

Nobel laureates stoke tensions in SE Asia

by Lydia Cherry

The recent foray into Thailand by a group of Nobel Peace Prize winners to put pressure on neighboring Burma, was not designed as a "peace" initiative but rather to create havoc, and that it did. From the time that Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the first of the seven laureates, arrived on Feb. 15 until the end of the month, this mission, whose ostensible purpose was to free from house arrest pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Ky, wreaked bedlam in Thailand. As a Bangkok source described it: "They are creating Hell here; they seem to want Burma and Thailand to go to war."

Among the other luminaries in the mission, which reportedly was forced on Thailand by the United States, was the Tibetan Dalai Lama and former President of Costa Rica Oscar Arias Sánchez. Mikhail Gorbachov expressed regret that he could not go, and his support for the venture.

Whose idea was this?

According to a spokesman from the Montreal-based International Center for Human Rights (which pulled the mission together), the brainchild of this initiative was Oscar Arias, who sits on their board. It is no surprise that Oscar Arias, who believes that developing sector countries don't need armies, would target Thailand, where the effort to weaken the country's military is well advanced following violent demonstrations instigated by U.S.-backed non-governmental organizations (NGOs) last summer (see *EIR*, June 12, 1992). Oscar Arias has a long history of promoting the elimination of national militaries in favor of supranational forces under the control of a U.S.-dominated U.N. His National Liberation Party took power in Costa Rica in 1948 in a guerrilla uprising backed by the U.S. CIA, and his first task was to disband that country's military. Both the party and Oscar Arias himself have been repeatedly linked to the drug trade. Indeed, the founder of this party, José "Pepe" Figueres, from 1972 until his death in the early 1990s, provided political protection for Dope, Inc.'s Robert Vesco.

The laureates' hidden agenda has at least four goals: 1) increasing tensions between Burma and Thailand; 2) increasing tensions between China and Thailand; 3) giving strong backing to the western-spawned NGOs in Thailand against the Thai military; and 4) creating a wedge in the consensus among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on how to deal with Burma and the other communist or former communist countries of Southeast Asia.

Before the delegation arrived, China issued two warnings to Thailand in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the exiled Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, from entering the country. As a result of these warnings, the Dalai Lama's visit was shortened and the itinerary modified.

Upon their arrival, the Nobel laureates called for Burma's expulsion from the U.N., an immediate embargo of arms sales to the country, and an economic boycott. Archbishop Tutu, Oscar Arias, Ross Daniels from Amnesty International, and Edward Broadbent from the Canadian human rights organizing body all attacked the ASEAN policy of "constructive engagement," calling instead for "a policy of constructive and rapid disengagement." Regional organizations have the "primary responsibility for dealing with a particularly barbarous regime," insisted Broadbent. Timed with the visit, the Bangkok English-language daily *The Nation* on Feb. 21 ran an editorial that reads as if it were drafted by Amnesty International. Titled "Time for ASEAN to Say Goodbye to Store," it insists that it is time for Thailand to break from the ASEAN position. "Burma is our Bosnia; it is the current 'killing field' of Asia." It called "constructive engagement" "a trite argument put [forward] by regional leaders whose own human rights records are appalling."

The Burmese military dictatorship responded by accusing Thailand of interference in its internal affairs. Thai Army Commander Wimon Wongwanit criticized the Thai government's decision to give in to U.S. pressure and agree to the visit. He suggested that the human rights people should "go and scream against Burma from the United States rather than from Thailand," the Thai source said.

"The government here couldn't do anything because they were forced by the U.S. government to accept this group; the military was against it, and much of the population. The royal family was against it," the source said. He noted that the Thai king had earlier become involved in cooling out tensions between Burma and Thailand around a territorial dispute. The king addressed the issue in his New Year's Eve speech (end of January) when "Burma was massing its troops and Thailand had sent tanks and it looked like there was going to be a big clash between the two countries. . . . He called off the Thai military, and negotiations started."

What the laureates seemed to be ignoring is Burma's status as a satellite of Beijing. The net result of the West's human rights actions are to push Burma further into the hands of the Chinese, whose recent military support to Burma reportedly includes long-range weapons and other equipment, from 40 mm rocket launchers to 120 mm mortars and 130 mm modern rocket launchers. The Chinese are advising the Burmese Army on guerrilla warfare. The two nations are also building a joint venture weapons factory. Clearly, this over-arming is a provocation against Thailand. "A war between these two countries would be like Iran and Iraq—nobody could possibly win; the two countries would only destroy themselves," the source concluded.