

Eurasian Powers Defy Sanctions on Myanmar

by Mike Billington

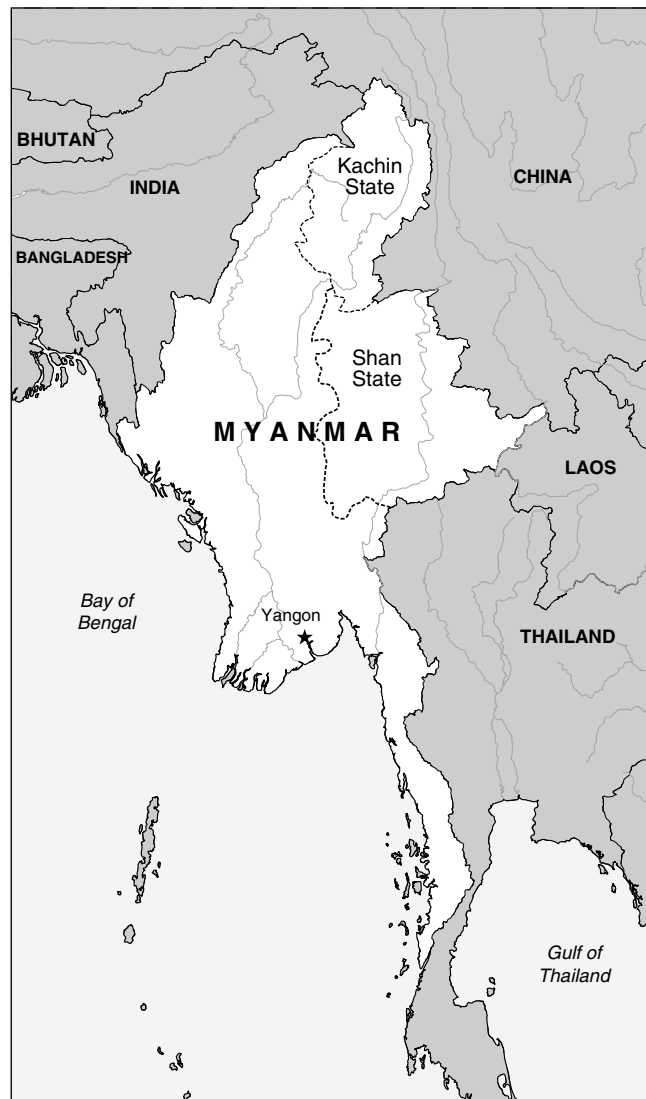
The more the United States and Britain attempt to impose sanctions on Myanmar, the more China and India respond by increasing cooperation and investment, mostly in transportation and energy development, in the nation which sits as a strategic hub between the world's two largest nations. Thailand, Myanmar's Southeast Asian neighbor, has also defied pressure from the U.S.A. and the European Union, expanding trade and investment with its historic regional rival. Russia, although not as deeply involved in the region, has also made its intentions clear, with new investments in oil and gas exploration and production.

Even the International Crisis Group (ICG), which generally sides with the human rights NGOs, reported recently that the effort to isolate Myanmar through sanctions was neither effective nor humane. An ICG report of Dec. 8, 2006 accused the George Soros-funded Open Society Institute (OSI) and others of pressuring the Global Fund, a UN body funded by the Group of 8 industrialized nations, to cut a \$98 million program to combat AIDS, TB, and malaria in Myanmar, causing the needless suffering and deaths of thousands of Myanmar citizens.

The Indo-Asian News Service of India, after reporting on April 13 on the extensive Indian investment in Myanmar oil and gas, hydroelectric, ports, roads, and rail, as well as military cooperation, added: All this is to the intense dislike of Washington, which, in 2003, enacted a Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act to apply sanctions against Myanmar's military rulers. Indian officials say while they too would want Myanmar to be a democracy, they don't share the American assessment that isolating the military junta is the way to go about it.

A Strategic Hub

A look at a map of Eurasia will indicate the strategic importance of Myanmar for the development of Eurasia as a whole. Of the three main routes for the Eurasian Land-Bridge, linking the Pacific and the Atlantic, the northern route through Russia, and central route through China and Central Asia, are completed in part, although in need of significant upgrading and transformation to high-speed and maglev systems. The southern route, however, through Southeast Asia, India, Pakistan, Iran and on to Russia and Turkey, has a huge gap in the middle, at Myanmar. This is primarily the result of the British colonial legacy, which left Burma (Myanmar) divided among



ethnic lines, with borders on all sides which were never truly in the government's control. Only now, with the nearly successful pacification of the ethnic insurgencies by the junta in Yangon, is the nation truly unified for the first time, and able to develop its rich resources while opening development corridors with India, China, and Thailand, and plugging the hole in the Eurasian Land-Bridge.

At a meeting of the Asian Regional Assembly of the International Union of Railways on March 21 in New Delhi, J.P. Batra, head of the Indian railway board, announced that as part of India's decision to join the Trans-Asian Rail Network (TARN), India will set up new rail links with Russia, Iran, and Myanmar. The first step is completing the rail links to Myanmar and then to China. In addition to the 215 km needed to close the gap from India to Myanmar, China is also planning a freight corridor of 660 km into Myanmar, linking up with the Indo-Myanmar rail line, and thus to Europe through

Russia or through Iran and Turkey.

India has also launched the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project, which will connect India's Mizoram State with Myanmar's Chin State via inland waterways and highways, with water access to the Bay of Bengal. The project will also upgrade the highway between Myanmar and Bangladesh. A car-rally through Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar is being planned for November to bring international attention to the opening up of the region.

On the eastern Myanmar border with Thailand, China and South Korea have financed feasibility studies to connect the two countries in two different locations, between Bangkok and Yangon, and in the north toward Mandalay.

In addition to Myanmar's huge offshore gas deposits in the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, which are being developed by numerous international oil companies (even U.S. Chevron has a piece), India, China, and Thailand are also helping to develop the hydroelectric potential, especially along the Salween River, heretofore off limits due to ethnic insurgencies. Five dams are under construction or under contract on the Salween, by far the largest being the huge Tar-hsan project, a joint venture between Thailand and Myanmar, with some Chinese participation. Tar-shan will have an installed capacity of 7,110 MW, most of which will be sold to Thailand, with some going without charge to Myanmar. Ground was broken for the project earlier this year, despite an international campaign to stop it by the oligarchical World-wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and its anti-growth minions.

Responding to the WWF charge that the dams will destroy the Salween before we even know what we are losing, and that Myanmar should be content with wind and biomass for its energy needs, a spokesman for the Myanmar government said: The Myanmar government will use every means to limit environmental effects on project areas. But we should not forget that industrialized countries have caused more damage to the environment than developing countries, and have given very little assistance to environmental conservation work in developing countries.

China and Myanmar have signed four deals this year for hydroelectric projects on the Salween, although none at the scale of the Tar-hsan project. China is also planning to build a crude oil terminal on the Bay of Bengal in Myanmar, and a 2,380 km pipeline to Yunnan Province, to move oil from the Persian Gulf as well as from the Myanmar oil fields, several of which are being explored and developed by China.

Were the United States to abandon the Bush Administration's mania for imperial regime change, and abandon the racist agenda of the Al Gore/WWF environmental genocidalists, in favor of an American System foreign policy, allying with the major powers of China, India, and Russia for great development projects across Eurasia and beyond, Myanmar would quickly emerge as a major strategic and economic regional power, overcoming at last the destructive legacy of British colonial policy.