

Terror Threats to the Bush Tour of Asia

by Mike Billington and Jeffrey Steinberg

As President George W. Bush prepares his whirlwind tour of Asia Oct. 17-23, security officials both in the United States and in Asia are bracing for a possible terrorist attack on the President, possibly targetting the meeting of over 20 heads of state in Bangkok, Thailand for the annual Summit of the Asian-Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) on Oct. 20-21.

The danger was signalled by the capture of Indonesian terrorist Hambali on Aug. 11 in Thailand, and Hambali's reported confession that regional terrorist networks were planning to attack hotels and commercial airliners during the APEC Summit. In the Philippines, where Bush will address the Congress on Oct. 18, the terrorist New People's Army (NPA) has announced plans to deploy a team to target the American President, while another Indonesian who had been involved in terrorist attacks in Manila, walked out of his military prison in the middle of that city on July 14, and is still on the loose.

The threat of terrorism during the Bush trip is particularly ominous in light of the declaration by Vice President Dick Cheney at the American Enterprise Institute on July 24—repeated regularly over the past months—that another major terrorist event is likely in the near future. Cheney is capable of using such a terrorist event to serve the interests of the neo-conservative cabal he heads within the Bush Administration, as he did after Sept. 11, 2001, using the attack on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center as Hitler used the self-inflicted "Reichstag Fire," as a justification for imposing both a war doctrine and a dictatorship. Cheney ultimately got the pre-emptive war doctrine, and the war on Iraq, that he had proposed twelve years earlier.

Now, with Cheney's political future greatly endangered by events in Iraq, and the global exposure of his primary role in promoting the lies used to justify the invasion, it must be borne in mind that a terrorist attack on President Bush could result in the truly frightening prospect of a President Dick Cheney.

'Third Force' Terror Possible

The existence of a terrorist environment in Asia is both real in itself, and also creates a situation in which a professional operation by a third party could be carried out and blamed on the local terrorist networks. A series of events in regard to Thailand exemplify the problem, and point to one glaring intelligence vulnerability.

Washington intelligence sources have underscored the significance of the Aug. 2003 "sting" arrest of a group of arms smugglers and money launderers in New York, including diamond dealer Yehuda Abraham, an Afghanistan-born Jew, with operations in the U.S.A., Thailand and Hong Kong. Abraham was arrested for attempting to smuggle a surface-to-air missile into the United States from Russia, in league with Russian Mafiya circles. The sources say that Abraham was part of a larger Russian/Israeli Mafiya apparatus, heavily involved in arms-for-drug trafficking in Central and South America, and diamond-for-arms trafficking in Africa and Asia. The sources say the same network was the subject of a Jan. 20, 2003 Organization of American States (OAS) report, detailing an Israeli arms trafficking ring that illegally sold large stocks of weapons to the Colombian United Self-Defense Forces, the right-wing paramilitary organization deeply implicated in the country's cocaine trafficking.

The sources underscored the Abraham-Thai operations, warning that this could be a channel for arming terrorists targeting the APEC summit.

On Oct. 1, Thai Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh reported to the press that officials believed six surface-to-air (SAM) missiles had been smuggled into the country and were unaccounted for. Earlier, on Sept. 11, the *Asian Wall Street Journal* carried a report by an "aviation expert" that the international airport in Bangkok was vulnerable to attack. Both this report and the SAM missile reports were subsequently denied by the Thai Government, but the security plans for the APEC Summit include the closure of the raised highway near the airport to truck traffic, as a precaution against a missile attack on airliners.

In Manila, Bush has reduced his visit to a total of eight hours, and the airport to be used is not being disclosed (he may use the old U.S. airbase at Clark Field, despite the obvious unpleasant irony which this evokes). As to the Philippines Congress, the U.S. advanced security detail in Manila plans to sequester a café in the House of Representatives complex in Quezon City, converting its 50-square-meter space into a "security holding area," and clear out the entire House of Representatives complex one week before Bush's arrival, including forced vacations for 2000 employees. Several opposition Congressmen are raising strong objections, but one Representative told the *Inquirer*, "Sad but true. We have to abide by the world superpower."

Besides the Philippines and Thailand, Bush will also visit Japan, Singapore, Indonesia and Australia.

With the U.S. policy of pre-emptive war and unilateral dictates having turned it increasingly into the object of anger and hatred around the world, it is to be hoped that the security for President Bush's Asian tour is adequate to the task. Despite the obvious failings of this President, the crucial institutional importance of the Presidency, as well as the threat of allowing the "next in line" to seize the reins of power in Washington, both will call for maximum precautions.