GLOBAL ECONOMIC WARFARE

A new kind of war is raging around us. It is a war to get control of the limited natural resources the world has to offer. Like any other war, people become the victims of this war as well. These villagers are fleeing their homes, fields, orchards, schools and places of worship. A gas pipeline, being built by Unocal of the USA, and Total of France is going through their villages.
GLOBAL ECONOMIC WARFARE

The changing international context of civil warfare in Burma

For several decades after Burma's release from colonialism, most of the warfare gurgling between Rangoon's central military authority and a host of opposition forces were predominantly political struggles. Whether faced with the Communist Party of Burma, the Kachin Independence Organization or the Shan State Army, the Burmese military engaged in arguably low-intensity civil warfare over diverse—if sometimes uninspired—ideological grievances. The opposition agenda ranged from minority rights to secession from the union to true revolution. Rangoon's response was to shoot first, and ask no questions at all. In the last several years, however, the global and, consequently, the national landscapes have changed dramatically, reorienting the stakes, strategies and overall meaning of these ongoing conflicts.

In the 1980's, the context of Burma's civil conflicts began to transform significantly, even if the descriptive aspects of warfare seemed to carry on as they always had. Although Burma remained more or less a post-colonial hermit, the world around it began to change in ways that would eventually reorder the terrain of the hermitage.

Thailand, an immediate neighbor, experienced a decade of immense economic growth and entrepreneurial vitality. A commensurate explosion in energy consumption, a ban on domestic logging and a gradual but profound disclosure of widespread environmental degradation highlighted for the first time the vulnerability and mortality of Thailand's natural resource base. The ecological cost of the nation's rapid and at times reckless economic growth is still being revealed today. Thailand shares a 2000 kilometer border with Burma, along which several ancient and active insurgencies made their home.

Looking north, as the Soviet Union collapsed in the dawn of the 1990's, China became the last significant communist power in the world, placing new pressures on old strategic ambitions, such as land access to the Indian Ocean. Yet China itself was cautiously altering the face of its international contacts, with gradual but monumental market reforms to its economy. China was producing and the world was buying. The world, much of which had been producing for a long time, perked up at the thought that a Chinese market of one billion potential consumers could be realized.

China also shares a roughly 2000 kilometer border with Burma, along which two major insurgencies flourished for decades, including the CPB's once-powerful and well-supported communist rebellion.

In Rangoon, the 1988 SLORC coup d'etat ushered in unprecedented initiatives to earn foreign exchange. The generals didn't go as far as putting on business suits, but they shed whatever moldy vestiges of the Burma Socialist program Party's ostensibly anti-market state planned economy in favor of a tightly controlled state-command capitalism. Economically introverted for so long, Burma hit the catwalk of international commerce, bejeweled and stunning with natural resources "untapped" and a virgin consumer populace.

Back in the jungles, the seasonal offensives continued as always, with more hype from the government in Rangoon than ever when the rains put offensives on hold. What was changing, however much that hill-by-hill, corpse-by-corps combat remained the same, was the meaning of the warfare, and the stakes that Rangoon had in suppressing its enemies once and for all.

Economically "isolated" from international trade, Burma was also isolated from what has become a massive conflict involving superpowers, aligned, non-aligned, Northern and Southern countries alike, as well as powerful corporate interests wielding quasi-governmental influence. There is combat, there is death, territory is won and lost, victors revel in their spoils and losers wallow in the abject misery of defeat or capitulation. As with all modern warfare, the greatest casualties are civilians, people rooted to the theatres of war but who don't stand to gain from the battles fought around them, and who would probably choose not to fight at all if they were able to raise a voice of dissent.

Global Economic Warfare has become the context for Burma's more traditional civil wars, and it has cast in a newly urgent and sobering light the ideals and potential for peace in Burma.

Global Economic Warfare seems to know only two major objectives, though each could be subdivided minutely: control over natural resources and expansion and manipulation of consumer markets. In the macro economic cycle, these two poles are the start and finish lines for most entrepreneurial activity. Raw materials for industry, for power generation, for real estate development, come from the natural environment. Yet the vigorous exploitation of these as resources is only feasible and desirable when there is a reasonably assured market for the finished products—teak houses, kilowatts, or hotel rooms. In Global Economic Warfare, the fluid capital and political influence of transnational corporations obviate the need for proximity between the resource base and the market. Burmese teak can be sold in America, gas from Martaban Gulf can fuel power plants in Thailand, European tourists will book hotel rooms in Rangoon and Mandalay.
For centuries, the rivers, jade mountains, animals and overall ecosystems of Burma's martial hinterlands were merely the arena of war. The Salween river, therefore, was something armies crossed and tried not to drown in, perhaps wishing to control it as a transportation route and conquer it strategically, vis-a-vis combat. But—and this is an important distinction—no one was fighting over the river per se, over its water, fish, irrigation potential. Similarly, in Kachin state, while gem-mining has always been big business, mining was an economic backdrop to combat, and important strategically in its potential to make men rich and thus spur them on in their combative inclinations over political issues. The capital, technology and markets simply did not exist to drive armies to seize mountains for their own sake, and then reduce them to rubble for some colorful rocks inside.

Now, however, not only does Burma have access to the capital, technology and market to exploit natural resources, but its more economically consumptive neighbors require and demand the benefits. Furthermore, post-1988 economics in Burma are not constrained by the professed responsibilities of the socialist state.

Looking around the neighborhood, one sees how the global economic arena encourages creative and rapid inroads into Burma as a theatre of war. The Thai industrial complex believes that it needs natural gas from the Gulf of Martaban to fuel continued economic adventure; it also believes in a need to not only generate hydropower from massive dams on the hitherto untethered Salween river, but—credibly—to divert the actual water into Thailand's own diseased and geriatric waterways. Trees have to come from somewhere, and while a domestic logging ban looks good on paper, the fact is that the trees come from Burma's (and Cambodia's) neighboring forests.

Where Global Economic Warfare differs from other forms of international trade is in the impact of resource and market manipulation, and the lengths to which those wishing to control these assets on a global scale will go to secure and prolong their control over them. The 1990 Gulf War in which the United States waged massive war against Iraq to retain access and influence over Middle Eastern oil fields is a recent and poignant example of the means of control. Furthermore, Global Economic Warfare is distinguished by the utter disconnect—edness between the local population and any semblance of control over their environmental resources or local markets, which are increasingly controlled "from above."

**With the advent of Global Economic Warfare, however, it is control of the natural resource base which is the target of planned or contemporary violent transformation, and the people themselves are, in the parlance of the Gulf War, collateral damage.**

As it happens, critical stretches of the Salween which are slated for damming, the pipeline route for Thailand's natural gas, and all the logs worth cutting are nested in jungles and mountains which have been at the heart of rebellions since 1948. These areas are also the homelands of under-represented peoples such as the Mon, Karen and Karenni, among others, which have actively sought recognition and participation in a national Burmese government. Segments of these minority populations are considered "indigenous," which for the purposes of explanation here will mean geographically remote, economically self-sufficient societies whose subsistence economies and unique cultures derive from and depend on the immediate natural resource base.

Until the advent of Global Economic Warfare, this natural resource base suffered some injuries, but it was the people themselves who were the direct targets of violence. So while a stream might have been poisoned to kill the villagers nearby, the stream itself was not the issue at hand (from the combatants point of view, the fish might feel differently). With the advent of Global Economic Warfare, however, it is control of the natural resource base (read: the means of their survival) which is the target of planned or contemporary violent transformation, and the people themselves are, in the parlance of the Gulf War, collateral damage.

The second major objective of global economic warfare is the control of markets. In another example, now from the Kachin State, not only logs and gems are cut out of the landscape, but also roads. These paths from China are more than baby steps towards Beijing's strategic influence in the Indian Ocean. They are market roads from Yunnan, along which Chinese goods of every imaginable description travel into Burma, and even find their way east to Thai markets as well. Important trade conduits in themselves, the roads are also an auxiliary feature of a new regional economic quadrangle project to build roads among Thailand, Laos, China and Burma for the purposes of trade and natural resource extraction. While a road in itself is not an agent of violence, violence is often the means by which the territory and control over a road is achieved. And once completed, a road can become an agent of economic violence, by permitting an external seizure of subsistence economies and reorienting them for the benefit of more powerful combatants in the global war.

China is, of course, but a single player in the massive barrage against Burma's potential 50 million plus strong consumer market. Governments and corporations from countries as close as Singapore and Taiwan or as far away as Canada and France are arming themselves to do battle for the hearts and minds of the Burmese kyat. Heavy artillery, in the form of mass media advertising, has been rolling into place for the last few years. (continued next page)
SUPPORT

GROWING SUPPORT FOR ECONOMIC BOYCOTT OF BURMA

by Anna Mitchell

American public opinion is increasingly in favor of exerting economic pressure on Burma's military regime.

In February, Eddie Bauer announced it would stop making clothes there, following the earlier withdrawal of Levi Strauss and Liz Claiborne. Last month New York's largest department store, Macy's, announced it would cease manufacture in Burma. Lack of infrastructure and corruption, rather than the junta's record of human rights violations, were cited as reasons for withdrawal, though other companies have admitted that public outrage at the regime's abuses against its own people have been influential in their decision. Recently Starbucks Corp, a specialty-coffee company, asked that a new cold coffee drink it is creating not be bottled or distributed in Burma by PepsiCo, Starbucks's partner in the coffee-drink project.

On March 13 Berkeley, California became the first city to bar contracts with firms doing business in Burma (most notably PepsiCo, Texaco and Unocal). No-business-in-Burma resolutions are pending the State Houses of Seattle and Massachusetts. Also in March, the University of Washington agreed to support stockholder resolutions (for any companies in which it holds stock) demanding withdrawal from Burma. A small group of student activists at Brandeis University is working towards the same end. Brandeis invests in PepsiCo.

Now Senator Mitch McConnell, the Kentucky Republican who initiated sanctions legislation against South Africa in 1986, is planning to introduce a similar bill against the Burmese regime into the US Senate. It appears such a move would have wide bipartisan support. Many see Burma as the South Africa of the '90s. Determined to pursue what it calls 'all-round modern development' at all costs, the SLORC cannot fail to be damaged by the combination of shareholder/student activism, politically acceptable boycotts, and hard-nosed commercial interests which have decided that Burma is a place to stay away from.

Sources
BP 950507
NYT 950402
Economist 950422
WSJ 950413

(continued from previous page)

The most ironic feature of the acceleration of Burma's civil wars into the superstructure of Global Economic Warfare is that the SLORC does not have to hide or defend its new tactics. Much to the contrary, it seeks and earns praise from others for discovering its role in the worldwide economic confrontation. Thus, it holds out the olive branch of peace to ethnic minority insurgents, whose territory is ripe killing ground in Global Economic Warfare, promising "regional economic development." There is no reason whatsoever to doubt SLORC's sincerity. Regional economic development is exactly what the regime is after, and please take note that the two chief indicators of success in these areas will be market development and natural resource exploitation. Rebel groups shaking hands with the junta on these terms are guaranteeing the poverty and manipulation of their peoples, with the casualties growing more severe as segments of the population fall more definitively into the "indigenous" category described above.

Along with "love" and "success," "development" is one of the most difficult words to define in the English language. To a resort conglomerate, reclaiming beach front from economically marginal fishing community and constructing an exclusive tourist resort is development. To a logging firm, cutting roads into forests and extracting every tree fit for processing is "development of timber resources." To international aid organizations, patiently cultivating third world communities to be more like their Northern brothers is development. SLORC's definition of development appears to be active and ruthless combat in the arena of Global Economic Warfare, developing native resources and creating foreign markets for them and, conversely, creating domestic services, such as tourism and cheap labor, to service foreign markets.

Unfortunately, the world can expect the traditional warfare in Burma to not only remain, but to carry on invigorated by a new sense of purpose. Where it is replaced by anything other than substantive political reform, the change will be superficial at best, and the same people who suffered from mortars and land mines will face an onslaught of ecological destruction and economic transformation which will push and keep them down on the ladder of political influence.
Damming the Salween

Introduction

The Thai and Burmese governments are currently negotiating to build dams on the Salween and Moei rivers which together form almost 300 km of the Thai-Burma border. These projects are being proposed as a source of electricity and water for Thailand and to provide revenue to the ruling SLORC of Burma. In particular, water drawn from the Salween River and its tributaries would be delivered to the drought-crippled Bhumibol reservoir in northern Thailand.

A total of twenty-three dams for hydropower and/or transbasin water diversion are proposed for the Salween watershed. 23.40 million cubic meters of water could be diverted from the Salween and its tributaries.

Salween River Mainstream Dams
- the Upper Salween (2 potential sites)
- the Lower Salween
- the Nam Moei 1, 2, & 3
- under separate agreement, a dam is planned (possibly for construction by Chinese engineers) on the Salween in Shan State.

There are also 15 hydro-power and water diversion from Salween tributaries planned inside Thailand, and further border dams are proposed at Nam Mae Sai, Mae Kok and Klong Kra.

The proponents of the Salween dams include the governments of Thailand and Burma, who have formed a Joint Working Commission and, more recently, China.

Because of the large sums involved in construction, multi-lateral aid and bilateral organizations, principally the ADB, will probably finance the projects. Consultants hired by these funders count on contracts overseas because the domestic dam industry in Northern countries is in decline.

Consult in Norway and EPDC and JICA in Japan have been most active in securing bilateral aid contracts from their respective governments to carry out pre-feasibility studies for the Salween dams.

Dams planning to date has dealt only with the economic aspects of construction. No studies have considered the proposed plans for the Salween basin as a whole, nor has there been any attempt to address the cumulative effects that water diversion and regulation will have on the river and its tributaries. Most feasibility studies have not progressed beyond desk level.

Impacts and Concerns: Environmental and Social Impacts

To date, Salween dam proponents have not initiated studies to assess the impacts of proposed dams individually or on the Salween River basin as a whole. As the Salween marks the border between Burma and Thailand, the watershed is shared between the two countries. While many of the effects of the dams will occur in downstream communities and ecosystems on the Burmese side, Thailand's forests, rivers and people will also be affected.

Decrease in River Flow

The cumulative impacts of water diversion from the mainstream of the Salween is almost certain to result in severe impacts on the ecology of the middle, lower and estuarine areas of the river. Many of the individual projects appear to draw very small percentages of water from the total annual flow of the Salween. During the dry season, amounts diverted by every proposed project will extract a higher percentage of the Salween's flow.

The consequences of diversion of a percentage of the Salween's flow could include:
ENVIRONMENT

- Decreased flow, which could change the ecology and water quality of the Salween River throughout its middle and lower reaches.
- Decreased flows in the Salween delta, which could cause salt-water intrusions into the delta, destroying rice paddies fields, rendering community drinking water wells unpotable, altering the delicate aquatic balance in spawning and feeding rounds of fish and other aquatic fauna.
- Involuntary Resettlement
  Local people will be evicted from proposed reservoir areas and dam construction sites. Many of these people are already refugees or displaced from their villages to avoid forced labour or persecution by the SLORC military. The vast majority are civilians accused by the SLORC of cooperating with armed ethnic groups controlling areas of Burma’s border region since 1949.
  On the Thai side of the border, many communities in the Salween watershed have been established for generations. Few of these local people have identity cards, citizenship papers, or land title documents. Consequently, the possibility of meaningful consultation with dam proponents or of receiving compensation for relocation, loss of land and livelihoods, decreases.

- Destruction of Forests
  Vast areas of forest will be destroyed when inundated by the reservoirs of the proposed dams. More forests will be cleared during construction of access roads to the dams. Every incursion into the forest will provide greater opportunity for commercial logging in border areas already degraded by five years of logging concessions granted to Thai companies by SLORC.
  As local people are evicted from their land, either due to inundation, forced resettlement, or flight from areas under SLORC control, people will be confronted with the necessity of clearing more areas of forest for the planting of food crops. Reduction in forest cover destroys or reduces habitat for forest animals and increases danger of rainy-season floods in downstream areas.

  Sustainable agriculture and gathering of forest foods are the primary means of subsistence for ethnic groups living in the vicinity of the border. Destruction of forests and riparian agricultural plots by large dams and reservoirs will effectively undermine these people’s food security.

  Slave Labour
  SLORC’s use of slave labour for construction of infrastructure projects in Burma is extensively documented. Village people in border areas, regardless of age or gender, are commonly press-ganged to work on large infrastructure projects, roads and railways. Often, people in SLORC’s labour program never return to their communities, dying of starvation, disease or injury during enslavement. Women bear brutal hardships, as rape of women labourers by SLORC troops is documented as a regular occurrence.

  Recommendations
  1. Complete Environmental Impact and Social Impact Assessments, addressing bio-regional impacts of large dams and water diversion in the Salween watershed. In addition, project-by-project assessments should be undertaken immediately. No dam construction should be initiated until all these studies have been completed.
  2. Existing and subsequent studies, especially Environmental Impact Assessments required for informed public debate and decision-making, should be made available to the public. Towards this end:

- Voluntary Resettlement
  A people’s means of livelihood is intimately linked to their culture. The indigenous peoples of Thailand and Burma rely on the land for not only survival, but also for their cultural identity. Many of the indigenous groups in the mountainous areas of the border are societies virtually unknown to outsiders.

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  2. Existing and subsequent studies, especially Environmental Impact Assessments required for informed public debate and decision-making, should be made available to the public. Towards this end:

- A. Any EIAs or SIAs produced should be based on the knowledge of potentially affected local people, who understand the rivers, forests, and agroecosystems upon which they depend for their means of livelihood.

- B. Local communities located within a proposed reservoir, and those living both upstream and downstream of a proposed dam and its reservoir, should be informed in as much detail as possible of the potential effects of particular dams in their areas, and of potential impacts of all projects on the Salween River basin as a whole.

- C. Questions of people affected should be fully addressed by project proponents, in a manner satisfactory to potentially affected local people before any decision to build a dam is made. Perhaps, above all, the Thai government should consider whether it is wise for it to enter into joint activities with the SLORC. Increasingly, Thailand will become dependent on Burma for its energy needs. When the official Burmese media consistently refers to Thailand as "the other country", when its soldiers consistently violate Thai sovereignty, does Thailand really want to place such a vital part of its own development in the hands of such unreliable "friends"?

Adapted from draft report "Hydro-electric and Trans-Basin Water Diversion Projects in the Salween River Basin" compiled by Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA), March 1995.
VICTIMS OF GLOBAL WARFARE

Refugees

The last few weeks have been dangerous and confusing ones for the refugees camped out on the Burma-Thai border. On 22 April 5 Karen refugees were kidnapped from Baan Mae Teun and 30 houses burned down. This was the signal for increasingly bold incursions into camps on Thai soil. Refugees were threatened with violence if they did not return to Burma, and the armed intruders made good their threats. Over the past few weeks a total of 10 refugee camps have been attacked and torched, with refugees killed or forced back to Burma at gun point. Thai villagers have also suffered violence and robbery from the intruders.

The Thai military response was extraordinarily luke-warm; possibly, as one writer to The Nation pointed out, because of the close business connections between the top military in both countries. The army's image was tarnished as it seemed that no amount of provocations could move it to action. General Wimol's public statements were ever blunter than usual, and caused some consternation. He made it plain he would like to push all the Karen back to Burma, and boasted it would take him less than a week to do so. Constrained only by fear of an international outcry, his next best idea would take him a total of 10 refugee camps.

In response to no less than seven protests served on the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok, the Ambassador disclaimed all responsibility for raids on the refugee camps and Thai villages, placing blame firmly on the DKBA over whom it claimed to have no control.

Meanwhile both Prime Minister Chuan and Foreign Minister Krasae continued to insist that 'incidents' at the border should not imperil Thai-Burma relations. The House Committee for Foreign Affairs called for a retraction of Burma's invitation to the July ASEAN meeting and a reassessment of current policy towards Burma, since it was clear that contact with the outside world had not, as hoped, encouraged the military junta to be more democratic or respectful of human rights. This reassessment does not appear likely.

Far from grateful for the support received from Thai authorities, Burma's deputy Military Intelligence Chief, Col. Kyaw Win, has blamed Thailand for the border problems, and accused it of harboring anti-Rangoon groups and supporting Khun Sa's army. Hoping to demonstrate that this is not the case, Thai soldiers are now searching refugee camps for stashes of armaments.

Source
Bangkok Post and The Nation

Villagers and the Pipe Line

On May 11, 1995, the Mergui/Tavoy Information Service interviewed a young Karen Buddhist who had recently fled Kanbauk in Ye Byu Township which is on the route of the Total/Unocal pipe line. Following is a brief summary of what this young villager had to say.

Although the Total company promised to give jobs to the villagers in Kanbauk village, only about 200 have been given work on the pipe line. More than 1000 workers from Rangoon have been brought out to help with survey work, and the construction of roads and buildings.

Applying for work on the pipe line was very difficult. Special fees had to be paid for medical clearance, and local officials also charged for the application forms. Only those who are close friends of Slorc officials are finally chosen. They receive 200 kyats per day salary.

Porters are also used, and they are gathered by the military. They have to do the hard work of clearing the area and are not paid. Many have fled because of this.

Gardens of the villagers were destroyed by construction work, and there is fear that a Slorc battalion base will be built in the area which will also destroy many orchards and gardens. There is no compensation.

Villagers have to pay many special fees to the military. Porters fees have been collected by Slorc since 1988. They used to be 400 kyats, but when Total arrived, they went up to 500.

The villagers were promised that there would be work on the pipe line and they would become prosperous, but now they feel cheated. Besides the ruin of the gardens, the Slorc soldiers also help themselves freely to fruits and other food in the villages. This is why many are fleeing their homes and gardens and seeking refuge near the Thai/Burma border.

Source
Mergui/Tavoy Information Service
EVENTS OF THIS MONTH

Gas

EGAT ran an advertisement in the Bangkok Post, actually stating that 11 villages in Burma had been relocated to make way for the natural gas pipeline from the Gulf of Martaban into Thailand. And new refugees confirmed the worst fears of opposition groups and activists that slave labor is being used to prepare the pipeline route. Total continues to disclaim all responsibility.

Constitution

The National Convention has been adjourned until October, having decided to grant self-administered status to 6 smaller ethnic groups in areas dominated by larger ones.

Aung San Suu Kyi

India has awarded Suu Kyi the prestigious Jawarharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding. Former winners are Nelson Mandela and Helmut Kohl. And British MP David Steel has sought permission to meet with Suu Kyi in July in order to present her with the Liberal International Prize for Freedom.

Sources: BP and TN

US/Burma Relations

Winston Lord, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said Wednesday (May 17) in Bangkok that the Burmese military junta’s lack of progress on human rights, democracy and narcotics control was “very disappointing.” Last November the State Department threatened to downgrade relations with Burma if there was not improvement in these areas.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher in April stressed the “strong possibility that a successor government in Burma could cancel any arrangement made with the current Burmese government.”

News release, Seattle Campaign for a Free Burma