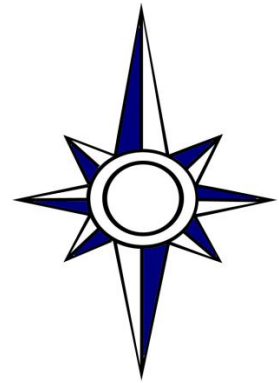


Comparative Connections

A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations



US-Southeast Asia Relations: Rebalancing

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With visits to Hawaii, Indonesia, Australia, the Philippines, and Burma, President Obama and Secretaries Clinton and Panetta demonstrated a renewed US commitment to Southeast Asia despite concern over a projected steep decline in the US defense budget. Southeast Asian reactions to the announcement of an increased rotation of US military assets to Australia range from ambivalence in Indonesia to enthusiastic endorsement in the Philippines and Singapore. Generally, the additional US forces are seen as evidence of Washington's decision to remain involved in regional security. At the East Asia Summit (EAS), Obama outlined his hope that it could serve as a high-level security conclave whose agreements would be implemented through other multilateral organizations. In visits to the Philippines and Indonesia, Clinton and Obama promised naval and air force upgrades to each, including two squadrons (24 aircraft) of refurbished *F-16C/Ds* for Jakarta. Hoping for a breakthrough in US-Burma relations, Obama sent Clinton to see whether the situation warranted the easing of US economic sanctions and if Naypyidaw was moving to meet US conditions for the restoration of full diplomatic relations.

US security shifts toward Asia

Despite the worst US economic downturn in decades and the prospect of a trillion dollar cut in defense spending over the next 10 years, the Obama administration is enhancing its security presence and commitments in Asia generally and toward Southeast Asia specifically, hoping to reassure partners and allies that the US pledge to the region remains strong and reliable. As National Security Adviser Tom Donilon said at the end of the East Asia Summit (EAS) in Bali on Nov. 19, "What we've seen in this trip is the implementation of a substantial and important reorientation of our efforts toward the challenges and opportunities in Asia on the part of the United States." This is a multidimensional enterprise involving the expansion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade pact with eight other nations so far, the creation of a US marine air and ground presence in northern Australia on a rotating basis to exercise with Australian forces, a new diplomatic initiative toward Burma's autocratic government that has shown glimmers of liberalization, and enhanced military ties with the Philippines as well as the provision of combat aircraft to Indonesia plus two new US ships to Singapore. Speaking to the Australian Parliament in Canberra, President Obama averred that "Reductions in US defense spending will not – I repeat, will not – come at the expense of the Asia-Pacific. We will preserve our unique ability to project power and preserve peace."

In her wide-ranging article on US involvement in Asia in the November issue of *Foreign Policy*, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton highlighted support for India's "Look East" efforts in Southeast Asia as well as Japan's enhanced activities, including a new trilateral

dialogue. President Obama buttressed this assessment in his Canberra speech. In an earlier October visit to Italy, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, responding to a question about America's Asian commitments, stated, "The most important thing we can do is to project our force into the Pacific – to have our carriers out there, to be able to make very clear to China that we are going to protect international rights to be able to move across the oceans freely." In this vein, the US-Australian joint statement announcing the rotation of up to 2,500 Marines to Darwin, including their aircraft, can be seen as a southern anchor to US positions from Japan and Korea in the north to regular training exercises with Southeast Asians that will now include collaboration with US and Australian partners. As National Security Council Asia Director Danny Russel stated on Nov. 16, "US and Australian Marines [will] train together ... and mentor third countries together." Singapore, Indonesia, and Vietnam are specifically mentioned among the countries that may exercise with them in addition to Washington's regular partners, Thailand and the Philippines.

In September at the Australian-US Ministerial Meeting in San Francisco, the two countries agreed that US forces would be granted additional access to three Australian bases in western Australia. The arrangement also permits the pre-positioning of US equipment. According to Australian Defense Minister Stephen Smith, the basing deal is "the single biggest change for advancement of the alliance relationship since ... the 1980s." The new access arrangements will place US Marine, Navy, and Air Force assets closer to Southeast Asia and out of range of any PRC ballistic missiles. (Fremantle port in western Australia is closer to Singapore than it is to Sydney. Darwin is only 820 km from Indonesian territory.)

Southeast Asian reactions to the new Australian-US base arrangements are mixed. Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa on Nov. 18 expressed concern that they could cause "complications" for ASEAN. He also asked for more transparency on "security scenarios" and plans for the use of Australian and US forces. Indonesian Commander-in-Chief Adm. Agus Suhartono fears that ships from Darwin will put the Indonesian archipelago in the midst of the South China Sea disputes. Some members of Indonesia's legislature wondered if the US deployments so close to Indonesia portended US involvement in Papua with respect to the labor strike at the Freeport mine (a US company). By contrast, Singapore and the Philippines have welcomed the Australian-US agreement and even Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has said he did not expect the new arrangements to upset regional security, saying "My hope is that China with the US will help establish Asia Pacific as a pillar of global growth." Along similar lines, Defense Minister Purnomo Yusugianto on Nov. 25 said that US forces in Darwin "can become our partners in joint exercises." And the Indonesian State Intelligence Agency (BIN) stated the US military presence in Australia will create no problems for Indonesia.

The East Asia Summit (EAS) and the South China Sea

Over the past few months, Washington has continued to emphasize freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and multilateral negotiations as the preferred way for resolving sovereignty disputes. To this end, US officials have insisted that the 1982 UN Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the legal foundation for these negotiations and that all disputants devise a common Code of Conduct (COC) to insure that the activities of claimant states in the South China Sea remain

peaceful. At the EAS in November, President Obama worked to fill in the gap he had identified in Asian regional architecture. While the infrastructure for the discussion of economic issues was fairly well developed through APEC, ASEAN Plus 3, the TPP, and the ASEAN Free Trade Area, political-security discussions remained underdeveloped. In a Nov. 9 press briefing, NSC Senior Director Danny Russel stated that Obama hoped “to transform the existing East Asia Summit into a venue where the leaders can not only discuss but provide guidance and leadership to other regional institutions, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the meetings of the ministerials.” The US acknowledged that ASEAN is the core for institution building in Asia and sees the EAS as an ASEAN-based expansion for regional security.

Specifically, President Obama urged the 18 nations represented at the EAS to discuss maritime security – a topic China hoped to keep off the agenda as inappropriate for a large regional gathering. In the event, 16 of the leaders in attendance spoke on the issue – only Cambodia and Burma remained silent. The first to speak were Singapore, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Manila and Hanoi have experienced tensions with China over confrontations in the South China Sea in 2011. The Southeast Asian leaders agreed that maritime disputes required a multilateral solution and that creation of a Code of Conduct would be an important first step. Obama waited for the Asian leaders to speak and then reiterated the US position that Washington had no claims in the South China Sea territorial disputes and did not take sides. However, the US has “a powerful stake in maritime security in general, and in the resolution of the South China Sea issue specifically – as a resident Pacific power, as a maritime nation, and as a guarantor of security in the Asia-Pacific region.” His description of the US as an Asian security guarantor carried particular resonance in the immediate aftermath of Washington’s forthcoming enhanced military presence in northern and western Australia.

Further on the diplomatic front, at the ASEAN Summit, Philippine President Benigno Aquino proposed a “zone of peace, freedom, friendship, and cooperation” – a rather grandiose name for an appeal to ASEAN to facilitate a meeting among all South China Sea claimants, including China. Its purpose would be to reach agreement on which areas of the SCS are in dispute and differentiate them from those that are not contested. In the latter, littoral states could engage in economic activities unmolested; in the former, negotiations among the claimants under ASEAN auspices could lead to joint economic arrangements while putting sovereignty claims aside.

ASEAN’s reaction to the Philippine proposal was cool. The 2011 ASEAN chair, Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Natalegawa, said that no additional proposal should get in the way of ongoing ASEAN-China negotiations for a Code of Conduct. Under its new chair, Cambodia, the ASEAN states agreed to have a draft CoC ready for review at the July 2012 ARF meeting. To date, it appears that discussions have yet to address the tough issue of maritime security practices in overlapping EEZs. This concern has already led to confrontations between China and the Philippines and Vietnam. Manila and Hanoi have awarded petroleum exploration contracts to Exxon Mobil, Talisman Energy, Inc., Energy Forum, Plc, and ONGC Vigdesh.

US enhances military ties with the Philippines

With the weakest armed forces among the South China Sea claimants, the Philippines has set out to enhance its military capabilities as well as strengthen security ties with the US, a defense

treaty partner. A small number of US Special Forces have been in Mindanao for almost a decade, training Philippine troops in counterinsurgency and probably also providing operational help via unmanned spy drones that monitor enemy positions. In early September, Manila announced that it would increase spending to defend its South China Sea territories, particularly the area of a \$4.5 billion natural gas project operated with Shell Philippines. That project supplies half of Luzon's natural gas needs and is located 50 miles off the coast of Palawan in waters also claimed by China. The new defense appropriation – a \$118 million addition to the current budget – will purchase a new naval patrol vessel and six helicopters, all destined for service in the Palawan region. Also emphasizing the importance of the Palawan area, US and Philippine forces held their annual *PHIBLEX* exercise there with combined forces of 3,000 that included a beach assault exercise. US Marine Col. Andrew MacMannis said one of the purposes of the exercise was to familiarize Philippine marines with advanced American equipment. (The Philippine navy has one of the oldest fleets, including many World War II vessels.) China's *Global Times* displayed China's ire at the Philippine-US military drills near the Spratlys by stating that they "provide no better excuse to strike back."

In a mid-November visit to the Philippines – her second in a month – Secretary of State Clinton spoke of updating the defense treaty between the two countries. Referring to the South China Sea by the name recently given to it by the Philippine government – the West Philippine Sea – Clinton stated that "The United States does not take a position on any territorial claim because any nation has the right to assert it, but they do not have a right to pursue it through intimidation or coercion." Updating the defense treaty, according to Clinton, "will require ... greater support for external defense, particularly maritime domain awareness – defensive ones – maritime boundaries." A formal meeting involving the two countries' foreign affairs and defense secretaries to discuss these issues is scheduled for January.

Secretary Clinton also committed to bolster Philippine naval power while on board the *USS Fitzgerald* in Manila Bay with Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario. Celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Philippine-US defense treaty, a senior State Department official traveling with Clinton promised additional US support for Philippine "maritime capabilities and other aspects of expeditionary power." As a token of this pledge, Clinton assured Philippine Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin on Nov. 16 that the US would provide a second refurbished *Hamilton*-class cutter to the Philippine Navy next year. The first, renamed the *BRP Gregario del Pilar*, was deployed in November off Palawan in Philippine territorial waters. The *Hamilton*-class vessels – over 30 years old – constitute the most modern ships in the Philippine Navy.

US defense support for Indonesia

Indonesia, despite being an archipelagic country, has traditionally privileged the Army because the government's primary concern has been internal security against communist rebels, insurgent secessionists, and radical Islamists. As a result, Indonesia has had difficulty protecting its vast maritime borders from smugglers, fishery poachers, and pirates, many of whom originate in poverty-stricken fishing villages along the Sumatran and Celebes coasts. As part of the Obama administration's rebalancing strategy, the US is assisting Southeast Asian partners in developing air and naval capabilities to protect national air spaces and sea-based jurisdictions as well as strengthen collaboration with US forces in maintaining the sea lines of communication (SLOC).

In 2011, President Yudhoyono announced a 35 percent increase in Indonesia's defense budget to \$7.5 billion. In September, Indonesia agreed to joint patrols with Vietnam of their shared maritime zone and with India on the Andaman Sea approach to the Strait of Malacca. However, even with the enhanced military appropriations, it constitutes only half of the armed forces (TNI) \$14.9 billion budget request. Currently the TNI receives just 1 percent of GDP. By contrast, Malaysia spends 2.5 percent and Singapore 4.5 percent on defense. To boost Indonesian air defense capabilities, Presidents Obama and Yudhoyono announced in sideline meetings during the EAS that the US would provide two squadrons (24 aircraft) of mothballed *F-16C/D* fighter jets at no cost to Jakarta other than \$150 million to equip the aircraft with advanced avionics, weaponry, and new Pratt and Whitney engines. Delivery is reportedly scheduled for 2014. Even with the more modern *F-16s*, however, Indonesia's Air Force remains behind its Malacca Strait neighbors; Singapore deploys six squadrons of advanced *F-15SGs* and *F-16C/Ds*, while Malaysia is equipped with a squadron of *F/A18s* and a squadron each of Russian *SU-30s* and *MiG-29s*. In the longer term, Indonesia is working with South Korea to develop a next generation multi-role fighter with stealth capabilities and a range double that of the *F-16*, which is scheduled to enter service in both countries around 2025. Indonesia chose the used *F-16s* rather than buying new aircraft because the Air Force wants to have enough money to expand its fleet of Russian-made *Sukhoi* fighters. Moreover, Jakarta does not want to become overly dependent on US suppliers so that spare parts and new equipment could be withheld by Washington over the kind of political differences prevalent during the Suharto era when the US suspended military relations because of the military's human rights violations in East Timor.

President Obama also announced in Bali that the US would provide \$600 million in economic and social aid through the Millennium Challenge Corporation to support environmentally sustainable development. The focus would be on rural areas to help villages electrify through renewable energy. Agreements have also been signed on health, educational exchanges, and science and technology. Jakarta has balked, however, at joining the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade arrangement. On Nov. 18, Deputy Trade Minister Bayu Krisnamurthi said that segments of the Indonesian economy could be harmed by opening them to the kind of competition required by the TPP.

Although the US regularly praises Indonesia as a quintessential example of an Islamic democracy, Washington still expresses concerns about human rights violations and religious persecution. On Nov. 14, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom sent a letter to the White House citing a number of violent incidents attributed to Indonesian religious extremists, including attacks against Protestants, a church burning in Central Java, and a deadly attack on the minority Ahmadiyah Islamic sect. The letter urged President Obama to raise these concerns during his visit to Indonesia. The US embassy also issued a report in early November along the same lines, expressing disappointment that the central government failed to prevent abuse and discrimination against religious minorities by nonstate actors. In reply, Jakarta's Foreign Ministry said that the government under Indonesia's constitution had no authority to interfere with the legal process controlled by local jurisdictions.

President Obama did express US concern over human rights violations in Papua and urged that Indonesia hold soldiers there accountable for their actions. President Yudhoyono accepted the

need for accountability but insisted that soldiers had the right to defend themselves and others when armed groups fire on citizens and officers saying, “When our soldiers conduct self-defense, this cannot be regarded as a violation of human rights.” Yudhoyono claims that all TNI officers are instructed to pay attention to human rights.

Rebalancing in Burma

When the Obama administration assumed office in 2009, US policy on Burma was characterized by sanctions and political isolation that had been in place since the military junta invalidated the 1990 election that could have created a democratic government for the country. The military government subsequently cracked down on opposition politicians and any indication of domestic dissent. Asia specialists in the US generally agreed that the isolation and sanction policy over those 20 years had failed. It did not lead to a liberalization of the ruling junta, created tensions between Washington and ASEAN, and permitted China to dominate Burma’s external relations. Despite the sanctions, China, India, Thailand, South Korea, and other Asian countries engaged the resource-rich country so that US and European avoidance seemed increasingly irrelevant or worse, harmful to the Burmese people rather than their rulers. At first, the November 2010 National Assembly elections in Burma seemed just another junta plebiscite, although some opportunities for the political opposition were created. These were sufficient for Washington to appoint a new special envoy for Burma – Derek Mitchell – whose brief has been to determine the extent to which the Burmese regime was willing to meet US benchmarks for the removal of sanctions and the restoration of normal diplomatic relations. The benchmarks include the release of over 2,000 political prisoners, reconciliation with the political opposition and ethnic minorities, increased respect for human rights norms, and adherence to UN nonproliferation agreements, particularly with respect to North Korea and Pyongyang’s alleged nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development aid. Together, these constitute a high bar for Naypyidaw to hurdle, but progress is being made.

Over the past four months, President Thein Sein has met opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who announced in November that her National League for Democracy is officially re-registering for upcoming by-elections in which she will run for a parliamentary seat. Special Envoy Mitchell visited Burma three times and with Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell declared they are encouraged by “dramatic developments under way” A National Human Rights Commission has been formed, following a UN request to probe alleged abuses; the head of Burma’s repressive state censorship body has called for press freedom; Southeast Asian leaders have agreed to allow Burma to chair the ASEAN regional bloc in 2014; and Secretary Clinton visited in December – the first US secretary of state to do so in over 50 years. Nevertheless, Aung San Suu Kyi insists that her country remains an incomplete democracy and lacks strong democratic institutions. Human rights groups note that although the government released 200 prisoners in mid-October, almost 2,000 prisoners of conscience – jailed since 2007 – remain incarcerated. Moreover, despite cease-fire agreements, Burma’s Army continues to wage war against several of the country’s ethnic minorities. Fear persists that these reforms could still be reversed if hardline leaders within the government prevail. Nevertheless, there are other flickers of hope. For example a mid-October law permitted workers to unionize and go on strike for the first time in decades. The International Labor Organization is particularly encouraged by this change.

The Obama administration seems ambivalent about these developments. One problem is that US officials do not know how decisions are made in the secretive Burmese government, whether the nominally civilian leadership of President Thein Sein has significant authority over the traditional ruling generals. In early November, Thein Sein approved changes to a law on political parties, paving the way for Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD to become a legal contender. One change even permits the NLD to criticize or suggest changes to the constitution. The revised law also removes a provision that forbade prisoners from being party members – in effect restoring the political rights of those NLD members still incarcerated. At the EAS, President Obama, after a telephone conversation with Aung San Suu Kyi, decided to seize “what could be an historic opportunity for progress” and dispatched Secretary Clinton for a visit to Burma.

In an intensive set of meetings on Dec. 1-2, Secretary Clinton met with President Thein Sein and members of his government as well as Aung San Suu Kyi and other opposition leaders. While acknowledging that the restoration of full-scale diplomatic relations (the return of a US ambassador) and the elimination of US economic sanctions are not yet on the agenda, Clinton reiterated the well-known set of conditions for their realization. The Obama administration is cautiously optimistic about the visit's accomplishments. Clinton announced a \$1.2 million assistance package for civil society in the areas of education, health, microfinance, and land mine victims; obviously not much more than a symbolic gesture. She also declared that Washington would no longer block assistance from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. However, lifting economic sanctions can only occur with congressional endorsement and that in turn depends on further Burmese reforms. Thein Sein told Clinton before her departure that he would explore ways of releasing the remaining political prisoners – reversing an earlier government claim that there were no such prisoner designations – and that his country would henceforth uphold UN resolutions 1718 and 1874 restricting the transfer of military technology from North Korea. The government also agreed to consider signing the additional protocol to the International Atomic Energy Agency's Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement to prevent the proliferation of nuclear technology. Should these promises be kept, US-Burma relations will significantly improve, but that could be still some time away.

An Assessment

In her lengthy exposition of the Obama administration's Asia policy in the November issue of *Foreign Policy*, Secretary Clinton summed up US strengths in the region by saying that “We are the only power with a network of strong alliances in the region, no territorial ambitions, and a long record of providing for the common good. Along with our allies, we have underwritten regional security for the decades – patrolling Asia searoutes and preserving stability – and that in turn helped create the conditions for growth.”

In his address to the Australian Parliament, President Obama designated the “US presence and mission in the Asia Pacific a top priority” despite any reductions in defense spending. For Southeast Asia specifically, Obama emphasized helping allies build their own defense capacities “with more training and exercises.” None of these affirmations is particularly new. Washington has practiced this kind of engagement since World War II. It seems to be mostly a change in the emphasis, reducing a focus on land confrontations in favor of maintaining air and naval

power, while strengthening smaller countries' capacities to protect their maritime and air spaces. (Washington's sale of 24 *F-16C/Ds* to Indonesia and the provision of two ships to the Philippines are illustrative.) An increase in the presence of US forces in northern Australia close to the South China Sea, improved relations with Burma, and the expansion of membership in the TPP suggest a reassurance strategy for friends and allies even with a reduced defense budget. Whether these actions are sufficient to sustain US dominance in the Pacific remains to be seen.

Chronology of US - Southeast Asian Relations September - December 2011

Sept. 5, 2011: The aircraft carrier *USS John Stennis* visits Port Klang, Malaysia, as part of a seven-month mission to the western Pacific and South China Sea.

Sept. 6, 2011: US House of Representatives Armed Services Committee delegation visits Manila to determine how Washington can help the Philippines meet its defense needs.

Sept. 9-14, 2011: US Special Envoy to Burma Derek Mitchell visits Burma for the first time and meets officials, political opposition, and civil society members. He meets opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi at her home in Rangoon.

Sept. 13, 2011: Burma is the only Southeast Asia country included on the State Department's annual black list of states violating religious freedom.

Sept. 13-15, 2011: US Ambassador to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Richard Carlen visits Washington to help prepare for President Barack Obama's inaugural visit to the November East Asian Summit and third US-ASEAN Leaders Meeting in Bali.

Sept. 15, 2011: Burma unblocks restrictions on foreign news sites including Reuters, Democratic Voice of Burma, Voice of America, and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

Sept. 18-22, 2011: Philippine President Benigno Aquino visits the US and receives an honorary degree from Fordham University before going to the annual meeting of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and to Washington, DC.

Sept. 19, 2011: Vietnam and the US hold their second defense dialogue in Washington and sign an agreement which includes the establishment of a regular defense dialogue mechanism and cooperation in maritime security, search and rescue, studying and exchanging experience in UN peace keeping activities, and humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

Sept. 20, 2011: US Ambassador to Malaysia Paul Jones applauds Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's stated intention to abolish the country's Internal Security Act, saying this would promote greater freedom for Malaysia. The ambassador also supports the idea of a new anti-terrorism law and invited the government to seek advice from the US.

Sept. 22-23, 2011: ASEAN legal experts meet in Manila to discuss a Philippine proposal for developing a “South China Sea Peace, Freedom, Friendship and Cooperation Zone.”

Sept. 26, 2011: David Shear is sworn in as US ambassador to Vietnam.

Oct. 10, 2011: Assistant Secretary of State for Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell says that in light of “dramatic developments under way” in Burma leading to political liberalization that the US is considering some strengthening of relations and that the US will provide an all-around engagement in Asia as part of its global responsibilities.

Oct. 14, 2011: Burma’s Parliament passes legislation permitting labor union organization for the first time since the repressive 1962 Trade Unions Act.

Oct. 16-21, 2011: Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation Thomas Countryman travels to Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand to help establish an agenda for the upcoming November East Asia Summit in Bali.

Oct. 17-28, 2011: US Marines and Philippine troops engage in the 28th annual *Amphibious Landing Exercise (PHIBLEX)* joint exercise in several locations, including Palawan (for the first time) adjacent to the Spratly Islands also claimed by China.

Oct. 20, 2011: The US and Cambodian navies begin their second annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise from the port of Sihanoukville. The exercise includes a civic action component, involving a public health clinic and building water wells.

Oct. 24, 2011: US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta meets Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in Bali. Speaking to reporters, Panetta affirms US Asian alliance commitments and adds the intention to “build new partnerships ... to improve the security in that region.”

Oct. 24-25, 2011: US Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma Derek Mitchell visits Burma and meets democracy movement leader Aung San Suu Kyi, senior officials including Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin, and representatives of civil society.

Oct. 24, 2011: Paul Jones, US ambassador to Malaysia, becomes the first US ambassador to be given the honorary title of *datuk* by the Sultan of Penang state. The honorific is a signal of strengthening US-Malaysia relations.

Oct. 25-27, 2011: Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell visits Jakarta and Manila.

Nov. 1-4, 2011: Special Envoy to Burma Mitchell visits Burma accompanied by Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Michael Posner.

Nov. 11, 2011: President Yudhoyono rejects Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s allegations of human rights violations in Papua growing out of a workers’ strike at the Freeport McMoren copper mine in that province.

Nov. 13, 2011: President Yudhoyono attends the 19th APEC Leaders Meeting in Honolulu and urges greater US economic cooperation with ASEAN.

Nov. 14-19, 2011: Leaders from 18 nations gather in Bali for the sixth annual East Asia Summit that includes the US and Russia for the first time.

Nov. 15-16, 2011: Secretary Clinton visits the Philippines to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the mutual defense treaty between the two countries. She calls for its update.

Nov. 16, 2011: Secretary Clinton visits Bangkok enroute to Bali and the East Asia Summit and offers flood assistance to Thailand.

Nov. 17, 2011: Speaking with President Yudhoyono at the Bali ASEAN Summit, President Obama announces the transfer of 24 excess US *F-16s* to the Indonesian Air Force and an expansion of the Peace Corps program in the country.

Nov. 17-19, 2011: President Obama attends the ASEAN-US and East Asia Summits in Bali.

Nov.30-Dec 2, 2011: Secretary Clinton, at President Obama's behest, visits Burma to assess that country's progress toward democracy and human rights.

Dec. 8, 2011: A Thai-American, Joe Gordon, receives a 30-month jail sentence in Bangkok for *lese-majeste* (insulting the king) in a book he wrote in the US. The US Embassy has denounced the ruling as excessive and a free speech violation.

Dec. 8, 2011: US Ambassador to Indonesia Scot Marciel announces that the US will refurbish 25 *F-16* fighter aircraft at cost for the Indonesian air force.

Dec. 13, 2011: The Philippines commissions the 3,390-ton frigate *BRP Gregorio del Pilar*, an old US Coast Guard cutter, as its largest and most modern warship.