistic and responsible in our fight against narcotic drugs.<sup>37</sup>

All these allegations levelled at Myanmar would have halted

the momentum of drug enforcement and belittled the success achieved in drug interdiction through Myanmar-Thai co-operation. As Thai criticism against the Myanmar government mounted, an article in the Myanmar magazine asked:

We should make a careful probe and analyse the questions, "Who is helping and providing refuge to the armed terrorists along the Myanmar-Thai border for their continued existence?", "Who has actual links to the illicit drug trade and is involved in these nefarious activities?", "Has the Myanmar government resolutely fought against the drug menace although beset by many difficulties?", and "How effective has its actions been and what new projects are being planned for future undertaking?". If these crucial questions are reflected upon honestly and objectively after careful study, the answers will be clear enough for all to perceive.<sup>38</sup>

The Thai government's support for anti-Yangon insurgent groups, especially the SURA, under the rubric of so-called anti-drug operations, has been a cause of tension along the Myanmar-Thai border. Whatever the reason for supporting such groups, it should be noted that they are fighting against the government with which the Thai government has established diplomatic relations. A state-owned newspaper in Myanmar claimed:

The drug trafficking routes are located in the length and breadth of Thailand. The country should cut off and block those routes; it should not harbour armed insurgents of the other country who are posing themselves as democracy and freedom fighters. These insurgents are the ones who are brashly trafficking drugs as the means of their existence. The country will continue to face trouble as long as it sees them as refugees and friends.<sup>39</sup>

In May 2000, the Thai government went further as the Thai Army Commander-in-chief suggested attacking suspected methamphetamine production laboratories inside Myanmar. At the same time, Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand said that Thailand would support such an attack even at the expense of her relations with Myanmar. By early 2001, the Myanmar government came to see evidence of the Thai Army actively supporting SURA insurgents in raiding Myanmar military outposts, in the name of drug suppression. This action finally led to increased tension between the two countries.



An article in a Myanmar newspaper asked a question in connection with the drug trafficking problems between the two countries:

The crucial question now is: How shall we resolve the problem of narcotic drug in the Myanmar-Thai border? Does Thailand intend to hurl unfounded and one-sided accusations against Myanmar to politicise the narcotic drug issue in her own self-interest? Or is she sincerely committed to finding a solution to a world-wide problem in the spirit of international co-operation? If Thailand is genuinely concerned about the narcotic drug problem and has sincere goodwill, the time is now ripe to choose the right course of action. Myanmar on her part is convinced that narcotic drugs that menace mankind today can be totally eradicated only through co-operation. It has designated the eradication of narcotic drugs as a National Task—a crusade, which she has undertaken with a fair measure of success. And she stands firmly committed to the pledge to eradicate narcotic drugs in full co-operation with the international community.<sup>40</sup>

For the control and suppression of methamphetamine, the same author said: "The answer is quite simple and brief, and that is 'No Precursors, No Drugs'."

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the methamphetamine problem came to Myanmar from Thailand. Methamphetamine has a very limited market in Myanmar. Thailand is a major transit as well as haven for internationally organised criminals engaged in drug trafficking. Precursor chemicals, lab facilities and even funding for methamphetamine production came from Thailand. The area along the Myanmar-Thai border is a sanctuary for drug runners. As noted earlier, the area is beyond the control of the Myanmar government. To the Myanmar government, it appears that the eradication of drugs could be achieved gradually and law enforcement could be carried out hand in hand with regional development programmes. A Myanmar newspaper article noted that "if the drug abuse problems were to be solved as true neighbours and in the ASEAN family spirit, the Myanmar government believed, it could be done so quite easily."<sup>41</sup> It also remarked that "as Thailand was unable to contain the flames which it had kindled itself and came to be in a fix as regards the narcotic drugs abuse problem, instead of

solving this problem on their own, they tried to point an accusing finger at Myanmar. The Thais tried to put the blame on Myanmar and this amounted to going too far. In reality, the drug problem is the own doing of Thailand and its own problem. It should be compared with a Myanmar saying that accusing a pointing finger at another country and blaming others is like blaming others without seeing one's own fault."<sup>42</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 မြန်မာ့ကုန်သွယ်ရေးနှင့် အခြားနိုင်ငံများနှင့် စတင်ပြုလုပ်သည့် အသေးစား အသင်းများ  
...အသင်းများသည် ဝင်ရောက်သည်။ Saw Kyaw Myat Nyein. "Prospect for Thai  
Investment and Thai-Myanmar Trade: Mawtaung Border Town"  
in *Living Colour Magazine* (June 1999), p. 21
- 2 *Bangkok Post* (19 May 2001)
- 3 An interview with an army officer
- 4 မောင်စောစိုက်၊ မောင်စောစိုက်၊ မောင်စောစိုက်။ Thaug Wai Oo. *Not Fated  
to Die, Not Yet Die*. Yangon: Hlowet Sankye Magazine, 1999, pp.  
632–638
- 5 Document from the Ministry of Defence, Document (A), pp.  
30–31
- 6 စင်စင်စိုက်၊ စင်စိုက်၊ စင်စိုက်၊ စင်စိုက်။ Tin Than Oo. "The Next Door  
Neighbour" in *Kyemon* (March 2001)
- 7 Document from the Ministry of Defence, Document (A), p. 31
- 8 *ibid.*
- 9 Pasuk Phongpaichit, et al. *Guns, Girls, Gambling, Ganja: Thailand's  
Illegal Economy and Public Policy*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 1998,  
p. 179
- 10 *ibid.*, p. 182
- 11 *ibid.*, p. 177
- 12 စင်စိုက်၊ စင်စိုက်၊ စင်စိုက်၊ စင်စိုက်။ (အစွဲ နှင့် အဖွဲ့ နှစ် နှစ် ၂၀၀၁)။  
Sithu Aung. "Not a Short Distance Race" in *Creative Journal* Vol. 1  
No. 38 (1 May 2001)
- 13 Pasuk Phongpaichit, et al, *Guns, Girls, Gambling, Ganja: Thailand's  
Illegal Economy and Public Policy*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 1998,  
p. 182
- 14 မြင့်စိုက် (အသင်း) မှ ဖွဲ့စည်းထားရန် အချက်။ Myint Soe (Na Ta La). "No  
Henchman Available for Hire" in *Myanma Alin* (9 March 2001)
- 15 The Drug Report 2000 of the State Department noted that "under

- the terms of the ceasefire agreements, Burmese troops cannot even enter Wa territory without permission from the UWSA." See U.S. Department of States. "Southeast Asia and Pacific" in *World Drug Report 2000*, p. 4 ([www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2000](http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2000))
- 16 The Drug Report 2000 of the State Department also acknowledged this point. It stated: "the (Myanmar) government has encouraged former insurgent groups to invest in 'legitimate' businesses and some have used the opportunity to launder money through investments." See U.S. Department of States. "Southeast Asia and Pacific" in *World Drug Report 2000*, p. 4
- 17 The Drug Report 2000 also reported: "There are no current, confirmed reports of U Sai Lin (leader of Shan State Special Region 4) or the ESSA (Special Region 4) still being involved in narcotic trafficking." See U.S. Department of States. "Southeast Asia and Pacific" in *World Drug Report 2000*, p. 4
- 18 မြန်မာ့အသံ (သံ့ ဝေ့ ညီ ငွေ) Information Sheet B-1814 (I) dated 13 May 2001 in *Kyemon* (13 May 2001), [www.myanmar.com](http://www.myanmar.com)
- 19 မြန်မာ့အသံ (သံ့ ဝေ့ ညီ ငွေ) in *Kyemon* (12 May 2001)
- 20 Pasuk Phongpaichit, et al. *Guns, Girls, Gambling, Ganja: Thailand's Illegal Economy and Public Policy*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 1998, p. 101
- 21 BBC (10 March 2001)
- 22 Kyaw Kyaw. "Insurgents Along the Myanmar-Thai Border and Drug Problem" in *Kyemon* (30 September 1999); Kyaw Kyaw. "How to Find Solution to the Drug Problems Along the Myanmar-Thai Border" in *Kyemon* (11 December 2000)
- 23 *Bangkok Post* (31 October 2001)
- 24 *Bangkok Post* (12 May 2000)
- 25 Kappiya Kan Kaung. "Latest Cheap Jokes of Sukhumbhand" in *New Light of Myanmar* (21 May 2000) and *Kyemon* (19 May 2000)
- 26 *Bangkok Post* (11 February 2001)
- 27 *Bangkok Post* (13 February 2001)
- 28 U.S. Department of States. "Southeast Asia and Pacific" in *World Drug Report 2000*, p. 6
- 29 *ibid.*, p. 45
- 30 Interview with a law enforcement officer
- 31 Kyaw Kyaw. "How to Find Solution to the Drug Problems" in *Kyemon* (11 December 2000)
- 32 U.S. Department of States. "Southeast Asia and Pacific" in *World Drug Report 2000*, p. 7
- 33 *Bangkok Post* (26 April 2000)
- 34 *Nation* (23 May 2000)

- 35 *Bangkok Post* (19 February 2001)
- 36 *Bangkok Post* (14 March 2001)
- 37 Information Sheet No. B-1746 I/L dated 13 March 2001, www.myanmar.com
- 38 Kyaw Kyaw. "Endeavours of the Government of the Union of Myanmar in Narcotic Drug Control" in *New Light of Myanmar* (27 May 2000)
- 39 Maung Po Hmat. "Where are Stimulant Pill Manufacturing Machines Located?" in *Kyemon* (11 July 2000)
- 40 Kyaw Kyaw. "How should the Narcotic Drug Problem at the Myanmar-Thai Border Area be Resolved?" in *New Light in Myanmar* (15 December 2000)
- 41 စီရင်စင်၊ နိုင်ငံ့အကျိုးစီးပွားနှင့် နိုင်ငံ့အကျိုးစီးပွား . Po Nyan. "One Should See One's Own Fault" in *Kyemon* (March 2001)
- 42 *ibid.*

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## CONCLUSION

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Relations between Myanmar and Thailand from 1988 to the present could be best and safely described as love-hate-and-distrust. It has witnessed a major increase in interaction, transaction, socialisation and institution building at both bilateral and multilateral levels. For the first time, there are several bilateral and multilateral institutions available to discuss various political, economic and social issues between the two countries. Yet it appears that these new developments have not yet produced any mutual trust and confidence, let alone a "sense of community". In spite of the fact that both countries are members of ASEAN, subscribing to the principle of non-use of force and pacific settlement of dispute, they have displayed in recent clashes that they are quite prepared to use force.<sup>1</sup> In this context, deterrence, (personal) diplomacy and balance of force have played important roles in Myanmar-Thai relations.

For Myanmar, Thailand was neither friend nor foe, though the Thai media, school textbooks and popular culture have persistently projected Myanmar as the national enemy for several decades, if not centuries. Neither popular culture nor school textbooks in Myanmar teach the general public and youngsters to hate or look down on their Thai neighbours or to foster anti-Thai sentiments. Even the recently introduced supplementary history textbooks did not project Thailand as an enemy. The textbooks basically dealt with the insincerity of the Thai government. Professor Charnvit Kasetsiri of the Research Council of Thailand said that "deep-rooted reproduction of hatred and ignorance seemed to have made Burma (Myanmar) an eternal enemy and for over two hundred years, the Thai state never helped to build up an appropriate attitude or attention to ethnic minorities along the Thai border, not to mention the Burmese (Myanmar) people."<sup>2</sup> Recently, scholars in Thailand are calling for the revision of the secondary school curriculum. In fact, Myanmar

has been institutionalised and fictionalised as Thailand's archenemy in popular culture for so long that it is now out of control. The Thai people have been socialised in such a way that the dehumanisation of Myanmar has become a theme in Thai popular culture.

The release of "Bang Rajan", a Thai movie based on the struggle of villagers who tried to fend off the Myanmar invasion in the late 18th century, in early 2001 has also generated intense anti-Myanmar sentiment and "made many Thais eager for revenge for Burma's destruction of Ayudhaya 234 years ago."<sup>3</sup> Another movie scheduled to be released in August 2001, "Queen Suriyothai", is a heroic story about a Thai queen killed in fighting with Myanmar in the 16th century. Moreover, the worship of heroes and heroines, such as King Naresuan who liberated Thailand from Myanmar, has become a culture in Thailand. The day King Naresuan killed the Myanmar Crown Prince in battle, 25 January, is celebrated as the Thai Army Day. In 1998, another heroine known as Princess Suphankalaya came up in Thailand. Barely mentioned in official Thai history, Princess Suphankalaya's sudden rise to fame in the late 1990s has perplexed many Thai historians and scholars. Though there is no story of the princess in any Thai chronicle but only scant entries (not even in the name of Suphankalaya) in some Myanmar chronicles, the princess has become a symbol of anti-Myanmar sentiment. In this context, the Thai Third Army erected a monument to the princess in front of its headquarters in Phitsanuloke and commissioned a biography in late 1998. The biography mentioned, among other things, that "the princess was unfairly killed while lying on her bed by a cruel husband (a Myanmar King)."<sup>4</sup> The most recent development in this fashion in Thailand is the decision to erect a statue of King Naresuan in Mae Sai, just opposite Tarchileik. Though Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai argued that it was done only to honour the king's contribution to the Thai nation and not to confront any country,<sup>5</sup> the proposed site clearly signalled that the statue is directed against Myanmar. All these developments indicate that there is a growing anti-Myanmar sentiment in Thailand.

On the other hand, as Dr. Sunait Chutintaranond of Chulalongkorn University points out, "there is almost no anti-Thai sentiment in Myanmar popular culture, and Thailand is never mentioned as an enemy, which is a stark contrast to the heavy dose of anti-Myanmar sentiment in Thai textbooks, films and media reports."<sup>6</sup> The Myanmar government was even conciliatory towards Thailand. For example, shortly after the Myanmar government

renamed Victoria Point in Kawthaung as Aung Zeya Point in early 1990s, in honour of King Alaungpaya, it responded to informal requests by local Thai authorities across Kawthaung and changed the name to Bayin Naung Point for the simple reason of friendship. The Myanmar government has never projected Thailand as a national enemy. But it does not consider Thailand as a trusted friend either.

However, it appears that more and more anti-Thai sentiments have been growing in Myanmar since early 2001. It seems that this trend is likely to continue in the future. Sithu Aung, a government official, wrote a two-part article in *Atwe-Thit* (အတွေးအခေါ် - Creative) Journal, urging the Myanmar people to unite in various fronts and engage more extensively in anti-Thai campaigns, such as in consumer preference (no Thai products?), popular culture and so on.<sup>7</sup> Articles appearing in Myanmar newspapers have generated an anti-Thai feeling among ordinary Myanmar people. The Myanmar people in general feel insulted as Myanmar has been blamed for everything that has gone wrong in Thailand. On 16 May 2001, Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1 of the SPDC, called on the entire national brethren to unite and ward off or crush all dangers to the nation, based on Union spirit and patriotism. This is a sign that, for the first time, a foreign country (though no name is mentioned) was considered a national enemy. Moreover, Secretary-1 called for the Myanmar people to keep up with patriotism. He said:

It is the pressing need for the nation at this time to organise and train our youth to keep up with the “Myanmar Spirit” (the spirit of non-tolerance towards the insult on Myanmar nation), the “Spirit of King Bayin Naung” (the spirit of unyielding perseverance and determination) and the “Spirit of King Alaungpaya” (the spirit of rooting out all the enemies of the nation), through all available mediums, such as education, social activities and cultural presentation.<sup>8</sup>

His speech was beyond the usual call for the “Union Spirit” which had an inward orientation. These three new ‘spirits’ were directed at external elements, apparently related to Myanmar’s relations with Thailand in the pre-colonial past.

Constructive engagement, despite criticism from certain Thai academic and political circles, has been the basis of Thailand’s relationship with Myanmar since late 1988. But the Myanmar government has never been completely convinced that the Thai government has consistently followed it. The Myanmar government



believed that, at least since early 1998, the Thai government has adopted the so-called flexible engagement policy towards Myanmar without having officially subscribed to it. To the Myanmar government, Thai public rhetoric about constructive engagement was more of a smokescreen for its involvement in anti-Myanmar organisations and for the exploitation of Myanmar resources than for a firm foundation to build a stable and friendly relationship between the two countries. The up and down relationship in the past decade has further strengthened the Myanmar government's belief that it cannot trust Thailand.

In terms of regulating relations between the two countries, there are two mechanisms—the *de jure* mechanism and the *de facto* mechanism. However, it is the *de facto* mechanism that has effectively managed bilateral relations as far as the Myanmar government is concerned. In this respect, the Myanmar government has considerable influence and bargaining position in managing bilateral relations. Until around 1998, the Myanmar government had succeeded in placing the Myanmar policy card in the hands of the Thai military, by applying personal and resource diplomacy. This included logging concessions, fishing rights and border trading. The Myanmar government accorded the “most favoured person status” to Thai military personnel. Issues affecting bilateral relations are being discussed between military commanders from both countries. Though the RBC should be subordinate to the JCBC and the JBC, it has become the most important forum for bilateral relations. One important reason is the fact that regional commanders are above ministers in Myanmar as they are usually members of state level organisations such as the SLORC or the SPDC. However, the Myanmar government seems to have lost its control over who should hold the Myanmar policy card by late 1998 after the Thai military leadership abandoned its role in foreign policy making to the Foreign Ministry and politicians.

As long as Thai authorities continue to maintain a close association with anti-Myanmar insurgents along the Myanmar-Thai border, the Myanmar government will not change its perception that Thailand is implementing a buffer zone policy between the two countries. That Thailand has stepped up its activities on border security and introduced several measures to boost its defence by recruiting hill tribes and setting up defence villages has strengthened this perception. It is the Myanmar government's belief that the Thai military has never abandoned the buffer zone mentality in its forward defence policy and will not do so in the foreseeable future. This will

continue to drag Myanmar into tension along the border.

The refugee issue is closely related to other political issues. Counter-insurgency operations carried out by the Myanmar Armed Forces has created an influx of refugees into Thailand. It has become a source of tension between the two countries, as the Myanmar government believes that the Thai government is exploiting the situation and has never been sincere in resolving the issue. Although the successful resettlement and rehabilitation of several thousand formerly displaced people is a point to highlight the Myanmar government's policy of refugee repatriation, the refugee issue in Thailand will remain unresolved for some time. Under present circumstances, unless the Thai government changes its policy and begins to convince the Myanmar government that it sincerely wants to resolve the problem, the refugee issue will remain a source of tension and conflict in relations between the two countries.

Territorial disputes over both land and maritime boundaries arose when the Myanmar government eventually gained control over the border areas. It is apparent that all boundary disputes between the two countries, except for the one involving the meanders and an islet in the Thaungyin River, arose primarily from the transition of frontier to boundary. Thailand's refusal to accept the borders demarcated by the colonial British government has been a source of border disputes. The use of different maps by the two countries was another reason why the problem could not be resolved. As shown in the cases of the Lwelan area, Hill Point 1542 and the three islands at the mouth of the Pakchan River, the transition from frontier to boundary has led to bilateral tension and, in some cases, armed clashes. Territorial disputes will remain a source of tension between the two countries for years to come.

Other bilateral issues such as illegal logging, fishing, drug trafficking, and human and animal trafficking are trans-national crimes requiring co-operation instead of accusations from either country. These non-traditional security challenges will continue to dominate bilateral relations. In recent years, drug trafficking, especially in ATS, has become a serious problem affecting relations between the two countries. ATS abuse has been a national problem for Thailand since the mid 1970s. It has now spread into Myanmar. Though the Myanmar government has been rather successful in law enforcement in most parts of the government controlled areas, it has little ability and resources to deal with drug runners and drug labs or refineries along the Myanmar-Thai border. These areas have been

under the control of various insurgent groups and peace settlement groups, with which the Myanmar government has undertaken confidence-building measures. In connection with the ATS issue, the Myanmar government has adopted a policy of "No precursor, no drug". It also works closely with other drug enforcement agencies such as the UNDCP and the DEA. Recently, bilateral tensions arose in connection with drug trafficking along the border when Thai authorities levelled accusations at the Myanmar government for its alleged involvement or harbouring of drug production centres and traffickers. The Myanmar government felt insulted that people who were once and still heavily involved in drug and drug-related businesses did not see their own faults and blamed Myanmar for their own problems.

All these perceptions, conceptions and outstanding issues came to a boil in early 2001. While ASEAN members have carefully avoided taking sides and voicing their views publicly on the Myanmar-Thai bilateral tension, extra-regional powers have begun to play a role. Amid the border clashes, General Fu Quangyou, Chief of Staff Headquarters of the People's Liberation Army of the Peoples' Republic of China,<sup>9</sup> and General Pervez Musharraf, Chief Executive and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of Pakistan,<sup>10</sup> showed up in Myanmar. Port calls of Chinese and Pakistani submarines and warships in Myanmar in early May 2001<sup>11</sup> have also caused concern among Myanmar watchers. Two weeks after the port calls, Admiral Dennis Blair, Chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, publicly stated that the "U.S. supported Thailand's defence position in its stand-off with Burma (Myanmar)."<sup>12</sup> However, both sides managed to keep external interference at bay.

Due to tensions and clashes along the Myanmar-Thai border in early 2001, considerable damage has been done to relations between Myanmar and Thailand. It will not be easy to repair the damage. To regain mutual confidence between the two countries will take some time. To make matters worse, recent developments in both countries are worrisome. Anti-Myanmar sentiments have been generated in movies, television productions, books, newspaper articles and other popular culture in Thailand. The dehumanisation of Myanmar in the Thai media and the projection of Myanmar as the national enemy in Thailand has gone beyond reasonable limits. Since Thai society has been thoroughly socialised by institutionalised propaganda of hatred, suspicion and distrust toward Myanmar, stable and

amicable relations between the two countries will be a challenge, if not impossible, to achieve. The matter could well worsen if the Myanmar government continues to engage in psychological defence and warfare. It appears that this is already happening in Myanmar. For instance, the Myanmar government has shown no signs of withdrawing supplementary history textbooks from schools.

Differences, disputes and conflicts of interest will continue to characterise Myanmar-Thai relations. However, what is more important is, being members of ASEAN, both countries have to manage bilateral relations relatively smoothly and develop a habit of resolving disputes without resorting to the use of force. In the short and medium term, relations will improve on the basis of personal diplomacy. Some form of normalcy is likely to be restored as a quick fix but structural problems will remain. As long as “the tendency to blame Myanmar for everything that goes wrong in Thailand from petty crime to terrorism”<sup>13</sup> continues, relations between Myanmar and Thailand will remain bleak. Dr. Sunait Chutintaranond said, “Most of Thailand’s current troubles have nothing to do with Myanmar at all. But Myanmar is the most convenient enemy.”

To paraphrase Dr. Sunait’s line of argument, Myanmar has been made the catch-all term for evil in the absence of a communist threat in this post Cold War period. In this regard, tension between Myanmar and Thailand will remain for years to come.

Thus, with this pre-conceived perception of mistrust and hatred on the part of Thai people and the increasingly growing anti-Thai sentiment among the Myanmar people, any outstanding issue between the two countries can easily escalate into tension, conflict or clashes. Anti-Thai sentiment has also been growing in Myanmar arising from the many unhappy instances in dealing with Thailand. In this regard, a friendly, healthy and stable relationship between Myanmar and Thailand seems to be more a chimera than a realisable goal.

## NOTES

- 1 For example, Pha Muang Task Force of the 2nd Cavalry fired more than 200 motor and artillery shells in a single day. General Surayud had given approval to the 2nd Cavalry to take “drastic measures at any cost” to resolve the border issue (*Bangkok Post*,

9 May 2001). Lt. Gen. Wattanachai also publicly challenged Myanmar by saying that “if they (Myanmar) want to fight, then let’s fight at the border” (*Bangkok Post*, 30 May 2001). Myanmar has also deployed several military divisions. Myanmar troops are also engaged in motor and artillery fires.

2 *Bangkok Post* (25 March 2001)

3 *ibid.*

4 *Nation* (1 March 1999)

5 *Bangkok Post* (5 May 2001)

6 *Online Asia Time* (7 March 2001)

7 စည်သူလင်း၊ စည်သူလွန်းတို့၏ အတ္တဗျာဏ် (အမှတ် ၃၇၊ ၂၄ ဧပြီ ၂၀၀၁)၊

စည်သူလင်း၊ ဓာတုဗေဒ (အမှတ် ၃၈၊ ၁ မေ ၂၀၀၁)

. Sithu Aung. “Feeling Bad” in *Atwe-Thit* Vol. 1 No. 37 (24 April 2001); Sithu Aung. “Not a Short Distance Race” in *Atwe-Thit* Vol. 1 No. 38 (1 May 2001)

8 စည်သူလင်း၊ စည်သူလွန်းတို့၏ အတ္တဗျာဏ် (အမှတ် ၃၇၊ ၂၄ ဧပြီ ၂၀၀၁)၊

9 *Kyemon* (19 May 2001)

10 Between 25 and 29 April 2001

11 Between 1 and 3 May 2001

12 *Far Eastern Economic Review* (10 May 2001)

13 *Bangkok Post* (17 May 2001)

14 Dr. Sunait Chutintaranond’s comment in *Japan Time* (9 March 2001)

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ဘိန်းသောင်းကျန်းလိုမြင်တတ်ပါစေ (မြန်မာ့ အလင်း : ၁၇ ဖေဖော်ဝါရီ ၂၀၀၁)

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သက်ရှည်၊ သတင်းထောက်၊ မှတပါးအခြားမရှိ ( မြန်မာ့အလင်း ၂ ဧပြီ ၂၀၀၁)

Reporter Thet Shey. "Non Other than This" in *Myanma Alin* (2 April 2001)

စိန်လွန်၊ ဆင်သေကိုဆိတ်ရေနှင့်ဖုံးခြင်း (မြန်မာ့အလင်း ၃၁ မတ် ၂၀၀၁) . Sein

Lun. "Covering the Carcass of an Elephant With a Goat Hide" in *Myanma Alin* (31 March 2001)

စည်သူအောင်၊ ရင်နာလွန်းလို့ပါ (အတွေးသစ်၊ အတွဲ ၁-အမှတ် ၃၇၊ ၂၄ ဧပြီ ၂၀၀၁)

. Sithu Aung. "Feeling Bad" in *Creative Journal* Vol. 1 No. 37 (24 April 2001)

စည်သူအောင်၊ တာတိုပြေးပွဲမဟုတ်ပါ၊ အတွေးသစ်ဂျာနယ်

(အတွဲ ၁၊ အမှတ် ၃၈၊ ၁ မေ ၂၀၀၁) . Sithu Aung. "Not a Short Distance Race" in *Creative Journal* Vol. 1 No. 38 (1 May 2001)

မိုမိုတာရောစန်၊ 'မဲခေါင်စစ်ဆင်ရေး၊ ပိုင်းမနော်တိုက်ပွဲ'၊

ရွှေရတုတပ်မတော်စာစောင် (ရန်ကင်း၊ ရစ်သနိုင်းယွန်းတိုက်၊ ၁၉၉၅)

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Tin Win. "Wish They Do not Cry Their Heart Out Like Banyan U" in *Kyemon* (27 May 2001)

မတင်ဝင်း၊ ဒေါက်တာ၊ မေတ္တာရည်ခွဲသော်လည်း (ကြေးမုံ၊ ၁၆ မေ ၂၀၀၁) . Dr. Ma

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- မတင်ဝင်း၊ ဒေါက်တာ၊ မေတ္တာစကားဆိုခဲ့ပါတယ် (ကြေးမုံ၊ ၂၅ မေ ၂၀၀၁) . Dr. Ma Tin Win. "Words of Loving Kindness" in *Kyemon* (25 May 2001)
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## Reports

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## Newspapers and Magazines

မြန်မာ့အလင်း (Myanma Alin)

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*Asia Yearbook*

*Asian Defence Journal*

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*Bangkok Post* (Thailand)

*Far Eastern Economic Review*

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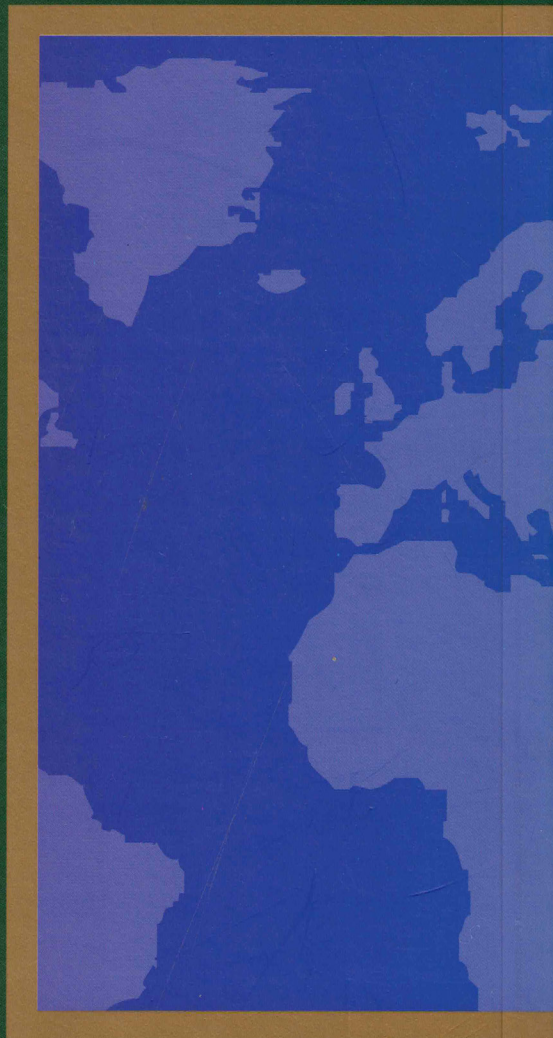
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*New Light of Myanmar*

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**S**ince late 1988, the Thai government has adopted a policy of constructive engagement towards Myanmar. Although it was not without its imperfections, the Thai government has hoped that such a policy would enhance its national security and, in particular, its border security. However, with the deep-rooted historical animosity on the part of Thailand and Myanmar's memory of Thailand's involvement in anti-Myanmar activities in the recent past, the relationship between the two countries since 1988 has not been completely smooth. Diplomatic disputes and tension have become common features of Myanmar-Thai relations. Myanmar's border with Thailand has become a focus of tension and conflict, and a potential flashpoint on the mainland Southeast Asia. This book examines the factors and issues that has caused bilateral tensions between Myanmar and Thailand.



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