

Comparative Connections

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U.S.-Southeast Asia Relations:

U.S. Frustrated as Burma Obstructs Cyclone Relief

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Cyclone *Nargis*, which devastated Burma's Irrawaddy delta in early May killing tens of thousand and leaving 1.5 million homeless, was met with international concern and the offer of large-scale U.S. assistance via navy ships in the vicinity for the annual *Cobra Gold* exercise. Burma's junta, however, obstructed international humanitarian assistance, fearing that Western powers would use the opportunity to overthrow the generals. So, in contrast to the massive aid effort for Indonesia in the December 2004 tsunami aftermath, assistance has only trickled into Burma, and mostly controlled by the Burmese military. ASEAN, in collaboration with the UN, appealed to Burmese authorities to open the country to aid providers, but the most it has been able to accomplish is to insert 250 assessment teams into some of the hardest hit areas to survey the population's needs. U.S. aid has been limited to more than 100 *C-130* flights out of Thailand whose cargos are delivered into the hands of the Burmese military.

Cyclone Nargis

On May 3, Cyclone *Nargis* whipped through Burma's Irrawaddy delta packing 155 mph winds, the worst natural disaster to strike Southeast Asia since the December 2004 tsunami. However, in contrast to the Indonesian government at that time, which immediately welcomed international assistance for the devastated Sumatran province of Aceh, Burma's military junta denied qualified aid workers access to the stricken region for several days. Subsequently, they permitted a small number to provide emergency supplies mainly via Burma's military, which, in turn, distributed the aid to only a fraction of the 1.5 million people in need. Whereas in the aftermath of the Indonesian tsunami, the U.S. and a number of Asian donors were immediately on the scene with life-saving food, shelter, and medical attention, the Burmese authorities refused access to several U.S. Navy ships as well as a British and a French vessel with helicopters and supplies that could have been deployed to the hardest hit areas.

ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan, overcoming the Association's noninterference principle, urged the junta to grant immediate access to international relief teams as did several ASEAN political leaders and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. These pleas had little effect until May 19, when the government agreed to allow foreign assistance from ASEAN on a case-by-case basis. The junta's refusal to permit military humanitarian assistance is based on its fear that the U.S. and Great Britain would use their forces to invade Burma and overthrow its leadership – a reflection of the latter's insecurity and paranoia. In a futile attempt to reassure Burma's leaders, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on May 8 insisted that, "It should be a simple matter. It's not a matter of politics. It's a matter of a humanitarian crisis." Directors of

international aid organizations already in Burma when the cyclone struck reported that some of the foreign aid that arrived in Rangoon was being stolen, diverted, or warehoused by the Army. By early June, Adm. Timothy Keating, U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) commander, said the U.S. made “at least 15 attempts to convince the Burmese government to allow our ships, helicopters, and landing craft to provide additional disaster relief for the people of Burma.” Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej told U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates that the junta rejected foreign military help because “it feared it could be seen as an invasion.” Moreover, accepting large-scale Western assistance could be seen as an admission that the regime cannot deal with the country’s problems. Any green light for the U.S., given its support for dissident monks in last September’s anti-government protests, could further what the junta believes is a plot to overthrow the government.

U.S. aid efforts

In the aftermath of the May 3 cyclone, the U.S. Navy redeployed three amphibious ships from the *Cobra Gold* exercise in Thailand equipped with 90 tons of necessities to help at least 600,000 people per day. Washington also offered to send search-and-rescue teams and disaster relief experts. The proffered assistance included water-making and purification capability. However, U.S. *C-130s* flown to Rangoon from Bangkok constituted the only source of U.S. aid permitted by Burmese authorities, and after the first one landed on May 13, Burma’s Vice Adm. Soe Thein delivered the only formal expression of thanks given by the junta for U.S. assistance in the several weeks following the disaster.

Burma’s resistance to international aid led Washington and some of its European allies to consider requesting UN authorization for a relief mission even without the approval of the junta. This plan was dropped when it became clear that China would veto any UN Security Council resolution calling for “humanitarian intervention.” Even discussions about imposing new UN sanctions on the junta were put on hold because Western aid givers did not want to further complicate efforts to convince the regime to permit more aid.

In mid-May, the junta gave the chief of the U.S. mission in Burma, Shari Villarosa, a helicopter tour of parts of the delta accompanied by Burma’s Foreign Minister Nyon Win. Villarosa subsequently told the *Associated Press*: “It was a show. That’s what they wanted me to see.” As for her offer of more U.S. aid, the junta’s newspaper, *The New Light of Myanmar* on May 21 stated it was not acceptable because Washington wants to overthrow the government and seize the country’s oil. In a U.S. Congressional hearing on May 20, the new U.S. Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs Scott Marciel stated that if the junta did not accept large-scale assistance, it would be responsible for “a second catastrophe” of further death.

In late May, in the midst of negotiations over how much foreign aid and from whom the junta would admit, Burmese authorities extended democratic opposition leader and Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi’s house arrest for another year. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack issued a mild rebuke, saying: “It’s a sad statement about the state of political freedom in Burma.” Nevertheless, he hastened to add that Suu Kyi’s house arrest and the provision of aid to cyclone victims were separate issues and that humanitarian assistance was a high priority “in this time of extreme need in Burma.”

Frustrated by Rangoon's refusal to permit large-scale U.S. assistance, the Pacific Command pulled its four ship *USS Essex* group away from Burma's coast on June 5. However, Adm. Keating said the ships would be close enough so that they could still offer assistance "should the Burmese rulers have a change of heart." Keating also noted that several *C-130s* would remain in Thailand to assist UN and ASEAN relief efforts. By June these aircraft had completed well over 100 airlift missions to Rangoon.

Washington's continued condemnation of Burmese authorities

The day before Cyclone *Nargis* struck, President Bush ordered the Treasury Department to add to a long list of sanctions already imposed on Burma. This time assets of state-owned firms were frozen "that are major sources of funds that prop up the junta." Critics have argued, however, that there is no indication that the sanctions have had any noticeable effect on the junta's behavior. At a May 5 press conference, First Lady Laura Bush excoriated the junta for allegedly failing to provide timely warning of the approaching storm, calling it "a friendless regime" that "should step aside." A day later, President Bush signed legislation awarding the Congressional Gold Medal, the top U.S. civilian honor, to Aung San Suu Kyi. These actions probably served to convince Burma's junta that offers of U.S. aid would come with political strings. By May 9, the U.S. Senate passed a unanimous resolution demanding that Burma's rulers lift restrictions on the delivery of foreign relief.

At the late May annual Shangri-La Dialogue of Asia-Pacific defense ministers in Singapore, Secretary of Defense Gates said that Burmese authorities were guilty of "criminal neglect" for blocking large-scale international aid and that as a result, more Burmese civilians would perish. Gates also said there were no plans to use force to enter Burma for aid distribution. Without the cooperation of Burmese authorities, it would be impossible to deliver aid effectively.

Other concerns roiled Washington's relations with Burma as well. The Bush administration and Congress condemned the junta for holding its constitutional referendum on May 10 despite the cyclone's devastation and National Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe dismissed the reported 92.4 percent approval. In late May, President Bush alongside global leaders from Europe and ASEAN expressed outrage and disappointment at the junta's extension of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest. A month later Secretary of State Rice slammed the junta for backtracking on the "modest steps" it had taken – naming a liaison to meet with the Nobel Prize recipient and permission for her to meet with her National League for Democracy colleagues.

Junta reactions to the cyclone

In the immediate aftermath of Cyclone *Nargis*, Burma's military rulers underplayed its destruction and the dire straits for up to 2 million of the country's citizens. The regime was more concerned about its constitutional referendum that formalized military control than providing for its beleaguered population. Refugees were forced to leave schools and temples so that these structures could be used as polling stations. Allegations by aid personnel in Burma when the cyclone hit included that names of foreign donors were removed from supplies and replaced by

those of the junta's leaders. Some aid was actually pilfered by the military and high-energy biscuits were reportedly taken by the army and substituted with low-quality cookies.

By the end of May, the junta was claiming that the emergency relief phase of the disaster was over and that the country had enough rice – clearly untrue; hundreds of thousands had still not been reached. Instead, the government appealed for \$11 billion in reconstruction aid. Donor countries ignored this outrageous request and insisted that the more than \$150 million they offered would be contingent on greater access to the populations in need. The junta responded by criticizing countries for maintaining sanctions on the regime despite the devastation. *The New Light of Myanmar* asked sarcastically: “Do such countries really have humanitarian spirit?”

In June, as international aid workers began to receive visas, they found they could only travel with the permission of military liaison officers, who gave conflicting signals on what was permissible, thus obstructing coordinated assistance. The junta fears losing control over foreign aid activities because the public would see it as an admission that the government cannot solve the problem. By mid-June, ASEAN stated that it had over 250 assessment teams in the delta and around Rangoon that were scheduled to report to an ASEAN roundtable in Rangoon on June 24.

ASEAN's role

The cyclone devastation of a member became a test of ASEAN's ability to assist one of its own and to mediate between the xenophobic junta and external aid givers. New ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan seized the moment by ignoring the organization's non-interference principle and urging the junta to grant immediate access to international relief teams. Singapore and Thailand were among the first countries permitted by the junta to provide aid. In fact, ASEAN had created a regional agreement in 2005 after the Indian Ocean tsunami on disaster management and emergency response.

On May 12, the ASEAN Secretariat, the World Bank, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs met to discuss relief efforts and how best to support the ASEAN-led “Coalition of Mercy.” Burmese authorities agreed to an ASEAN Emergency Rapid Assessment Team to determine the critical needs of the population, though its scheduled full report for mid-July suggests it is somewhat less than critical or rapid. A pledging conference took place in Rangoon on May 25, though the junta made clear that only medical teams exclusively from ASEAN states would be given preferential access. However, ASEAN's capacity to provide urgent medical aid and prevent a public health catastrophe is questionable.

Secretary General Surin acknowledged a gap between what the donor countries believed to be a continued need for emergency aid and access to the most devastated region in the delta and the regime's insistence that the emergency phase of cyclone relief was over and that the donors should focus on providing billions of dollars for reconstruction – to be given, of course, directly to the junta. Scott Marciel, the U.S. envoy for ASEAN, stated the U.S. was ready to significantly increase its relief aid but only when the junta improved access to the worst hit areas.

At the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak insisted that the militaries of ASEAN countries would be the most effective purveyors of

humanitarian aid and that Burma should be assured “that our involvement is strictly humanitarian in nature and there is no other agenda we have in mind when we sent our military into the various disaster-stricken areas in other countries in the past.” One ASEAN official interviewed in Rangoon was asked whether Burma’s military was cooperating fully with the aid effort. His reply was “How can I fully answer that without hurting the mission?”

A spin-off from this experience and the growing frequency and severity of natural disasters has been the creation of an interim ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management in Jakarta. Operations are scheduled to begin by the end of 2008.

U.S. security activities

High-level U.S. defense officials’ visits and the annual multinational *Cobra Gold* exercise characterized this quarter’s security affairs in Southeast Asia. *Cobra Gold* in Thailand directly involved armed forces from Thailand, the U.S., Japan, Indonesia, and Singapore with observers from China, India, Laos, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, South Korea, and Vietnam. This year’s exercise from May 8-21 simulated operations in support of humanitarian and disaster relief efforts. In addition to the command post portion of the exercise, for the first time Indonesian and Singaporean forces also participated in the field-training component. In recent years, *Cobra Gold* exercise scenarios have focused on humanitarian interventions rather than military confrontation. These themes have attracted more Asian participants and observers.

Defense Secretary Gates and PACOM Commander Adm. Keating visited the region in April and May. At the Singapore Shangri-La Dialogue, Secretary Gates reassured Asian defense leaders that regardless of who prevails in the upcoming U.S. elections, “the United States remains a nation with strong and enduring interests in the region.” He also expressed U.S. interest in discussions on “new security architecture” in Asia that would lead to “various forums to deal with region-specific problems...” As for Burma’s recalcitrance in permitting foreign aid for Cyclone *Nargis* victims, Secretary Gates contrasted Indonesia’s openness after the December 2004 tsunami and expressed hope that ASEAN would develop “a mechanism that can help international assistance reach those who need it.” Gates reiterated the need for the peaceful resolution of competing South China Sea territorial claims that avoid “pressure tactics” – a veiled reference to China’s claims.

Adm. Keating visited Southeast Asia in April. In Brunei and Indonesia he stressed the importance of multilateral exercises and counterterrorism intelligence cooperation. He also expressed concern about China’s growing military capabilities to Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. U.S. officials are generally pleased at the progress Southeast Asia has made in containing militant Islamic terrorism. The Pentagon recently awarded the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia \$27 million for coastal surveillance stations equipped with radar, heat-detecting cameras, and computers to disrupt terrorists plying the Sulawesi sea-lanes. In collaboration with the Australian Federal Police, the FBI is enhancing Indonesian police monitoring capabilities and U.S. specialists are helping to train Indonesian lawyers, prosecutors, and judges.

U.S. ambassador for ASEAN affairs

In mid-April, the U.S. became the first country external to ASEAN to appoint an ambassador for ASEAN affairs – Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Scott Marciel, who will remain resident in Washington. ASEAN Secretary General Surin, who praised the move as recognition that ASEAN is the premier regional organization in Southeast Asia, welcomed the announcement. Marciel pledged continued U.S. support for capacity building in the ASEAN Secretariat to assist in the increased workload that will come when (and if) ASEAN's new Charter is ratified. Under the Charter, all ASEAN members will appoint permanent representatives to form a Committee of Permanent Representatives in Jakarta.

Aid and controversy in Philippine-U.S. relations

U.S. economic and military aid this quarter continued to focus on the southern Philippines. In mid-June, U.S. Agency for International Development pledged \$2.5 million for the construction of new classrooms and rehabilitation of old school buildings in Mindanao. Two weeks earlier the U.S. Department of Defense pledged \$15.5 million to fund a Philippine Navy plan to install high-frequency radio equipment along the country's southern maritime borders of the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas to monitor shipping lanes and fishing areas that are also home to private gangs and radical Islamists who move between Indonesia and the southern Philippines. In fiscal 2007, the U.S. allocated about \$60 million to help the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia tighten their borders against movement of weapons, contraband, and militants. In early June 2008, Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited Mindanao and promised continued assistance to the Philippine military in its anti-terrorist campaign. Currently, approximately 300 U.S. troops are in the southern Philippines to train local forces in their quest to hunt down the Abu Sayyaf. The U.S. troops have also provided unaccompanied aerial vehicles and satellite imagery to track southern militants.

The annual State Department Report on Freedom and Democracy once again gave the Philippines a mixed assessment. Released in early June, the report stated the Philippine government "generally respected human rights of its citizens." Nevertheless, "there continued to be serious problems in certain areas, particularly extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances. Moreover, the country remains vulnerable to political turmoil, recurring extra-constitutional attempts to resolve leadership crises, and concerns about the credibility of elections. Added to these are continued corruption and weak rule of law. On the positive side, the report acknowledged generally free elections, high voter turnout, and efforts by the central government to reduce extrajudicial killings and disappearances.

On June 13, in an unusual case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against Philippine human rights victims of the Marcos era in a dispute over \$35 million held in a U.S. brokerage account by the late dictator. Overturning a U.S. Court of Appeals decision awarding the sum to the victims, the decision was a victory for the Philippine government, which insisted that the U.S. courts were an improper venue for the disposition of the money and that the claims should be settled in Philippine courts. (Marcos and his family have been accused of stealing up to \$10 billion from the Philippines.) In arguing the case, the Philippine government claimed sovereign immunity, a doctrine that bars a legal proceeding against a government without its consent. The U.S.

Supreme Court agreed with Manila. President Arroyo said the government would use the funds to finance its rural anti-poverty program to help poor farmers acquire their own land. Lawyers for the claimants warned that Washington was turning the money over to a government notorious for corruption.

On the anti-terrorism front, the State Department on June 17 added another Philippine group to its list of terrorist organizations: the Rajah Solamin Movement (RSM). Following a similar UN Security Council designation made on June 4 that the RSM is linked to Al Qaeda, the State Department accused the group formed in 2002 of involvement in a number of bombings in the Philippines and linkages to Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiya. RSM members were involved in the Philippines' worst terrorist incident, the Feb. 2004 bombing of Super Ferry 14, resulting in the loss of 116 lives.

Militant activity cut short the humanitarian visit of the *USNS Mercy* hospital ship to the southern Philippines. On June 9, while on a routine flight supporting its medical mission, one of the ship's helicopters was fired on. The ship subsequently left Mindanao early and sailed to Samar Province in the central Philippines to continue its mission.

Finally, on a 10-day late June state visit to the U.S., President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo met presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama. In talks with President Bush, she expressed hope for U.S. implementation of a Philippine veterans equity bill that passed the U.S. Senate 96-1, giving pension benefits to 18,000 Filipino soldiers who fought alongside U.S. forces in World War II. The legislation is currently before the U.S. House of Representatives.

U.S. supports Indonesia's military

In a major Asia policy address on June 18 at The Heritage Foundation, Indonesia was the only Southeast Asian country mentioned by Secretary of State Rice when she referred to it as an emerging democratic power with which the U.S. has "new, deeper relations." On April 10, USPACOM Commander Adm. Keating on a visit to Jakarta praised the Indonesian military's (TNI) respect for human rights and its performance as part of the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon. Adm. Keating noted that under a 2007 cooperation agreement, Washington has offered 138 programs in Indonesia for the TNI divided into training and exercises, logistics, communications and intelligence, high level visits, and education. He stressed that USPACOM particularly wanted to help the Indonesian Navy build capacity to monitor its territorial waters.

Although Secretary of Defense Gates had offered to sell *F-16s* to Indonesia when he visited in February, Defense Minister Juwono Sudharsono told Adm. Keating that the TNI did not have sufficient funds to make the purchase. Left unstated is Indonesia's questioning of Washington's reliability as a defense equipment supplier since for many years it had embargoed military sales because of Indonesian armed forces human rights violations.

In conflict over constitutionally enshrined freedom of religion, the radical hard-line Islamic Defenders Front attacked a June 1 rally of moderate Indonesians advocating protection for the minority Ahmadiyah Islamic sect. President Yudhoyono condemned the violence, and the U.S. Embassy in Indonesia urged the government to "continue to uphold freedom of religion for all its

citizens...” Communal violence sporadically occurs in eastern Indonesia, including Papua, although until the recent anti-Ahmadiyah riot, Jakarta has been relatively calm.

Economic relations and human rights concerns in Vietnam

Vietnam and the U.S. hold an annual human rights dialogue. On May 30 in Hanoi, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights David Kramer raised the arrest of two Vietnamese journalists who reported on a major corruption scandal. Kramer emphasized that journalists needed to be able to report without concern for their safety or “for being arrested every time they report on a sensitive matter” – in this case officials embezzling funds in the Transport Ministry.

Despite continued human rights violations, overall U.S.-Vietnam relations have been positive. From June 23-26, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung paid an official visit to Washington DC that celebrated burgeoning economic relations. The U.S. has become Vietnam’s largest export market and its fifth largest investor with an accumulated \$5.5 billion. Cooperation agreements have been signed on education, science and technology, health care, and labor. Washington has granted scholarships to college-bound students coming to the U.S. for science and technology. The Bush administration is interested in helping to improve Vietnam’s administrative practices as a way of encouraging additional U.S. investment.

The U.S. hospital ship *USNS Mercy* docked near Cam Ranh Bay on June 20, planning to treat hundreds of patients during a 10-day stay. The U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission John Alose described the medical ship’s visit as part of a U.S. effort “to build capacity to perhaps be able to respond to a natural disaster in the future...” As part of a medical aid project, Cindy McCain, wife of the Republican presidential candidate, came to Vietnam to visit the charity Operation Smile, which performs reconstructive surgery on children with facial deformities. Mrs. McCain is a board member of the charity.

Looking forward: Is the Burma cyclone the test for ASEAN?

Has ASEAN finally come of age in its efforts to provide aid in the wake of Cyclone *Nargis*? Washington expressed confidence in the Association’s future when in April it became the first external country to appoint an ambassador for ASEAN affairs. Despite the Burmese junta’s roadblocks preventing foreign aid from reaching those in need, ASEAN in collaboration with the UN was able to insert 250 assessment teams into the south to begin a village-by-village survey to determine how much food, water, and shelter are needed. Nevertheless, despite ASEAN’s promise to create an arrangement prepared to provide emergency aid in the event of national disasters following the December 2004 tsunami, in fact, no such arrangement exists. ASEAN was not prepared to send experts or equipment when the cyclone struck. Individual countries such as Thailand and Singapore were the first ASEAN states to proffer support. Those on site who were prepared to provide massive assistance via navy ships – the U.S., the UK, and France – were refused access by the junta.

ASEAN is scheduled to present a detailed report on Burma’s situation in mid-July, more than two months after the cyclone and when its aftermath will have already taken a devastating toll on life, health, and future rice crops. ASEAN Secretary General Surin placed the best possible face

on all of this: “We have been able to establish a space, a humanitarian space, however small to engage with the Myanmar authorities.” At a more recent one-day ASEAN workshop, he said that ASEAN has shown it is up to the responsibility placed on it, that the new ASEAN was “baptized by Cyclone *Nargis*.” Critics are less sanguine: the junta has returned to its old oppressive ways, and some say that ASEAN allowed itself to be used by the generals to provide the semblance of a positive response to the international community in order to escape international condemnation.

Washington should stand by its commitment to help the ASEAN Secretariat enhance its administrative capabilities. If the new ASEAN Charter is ratified and the ASEAN social, economic, and security communities follow, Washington will be in a position to contribute to the development of Southeast Asia’s next organizational generation – an important foreign policy opportunity for the forthcoming U.S. administration.

Chronology of U.S.-Southeast Asian Relations April - June 2008

April 1, 2008: A State Department spokesman accuses Burma’s ruling military junta of continuing “a climate of fear and repression” in arresting opposition activists.

April 6-7, 2008: Secretary Hill visits East Timor and praises the fledgling state’s ability to cope with the recent assassination attempts on President Jose Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao.

April 8, 2008: Secretary Hill meets with his North Korean counterpart in Singapore.

April 8-9, 2008: U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) Commander Adm. Timothy Keating visits Brunei and discusses anti-terrorist cooperation.

April 9, 2008: U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Kristie Kenney pledges U.S. rice exports to the Philippines to ensure supplies amid soaring commodity prices.

April 10, 2008: USPACOM Commander Adm. Keating visits Indonesia and praises the latter’s military peacekeepers in the Lebanon UN force.

April 11, 2008: Singapore Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong meets President Bush in the White House. The president describes Singapore as “a very strong ally” on the global war on terror.

April 11, 2008: The U.S. appoints Scott Marciel as the first U.S. ambassador for ASEAN affairs. He also serves as deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific.

April 24, 2008: The U.S. Senate votes to award Aung San Suu Kyi the Congressional Gold Medal. The bill, which was approved by the House of Representatives December 2007, is passed unopposed in the Senate.

April 28, 2008: The Vietnamese government announces that it will end an adoption agreement with the U.S. amid accusations of corruption. A recent report from the U.S. embassy in Hanoi cited cases in which children had allegedly been sold and families pressured to give up their babies. Vietnam dismisses the claims as unfair.

April 29, 2008: President Bush issues executive order that instructs the Treasury to freeze the assets of Burmese “state-owned companies that are major sources of funds that prop up the junta.” The sanctions target companies and industries that produce timber, pearls, and gems.

May 3, 2008: Tropical Cyclone *Nargis* strikes Burma, devastating much of the fertile Irrawaddy River delta and the nation’s major city, Rangoon.

May 3, 2008: ASEAN trade ministers agree to help each other during the global food crisis and to take measures to maintain the stability of rice prices and boost production.

May 8, 2008: U.S. Secretary of State Rice says that Burma should consider foreign disaster relief as humanitarian and not political intervention.

May 8, 2008: After a two-day delay, Burma allows the first aircraft load of UN-sponsored relief goods for victims of Cyclone *Nargis* into the country. However, workers from several international aid agencies are still not given visas to enter the country.

May 8-21: U.S. and Thai troops stage *Cobra Gold*. This year’s annual joint military exercise takes place in northern Thailand, emphasizing peacekeeping and includes over 5,000 Thai and 6,000 U.S. forces plus small contingents from Singapore, Indonesia, and Japan.

May 9, 2008: The U.S. head of mission in Burma says the country’s death toll could go to 100,000 from the cyclone and its aftermath.

May 9, 2008: Secretary of State Rice urges Burma’s military government to admit disaster assistance from the international community.

May 10, 2008: Burma’s junta opens the polls for a referendum on a new constitution, which it says will pave the way for democratic elections in 2010. Pro-democracy campaigners say the ballot will be rigged and accuse the generals of trying to prolong their reign.

May 10, 2008: The U.S. Ambassador to Thailand says that a U.S. disaster relief team is waiting in Thailand for visas to Burma.

May 12, 2008: The White House announces an additional \$13 million in aid to Burma for food and logistical assistance as cyclone relief.

May 12, 2008: State Department officials state they are concerned that international relief goods are being sold by the junta on the local black market.

May 12-13, 2008: Adm. Keating is on board the first U.S. relief flight to Rangoon, the first time in years a USPACOM commander has entered Burma. On the 13th, two more U.S. relief flights are permitted to land in Rangoon.

May 14, 2008: U.S. National Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe dismisses the Burmese constitution referendum, which the regime claims received a 92.4 percent approval.

May 16, 2008: An additional four *C-130* cargo planes land in Burma, the Rangoon authorities now permitting daily relief flights, but still no visas for relief agency personnel.

May 17, 2008: Shari Villarosa, chief of the U.S. mission in Rangoon, flies over the Irrawaddy delta with Burma's foreign minister by helicopter and states: "It was a show."

May 21, 2008: U.S. ASEAN envoy Marciel tells a Congressional hearing that swift aid access to cyclone-devastated areas in Burma is more important than the fundraising conference requested by the ruling junta.

May 21, 2008: Burma's government mouthpiece, *The New Light of Myanmar*, states that foreign donors are a greater threat than the cyclone and that the U.S. ships could be used to overthrow the government.

May 23, 2008: Fifty U.S. military cargo flights have landed in Rangoon by this date. No other locations have been served.

May 24, 2008: Burma's military rulers say foreign aid workers will be given visas to deliver assistance, but foreign military equipment and personnel are still prohibited. Only 25 percent of those in need have received any aid.

May 25, 2008: U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN Marciel states the U.S. is prepared to offer more than the \$20.5 million in aid already donated, contingent on access to the worst hit areas.

May 27, 2008: President Bush expresses outrage at Burma's military junta's decision to extend Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest for another year.

May 29, 2008: U.S. chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in an Indonesian visit offers to resume joint exercises between the two countries' special forces that had been halted for several years.

May 30, 2008: The U.S. Navy hospital ship *USNS Mercy* begins a humanitarian medical service deployment in Indonesia.

May 31, 2008: At the Singapore Shangri-La Dialogue, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates obliquely warns China not to pressure Southeast Asian claimants to South China Sea resources in Beijing's quest for energy and says the U.S. will play an "enduring role" in Asia. Gates accuses Burma's junta of "criminal neglect" in blocking large-scale international aid for cyclone victims and praises Malaysia for its role in protecting the Malacca Strait from piracy and terrorism.

June 2, 2008: In Bangkok, Secretary Gates expresses U.S. support for Thailand's democratically elected government and says Washington would frown on any military coup attempt.

June 2, 2008: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen visits Mindanao for the *Balikitan* exercises and meets Philippine Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Alexander Yano.

June 2, 2008: Restoring military aid to Cambodia after a 10-year hiatus, the U.S. gives 31 used trucks to the country's military.

June 3, 2008: The U.S. agrees to provide the Philippines with \$15.5 million to help guard its southern maritime border against pirates, smugglers, and terrorists.

June 5, 2008: U.S. Navy ships loaded with food, water, and medical supplies, after weeks of waiting, leave the area after the Burma government refused to permit them access.

June 5, 2008: U.S. *C-130s* have delivered more than 2 million pounds of emergency relief supplies from Thailand to Rangoon by this date.

June 9, 2008: U.S. Attorney General Michael Mukasey in Jakarta offers Washington's support for the establishment of an Indonesian anti-corruption task force.

June 11, 2008: A U.S. Navy helicopter from the medical ship *USNS Mercy* is hit by gunfire while on a humanitarian mission in Mindanao. Subsequently, the *Mercy* curtails its humanitarian mission and leaves for its next stop in the central part of the island country.

June 11, 2008: The U.S. State Department backs the conclusion of a UN Human Rights Monitor that Burma's draft constitution vote was far from credible and that political prisoners were being held in "appalling" conditions.

June 13, 2008: The U.S. Supreme Court blocks the recovery of \$35 million held by a U.S. brokerage firm for over 9,500 human rights victims of the Marcos era in the Philippines.

June 17, 2008: The U.S. State Department declares the Philippine's Rajah Solamin Movement to be a terrorist group linked to Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiya.

June 19, 2008: Secretary of State Rice accuses the Burmese junta of backtracking on even the "modest steps" it had promised to meet regularly with Aung San Suu Kyi and to permit her to meet with her NLD colleagues.

June 20-30, 2008: The U.S. hospital ship *USNS Mercy* visits Cam Ranh Bay Vietnam for a 10-day stay, treating hundreds of patients.

June 21-30, 2008: Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo visits the U.S. In addition to President Bush, she meets presidential candidates McCain and Obama.

June 23-26: Vietnam Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung visits U.S. and meets President Bush.