

Bush Ducks and Dives Through Asia

by Mike Billington

President George W. Bush survived a whirlwind tour of Asia from Oct. 16-23; U.S. and other nations' security for his trip reflected awareness of the mounting hatred towards America around the world. Huge U.S. security details preceded his visit, and in several locations, practically took over the political buildings, convention halls, and even the streets the President was visiting (see box for a Filipino's account of the President's eight-hour "stealth" visit to Manila).

In Bali, Indonesia, where Bush flew in and out in only three hours, he nonetheless took the time to meet with the leaders of the two mass-based Islamic institutions in the world's largest Islamic country—the Nahdlatul Ulama and

the Muhammadiyah—trying to demonstrate that the war on terror was not a war on Islam. However, the message he heard was, that the source of radicalism in the Islamic world was the U.S. policy itself. "We told him U.S. foreign policy should seek a new paradigm, if the U.S. wants to be respected by the world community, and to be safe," said Muhammadiyah leader Syafii Maarif.

The most promising development of the tour was the announcement by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Bush, that the United States was offering North Korea a multilateral security guarantee from the five states engaged in the "six-party talks" with North Korea (America, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and China)—"to meet the legitimate security concerns of the North." Such a proposal has been vigorously opposed by the neo-conservatives around Vice President Dick Cheney, who are trying to extend their pre-emptive war doctrine and their new nuclear strategic posture into a nuclear confrontation with North Korea. Although the North Koreans have demanded a bilateral non-aggression pact with the United States alone—since they are not threatened by the other parties—the fact that the Administration dropped its refusal to negotiate without previous concessions from North Korea on

Bush in the Philippines

The U.S. President's short Oct. 16 visit to Manila went like clockwork, presumably due to extensive security considerations by both administrations. The streets where his motorcade passed to the Malacanang Presidential Palace, and on to the Batasan (legislative building), were devoid of people. Some children and a few others were allowed to welcome the leader of the most powerful country in the world, but, on most occasions, even pro-U.S. groups were not allowed to go near President Bush. This wariness on the part of security groups was evident throughout the visit, justifiably so, considering the level of hatred America seems to have brought upon itself these past years.

Historians were quick to point out, that the first time we were visited by a U.S. President, President Eisenhower, he rode in a white Cadillac convertible, seated on top of the back seat, waving to thousands of admiring and grateful Filipinos, lined along the streets to Malacanang. In contrast, today's world leader rides in a limousine—one of three identical vehicles, to confuse possible attackers—a bomb- and bullet-proof Cadillac from which he did not venture to wave—to police, who were the only onlookers.

Bush's address to Congress can be described basically as a "feel good" speech, praising Filipinos as long-time allies in Asia, and more recently, as partners in the fight against terrorism. The portion of his speech which received

the most applause, was his clever quote from Pope John Paul II during the latter's 1995 visit to this city, wherein His Holiness referred to Manila as a source of light, which should shine and enlighten all of Asia and beyond, the way Bethlehem was to the rest of the world—a reference to the Philippines as the only Christian country in this part of the world. But Bush was clearly referring to our government's "anti-terrorist" stand.

There was a general promise of aid to Mindanao, on the condition that lasting peace is achieved; which can be interpreted as "peace before development," and not "peace through development." We can, therefore, expect an escalation of war in southern Philippines, as Bush dangles an imaginary carrot to this Administration. Unless President Gloria Arroyo pursues the assistance and diplomatic intervention of Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia (despite his pending retirement), and designs a settlement along the principles of the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia which ended the Thirty Years' War, neither peace nor development will come to Mindanao, nor to the rest of our country. And surely, Mahathir realizes that peace in the Philippines is vital to Malaysia and the whole of Southeast Asia as well.

The only relief felt by all Filipinos after President Bush's visit, was neither in economics nor in politics, but in the fact that nothing untoward had happened during his brief stay. The thought of the Beast-man Cheney directly in command is frightening—like jumping from the frying pan into the fire.—*Butch Valdes*

ending its nuclear program, is taken by leading diplomats in Asia as a promising step forward. China and North Korea are now discussing scheduling a new round of the six-party talks.

On the negative side, the Asian tour continued the unilateralist diplomacy of the Bush Administration, by attempting to turn the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) from its purpose as an economic discussion forum, into a security alliance, by demanding APEC's concurrence on specific military policies, such as joint operations against terrorist organizations, and a ban on production and trade in "manpads"—Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems (shoulder-held anti-aircraft weapons). Widespread Asian opposition to the "militarization" of APEC was led by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir. The final communiqué did call for common efforts to stop terrorism, but did not ban the manpads.

While in Bangkok, Bush granted Thailand "non-NATO ally" status, adding it to a list which already includes the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, and Australia, provided with special access to U.S. military assistance. This, together with Bush's attempt to militarize APEC, has brought up the ghost of SEATO (the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization), the anti-communist alliance created by cold-warrior John Foster Dulles in the 1950s. It was comprised of Thailand, the Philippines, Pakistan, Australia, and New Zealand, together with the United States, Britain, and France. SEATO kept Asia divided, and served as a platform for the American war against Indo-China, the subversion of Sukarno in Indonesia, and similar Cold War operations.

In both the Philippines and Australia, Bush addressed joint sessions of the national legislatures, but was greeted by open protest by elected officials opposed to the U.S. preemptive war policy. In the Philippines, several opposition congressmen refused to stand for the President, and walked out when he began to speak. In Australia, Bush's speech was twice interrupted by Senators from the Green Party, denouncing the Iraq war and U.S. disregard for international law. One shouted, "We are not a sheriff!" This refers to Bush's public statements, twice during the previous week, that Australia was America's "sheriff" in Asia.

The other major subject on the Bush agenda for Asia was the much-heralded American demand that China allow its currency, the yuan, to float, ending its link to the dollar. Even the U.S. Federal Reserve Board issued a report on Oct. 23 debunking the line that the undervalued yuan is to blame for America's economic demise. The Fed said such a move would harm, rather than help, the U.S. economy, but that hasn't held back the Administration. Chinese President Hu Jintao firmly rejected the demand, explaining that the policy would destabilize China, Asia, and even the West. However, it has become increasingly apparent that the Bush Administration has introduced this issue for extraneous, political reasons, rather than a real interest in its adoption. The *Australian Financial Times* wrote on Oct. 21, "With Bush facing economic and foreign-policy troubles on the home front, scapegoating China is a handy weapon of mass diversion."