THAILAND

Background

Known as Siam until 1939, Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country never to have been colonized (although it was occupied by Japan during World War II). In 1932, the government formally became a constitutional monarchy, subjecting the power of the king to a democratically elected parliament. However, until 1992, Thailand was ruled predominantly by military governments and most democratically elected governments were quickly replaced by non-violent coups; 17 coups took place between 1932 and 1992. From 1992 until 2006, a succession of democratic governments ruled Thailand, and elections during this period were generally deemed free and fair by observers. The king of Thailand, King Bhumibol, has reigned since 1946 and, although he possesses limited direct powers, his main contribution toThai politics is using his informal influence to resolve political impasses.

Thaksin Shinawatra founded the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party in 1998 and became prime minister of Thailand when the TRT swept national elections in 2001 and again in 2005. Although initially popular in Thailand, and commended for his coordination of relief efforts following the 2004 tsunami, corruption allegations and dissatisfaction with Thaksin's handling of the separatist conflict in the south eroded his popularity. The allegedly tax-free and highly lucrative sale of Thaksin's share in Shin Corp, a successful Thai telecommunications company, galvanized his opposition, which culminated in large-scale protests in Bangkok and led Thaksin to call for early elections in April 2006. Although the armed forces repeatedly denied that a military coup was a possibility amidst the political turmoil, on Sept. 19, 2006, the Thai army removed Thaksin from his position as prime minister while he was out of the country, and declared martial law. Bhumibol expressed support for the transfer of power and

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Surayud Chulanont, a retired army general, was chosen in October 2006 to replace Thaksin, who is currently in exile in London. Chulanont will serve as prime minister for approximately one year, while a new constitution is being created, after which new democratic elections will be held. The interim government has promised to hold new elections before the end of 2007. In May 2007, Thai courts found Thaksin guilty of corruption and breaking election laws during the April 2006 election.

In its 2006 Human Rights Report, the U.S. State Department noted that Thailand generally respected the rights of its citizens both prior to and after the September 2006 coup. However, certain, significant problems continued even after the coup. The security forces and the police continue to use torture and excessive lethal force, resulting in deaths of detainees while in custody, and unlawful killings. Muslim insurgents in the south continue to attack government officials, with civilian fatalities resulting from the violence, and disappearances continued in 2005. Corruption persists within the ranks of the police, who are susceptible to bribes, and some police officers have been found to be involved in prostitution and trafficking in persons, although the status of their prosecution remains unknown. Corruption also pervades the executive branch of the government and the "war on corruption," declared in 2004, remains largely ineffective. Although functionally independent, the judiciary also remained vulnerable to corruption, and outside influence. Freedom of the press is generally respected, but the independent media is increasingly threatened by the government, which reserves the right to restrict the press in the event of a national crisis, or for reasons of national security. As part of the notorious Golden Triangle, the region where Burma, Thailand, and Laos intersect, Thailand struggles immensely with trafficking, both in drugs and in persons.

Thailand remains embroiled in an internal insurgency, waged by Muslim separatists who desire an independent Muslim state in the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala. These provinces, located in the south of Thailand, have a Muslim majority, as compared to the rest of Thailand, which is largely Buddhist. In January 2004, Bangkok declared martial law in the provinces, following a large attack by insurgents who stole assault rifles from the military, killed Thai soldiers, and torched schools throughout the area. Violence escalated after the declaration of martial law and, since then, more than 1,700 people have been killed, with no resolution to the conflict in sight.

U.S. Military Assistance Prior to Sept. 11, 2001

Since 1945, Thailand and the United States have enjoyed a productive bilateral security alliance. The U.S.-Thai alliance granted the United States use of Thai military facilities during the Vietnam War. Additionally, Thailand's anti-communist stance and geographic proximity to Vietnam were vital to the United States during the Cold War.

Since the 1950s, the United States has furnished Thailand with military equipment and assistance. According to the UN Register of Conventional Arms, from 1993 to 2003, Thailand received 238 armored vehicles, 32 combat aircraft, 125 battle tanks, 40 large caliber artillery systems, two warships, and 166 missile launchers from the United States. Between fiscal year 1990 (FY 90) and FY 01 Thailand received approximately $335 million in Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) and concluded nearly $2 billion worth of Foreign Military Sales (FMS). Since the early 1990s the United States began increasing its military training programs in Thailand, sometimes holding up to 40 joint exercise programs a year. Congress also provided substantial International Military Education and Training (IMET) funding, totaling $17.8 million between FY 90 and FY 01. Thailand received $3 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) in FY 90, but military assistance was restricted in FY 93 after the

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military opened fire on demonstrators in Bangkok who were protesting the military's overthrow of yet another democratically-elected government. A grant of roughly $600,000 was appropriated to Thailand in FY 01, but no FMF was appropriated in the intervening years.

U.S. Military Assistance Since Sept. 11, 2001

Thailand has been a major supporter and ally in the U.S. "war on terror," and was designated a "major non-NATO ally" in 2003, in recognition of the long-standing U.S.-Thai military relationship, and its cooperation in counterterrorism efforts. This status makes Thailand eligible for greater defense cooperation and training with the United States, and gives the country greater access to U.S. weapons systems. Thailand has sent military engineering units to Afghanistan and Iraq, and Thai officials have made public statements in support of the effort to stamp out terrorism worldwide. In August 2003, Thai authorities captured top Jemaah Islamiya (JI) leader Nurjaman Riduan bin Isomuddin – commonly referred to as Hambali – in a U.S.-Thai joint operation. JI is a radical Islamic terrorist group based in Southeast Asia with links to al-Qaida and other extremist groups, that seeks to establish a large Islamic state in the region. Hambali has been deemed the mastermind behind the October 2002 bombing in Bali, Indonesia, and is the prime suspect in the J.W. Marriott Hotel bombing in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Aug. 5, 2003.

The United States reinstated FMF for Thailand in FY 02 and, in the five years after Sept. 11, Thailand received roughly twice the amount of military assistance it had received in the five years prior. Thailand has received consistent and substantial IMET funding, with $3.5 million requested in FY 07 and FY 08. In FY 06, Thailand received $2.4 million in IMET and $1.5 million in FMF but, on Sept. 26, 2006, the United States suspended all IMET and FMF to Thailand until a democratically-elected government takes power. According to the FY 08 congressional budget justification for foreign operations, the upcoming fiscal year budget request for Thailand, "presumes that events in Thailand will include a return to democratic rule in 2007 that will allow us to continue our assistance to the Royal Thai Government." $1.7 million in FMF and IMET appropriations are currently slated for Thailand in FY 08. A proposed amendment to the FY 08 Defense Authorization bill would implement legislative restrictions on military assistance until democratic rule is restored, but as the bill has not yet been made into law, the future of this amendment remains uncertain.

Thailand has continued large purchases of U.S. weaponry since Sept. 11, 2001. In 2002 and 2003, Thailand reported the import of a total of 16 F-16 fighter jets to the UN Register of Conventional Arms and it has concluded $74.4 million in DCS and more than $500 million in FMS since FY 02. In June 2003, the United States delivered 30 refurbished UH-1 helicopters, plus spare parts and training, to Thailand as part of a $30 million deal signed in late 2001 between the two governments. Thailand also received an F-16 part task trainer in FY 02 through the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program. In FY 06, Thailand concluded more than $100 million worth of arms sales with the United States, with robust projections for FY 07 and FY 08. Although military assistance has been suspended as a result of the September 2006 coup, the United States has not imposed an arms embargo on Thailand, and "continues to review all proposed arms transfers and sales to Thailand on a case-by-case basis," according the U.S. State Department's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls.

The United States has provided Thailand with several sources of counterterrorism training and funding, including multiple joint exercises such as Cobra Gold – in which both Singapore and, more recently, Indonesia also participate – and the Thai-U.S. anti-terrorism exercise, Known Warrior, which was first held in June 2002. Thailand is a beneficiary of the Regional Defense Counterterrorism Fellowship

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Program (CTFP) and received $200,000 in FY 06 and $175,000 in FY 07. Thailand was slated to receive $5.3 million in FY 06 through the Section 1206 authority in the defense budget, but military sanctions imposed after the September 2006 military coup have barred the transfer of any more funds under this authority until a democratically-elected government takes power. Thailand also receives funding to expand its counterterrorism capabilities, through the Foreign Operations budget's Anti-Terrorism Assistance program (NADR-ATA), which is part of the Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Activities account, since FY 05. Thailand received $2.9 million in FY 06 from this account, and is slated to receive $1.7 million more in FY 08.

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U.S. Military Assistance and Sales to Thailand, FY 90 - FY 08					
	IMET	**FMF**	**DCS**	**FMS**	**EDA**
1990	$2,533,000	$3,017,000	$32,077,000	$162,845,000	n/a
1991	$679,000	$0	$104,610,000	$178,050,000	n/a
1992	$0	$0	$32,457,000	$100,281,000	n/a
1993	$2,339,000	$0	$13,570,000	$105,899,000	$0
1994	$895,000	$0	$20,027,000	$150,646,000	$1,875,000
1995	$999,000	$0	$60,277,000	$355,558,000	$43,652,894
1996	$1,445,000	$0	$21,574,000	$269,381,000	$29,109,000
1997	$1,600,000	$0	$18,846,000	$151,161,000	$0
1998	$1,985,000	$0	$22,666,000	$143,558,000	$52,698,290
1999	$1,703,000	$0	$4,299,000	$133,157,000	$0
2000	$1,730,000	$0	$836,000	$113,299,000	$28,080,500
2001	$1,852,000	$598,000	$3,503,000	$118,386,000	$29,826,943
1990-2001	$17,760,000	$3,615,000	$334,742,000	$1,982,221,000	$185,242,627
1997-2001	$8,870,000	$598,000	$50,150,000	$659,561,000	$110,605,733
2002	$1,748,000	$1,800,000	$1,813,000	$167,772,000	$380,766
2003	$1,768,000	$1,990,000	$7,700,000	$131,535,000	$0
2004	$2,567,000	$881,000	$25,598,000	$179,191,000	$0
2005	$2,490,000	$1,488,000	$39,321,000	$92,315,000	$0
2006	$2,369,000	$1,485,000	$28,186,000	$75,629,000	$0
2002-2006	$10,942,000	$7,644,000	$102,618,000	$646,442,000	$380,766
2007	$2,370,000	$1,300,000	$23,113,000	$203,710,000	$0
2008	$1,200,000	$500,000	$48,998,000	$1,612,800,000	n/a

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