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Remarks at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. (Thailand)(Transcript)
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The President. Thank you very much. Dr. Thienchay, Dr. Kasem, to the students and faculty who are here, citizens of Thailand, my fellow Americans. Especially I would like to thank the glee club who sang. They did a marvelous job. Thank you very much for your music.

I am delighted and honored to be here today at a great center of learning that is a living memorial to Thailand's glorious past, yet with a mission focused on the future; an institution that is proudly and distinctively Asian, yet reaching out to the entire world. And in the faces of the young people who are in this audience, we all see the shining promise of tomorrow.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak here today about the future of the United States, Thailand, and the entire Asia-Pacific region we'll share in the 21st century. Three years ago, I took my first trip overseas as President to Japan and Korea. Now, shortly after my reelection, again my first trip is to Asia, to Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand. In Australia, at APEC, in my meetings with the leaders of China, South Korea, Japan, and your own nation, I have reaffirmed America's commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. That commitment is stronger than ever, for in the 21st century America's future cannot be secure if Asia's future is in doubt.

I wanted to visit Thailand for quite some time now, but I am especially glad to be able to join you in this historic year as we celebrate the life and work of His Majesty the King. The close ties between our two nations go back to 1833, when America signed a treaty of amity and commerce with the Kingdom of Siam. Those early bonds of friendship have endured the test of time, anchored by our security alliance, strengthened through our comradeship in Korea, in Vietnam, kept sharp and ready through Cobra Gold, the largest exercise involving United States forces anywhere in Asia.

Our nations are partners in prosperity as well. We enjoyed some $18 billion in two-way trade last year alone. We've forged important agreements in civil aviation, the protection of intellectual property, and the tax treaty I was honored to witness just a few moments ago here in Bangkok today.

More than ever, our people are also joined by ties of culture and community. My country has been strengthened by the contributions of

literally tens of thousands of Americans of Thai descent. And from Southern California to Houston to New York, our culture has been greatly enriched by the graceful temples, the ancient traditions, the exotic flavors of Thailand which now have a home in the United States.

Now we must deepen our partnership for the demands of the 21st century. The United States and Thailand, for all the distance and differences between us, share a common vision, the dream of an Asia-Pacific region where economic growth and democratic ideals are advancing steadily and reinforcing one another. That dream is coming true here in Thailand today, to the benefit of your people, this region, and the world.

Consider just how much the world has changed since President Johnson spoke here at Chula 30 years ago. The cold war is over. ASEAN, born in the throes of the Vietnam war, last year welcomed Vietnam as its newest member. Thailand has become an economic powerhouse. The economies of east Asia are the fastest growing in the world. The new global economy, spurred on by continuous explosions in information and technology, is transforming the way we live and work and communicate, collapsing the distances between us as the free flow of goods and the free flow of ideas are bringing tremendous opportunities for people throughout the world.

Of course, for all its promise, the 21st century will not be free of peril. Aggressive rogue states, global crime networks and drug traffickers, weapons proliferation, and terrorism, all these will continue to menace our security.

The nations most likely to succeed in this new world, to succeed in seizing the opportunities and meeting the threats of our time, are those that respond to the needs and aspirations of their people, promote commerce and cooperation instead of conflict, and have the openness and flexibility to harness the winds of change.

Thailand is proving that proposition every day. Yours has been the world's fastest growing economy over the last decade. You are laying the groundwork for an Asia of the future, where ancient cultures are linked by modern communications; where a vast and diverse region is joined by values of hard work and enterprise and shared benefits. This benefits the United States alone with more than 2 million jobs and 40 percent of our trade now tied to the Asia-Pacific region.

In the face of this, some have argued that democracy actually hinders economic growth in this region and in developing nations. But we need look no further than the economic vitality of Thailand, the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea to see that economic growth and democratic development can go hand in hand. Indeed, in the information-based economy of today and tomorrow, free market democracies have unique advantages. Freedom and democracy strengthen the prospects for strong and enduring economic progress.

A wave of democracy has swept the Earth in recent years, from Hungary to Haiti, to South Africa, to Cambodia, to Mongolia. More than half the world's people now live under governments of their own choosing, for the first time in all of human history.

Here in Thailand, last week's elections were a further milestone in your democratic journey. As always in elections, there were winners and there were losers. I can say that; I have been a winner and a loser. [Laughter] And while losing is not as good as winning, whenever power is transferred peacefully and democratically, everyone in that nation is a winner.

The United States is proud to have supported democracy's march across Asia. We do not seek to impose our vision of the world or any particular form of government on others. But we do believe that freedom and justice are the birthright of humankind. The citizens of Thailand, Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand - Taiwan - show us that accountable government and the rule of law can thrive in an Asian climate. The people of Cambodia and Mongolia proved that change is possible in difficult circumstances. The brave reformers in Burma led by Aung San Suu Kyi remind us that these desires know no boundaries. Their aspirations are universal because they are fundamentally human.

Every nation of the Asia-Pacific must preserve the best of its traditions while pursuing the benefits of progress. But surely we can all agree that human dignity and individual worth must never be undervalued or abused. The United States will continue to stand with those who stand for freedom in Asia and beyond. Doing so reflects not only our ideals, it advances our interests. A nation that respects the rights of its own people is far more likely to respect the rights of its neighbors, to keep its word, to play by the rules, to be a reliable partner in diplomacy and trade and in the pursuit of peace and stability.

It is in that pursuit that the United States will continue to maintain our strong Pacific presences, with 100,000 American troops to safeguard our common security. We are reinforcing our five core alliances here, including our very special alliance with Thailand. We're helping Asia to build new security structures to promote stability and peace. But let me be clear: Our presence is not aimed against anyone or any nation. Its aim is to benefit everyone and every nation through greater security and stability for all.

Safeguarding stability, we know now, requires more than military strength. In a world grown closer, both the rewards of cooperation and the costs of conflict have risen dramatically. just yesterday we saw a real result of working together as the APEC leaders, with strong support from Thailand, enforced early completion of an information technology agreement which would cut to zero tariffs on products from semiconductors to software by the year 2000.

Imagine the benefits to the students in this auditorium and those just outside and in booming countries the world over as ideas become even more open and accessible to people, as the information revolution spreads to even more eager minds. Imagine the even greater benefits which will come to that one-half of the world's population which, believe it or not, are still 2 days' walk from the nearest telephone. They cannot participate in this world we are trying to imagine and create unless we all join together to spread the benefits of the information revolution to everyone and to do it now.

But let us not be blind to the fact that as barriers crumble and borders blur and progress spreads quickly, so, too, can trouble spread quickly in this new world. We have only to look at the spread of environmental degradation, HIV and AIDS, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, drug trafficking, the rise of organized crime. These forces of destruction defy traditional defenses, just as traditional barriers can no longer keep out ideas, information, and truth. No nation is immune to the forces of destruction, and none can defeat these threats alone.

Therefore, we must work together. The United States is working with Thailand to ease the toll that economic growth has taken on your environment. Many American environmental companies are working here for a healthier future not only in Thailand but beyond your borders. Our Embassy here is our regional headquarters for working on issues like air pollution and climate change throughout the area. Thailand is helping to lead the way. Recently you became the first developing nation to ban the production and import of refrigerators with ozone-destroying CFC's, and I thank you for that.

We are also working with Thailand to help stop the terrible AIDS epidemic, now spreading faster in Asia than in any other region of the world. Again, Thailand stands on the very frontlines, setting a strong example in promoting AIDS prevention. But even with declining rates of infection, the public health problem is enormous. We in America will do our part by promoting dramatic increases in research and development of new drugs. I am happy to say that in our country in the last 4 years the average life expectancy for those with HIV and AIDS has more than doubled. We will continue to do our part, but you must continue to work as only you can here, as well.

The United States Agency for International Development helped to launch the Thai Women of Tomorrow Project to assist young women in finding better prospects than the prostitution that puts their lives at risk. The First Lady visited that project the day before yesterday when she traveled to Chiang Mai to see the project started by faculty members at Chiang Mai University. Of course, this is important to try to turn. these young women and their families away from destructive life habits. But as the First Lady has said all over the world, it is not enough to protect women and girls from those who would exploit them; we must all work together to open wide the positive doors of opportunity so that

every person in every free society can contribute and share in its progress.

Our cooperation is nowhere more essential than in the fight against the increasingly interconnected and global forces of organized crime. For left unchecked, these criminal conglomerates, multinational masters of the underworld, will distort free economies, derail fragile democracies, debilitate our societies with corruption and violence and drugs.

Thailand and the United States are close and committed partners in the fight against drugs. We cannot afford to rest in the struggle, for the lives of too many millions of our young people are at stake. Thailand is setting a strong example for other nations. With the help of Their Majesties, the King and Queen, you have helped to give farmers the opportunity to give up the cultivation of opium in favor of other more productive crops. You have drafted money laundering legislation which we hope will soon be passed. You have helped to deter drug trafficking through your country by toughening your northern border patrols.

And our extensive cooperation in law enforcement is clearly paying off. In 1994, Operation Tiger Trap dealt a crippling blow to a major trafficking network in Burma, enabling the arrest of 14 drug kingpins, 2 of whom have now been extradited to the United States. In all your work in this area, Thailand is sending a clear signal to drug lords: We will fight you; we are determined to stop you. And America has a clear signal to Thailand: We will stand with you all the way. On behalf of General Barry McCaffrey, who leads our Nation's antidrug effort and who is with me today, and all those children whose lives we are helping to save, I thank the Thai Government and the people of Thailand for moving away from the scourge of narcotics.

We know we must do more to fight illegal drugs at the source. Burma has long been the world's number one producer of opium and heroin and now is also making methamphetamines. The role of drugs in Burma's economic and political life and the regime's refusal to honor its own pledge to move to multiparty democracy are really two sides of the same coin, for both represent the absence of the rule of law. Every nation has an interest in promoting true political dialog in Burma, a dialog that will lead to a real fight against crime, corruption, and narcotics and a government more acceptable to its people.

Whether we are fighting drugs, combating AIDS, trying to open bright new futures for our children, or working to protect the planet we share, Thailand and the United States are making our partnership work for our people, for we both know we have much more to gain from standing together than by going it alone. And we both appreciate how much can be achieved when dialog and democracy are the lifeblood of two nations' relations with each other, when policies are made through consensus, not coercion, and when people everywhere are given the tools and the chance to make the most of their own lives.

Working together, the United States and Thailand can help lead the way to an Asia-Pacific region in which economic success and greater freedom advance together and support one another, a region in which growing opportunity is matched and strengthened by increasing freedom, stability, and security.

We still have challenges to meet. We still have opportunities to seize. We still have much to learn from one another. But I am confident we will do all these things, because we know that by working together and working with others we can build a Pacific community based on shared interests, shared values, and shared dreams. It is my great honor, therefore, to be here today to reaffirm America's enduring engagement in the Asia-Pacific and our lasting and proud friendship with Thailand.

Thank you very much.

[At this point, the degree of Doctor of Economics was conferred upon the President.]

The President. Thank you very much. Let me just briefly say that - first, to the distinguished officials of the university who voted this degree, I thank you very much. When I heard the president reading the degree citation, I have to tell you what I was thinking was I wish that they had made that available to the voters in my country before the last election. [Laughter] But I thank him for it very much.

I understand that in many quarters this great university, Chulalongkorn, is known as the Harvard of Thailand. Now, I never made it to Harvard - [laughter] - but if I had to choose, I feel so thoroughly elevated today in my wonderful robes and with my degree, I prefer to have been awarded the degree here. And I thank you. I think every time I go back now to my wonderful friends in Massachusetts and at Harvard, I will always - at least a part of me will always think of Harvard as the Chulalongkorn of the United States. [Laughter]

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:05 p.m. in the auditorium. In his remarks, he referred to Thienchay Kiranandana, president, and Kasem Suwannakul, university council chairman, Chulalongkorn University; King Phumiphon and Queen Sirikit of Thailand; and Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.