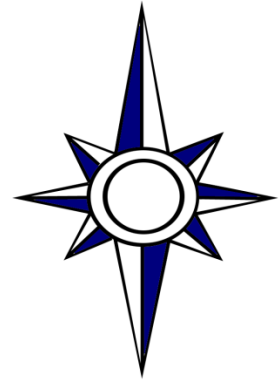


Comparative Connections

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US-Southeast Asia Relations: ASEAN Centrality?

Sheldon Simon
Arizona State University

The mid-February ASEAN-US Summit was the Obama administration's effort to show ASEAN's central role in the US rebalance to Asia. It was only partially successful. Several new business initiatives, labeled "US-ASEAN Connect," were inaugurated to link US and ASEAN entrepreneurs. However, security cooperation hardly advanced as the joint declaration reemphasized the importance of sovereignty and autonomy among ASEAN members and the sacrosanct nature of noninterference in members' affairs. While maritime security was included, the declaration did not mention US freedom of navigation (FON) patrols or the South China Sea disputes. In January, the Philippine Supreme Court cleared the way for the Philippine-US Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, under which US forces are permitted rotational access to several Philippine military bases. The US forces will train with their Philippine counterparts, enhancing interoperability. Washington plans to increase the frequency and "complexity" of FON patrols near the artificial islands built by China, and the US has begun joint patrols with Philippine ships. Washington also announced a Southeast Asian Maritime Security Initiative that includes a \$425 million multi-year appropriation for regional capacity to improve maritime domain awareness and patrols.

The US-ASEAN Sunnylands Summit: high hopes, modest achievements

In its valedictory year, the Obama administration hoped to secure its ASEAN bonds with a summit in Sunnylands, California. At the two-day event, the US president and secretary of state met most of their counterparts from the 10 ASEAN countries. As an institution, ASEAN desires to maintain its centrality in Southeast Asian security affairs, particularly with respect to South China Sea maritime disputes. Washington is prepared to provide diplomatic support for that ambition. By relying on ASEAN's leadership in regional security organizations such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+) the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, the Obama administration has been able to associate its policy preferences for rule of law, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and diplomatic consultations for the creation of a code of conduct for the South China Sea with Asia's most prominent security institutions led by ASEAN. (Even the PRC accepts ASEAN leadership in these organizations.)

The ASEAN countries are collectively the fourth largest US trading partner and US companies constitute the leading source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in ASEAN. At \$226 billion, US

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FDI has almost doubled since 2008 and it has invested more in ASEAN than have China, Japan, and South Korea combined. With a population exceeding 620 million, ASEAN's collective gross domestic product is \$2.4 trillion, the third largest in Asia after China and Japan. The US is ASEAN's fourth largest trading partner behind China, the European Union, and Japan. By inviting ASEAN's collective leadership to Sunnylands, the Obama administration hoped to strengthen regional institutions and support the liberal international order.

The summit's achievements were limited, however. The [Sunnylands Declaration](#) contained several new business initiatives, including a program called "US-ASEAN Connect" through which the US will set up "hubs" across the region to connect entrepreneurs and business people. "ASEAN Connect Centers" will be created in Jakarta, Singapore, and Bangkok to serve as points of contact for local businesses wanting to connect with US partners. Nevertheless, the declaration also stressed the importance of respecting each other's sovereignty, reflecting ASEAN reluctance to allow the US to become involved in ASEAN states' domestic affairs. Politically, the joint statement emphasized maritime security, safeguarding freedom of navigation and overflight, but the South China Sea disputes were not specifically referenced. Nor was ASEAN support for US FON operations. In fact, as William Tow of the Australian National University points out in a March 9 article in the *ISEAS Perspectives* series: "Washington ... privileges alliance politics and bilateralism over collective security as the best means for implementing crisis response in Asia, thus implicitly diluting 'ASEAN centrality'."

In a Feb. 16 news conference discussing the summit, President Obama stated that lowering tensions in the South China Sea required "a halt to further reclamation, new construction, and militarization of the disputed areas." Yet, this US position did not make it into the declaration. Obama also spoke of "disputes between claimants in the region [being] resolved peacefully through legal means such as the upcoming arbitration ruling under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea." This position was not part of the declaration either.

As for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), now awaiting ratification by signatories, discussions on the sidelines at Sunnylands revealed concerns by a number of ASEAN members that the upcoming US election and resistance in the US Congress to trade agreements might block US ratification. Without US leadership, the TPP would be stillborn.

In sum, Sunnylands showed Washington's commitment to the institutionalization of ASEAN and sent a signal to the next US president of ASEAN's importance for US security. As for the South China Sea conflicts, divisions among ASEAN states prevented inclusion in the communiqué of maritime security challenges specific to China that were advocated by the Philippines and Vietnam. Objections from Cambodia and Laos vetoed any mention. Vientiane and Phnom Penh also blocked the Philippine call to include "arbitration" as a means of settling disputes.

Philippines: EDCA approval clears the way

On Jan. 12, by a vote of 10-4, the Philippine Supreme Court cleared the way for implementation of the Philippine-US Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). Originally signed in 2014, implementation was delayed due to a legal challenge over whether the agreement was a treaty needing the concurrence of the Philippine Senate or an executive agreement that did

not. The Supreme Court ruled EDCA was an executive agreement, paving the way for the US military to station troops and equipment on a rotating basis at selected Philippine bases. At a meeting in Washington with Philippine officials that coincided with the Supreme Court decision, Secretary of State John Kerry stated: “We look forward to implementing this accord, which will increase the interoperability of our armed forces and contribute to modernization and improve our joint capacity...” The 10-year accord gives the US locations less than 500 miles from islands built by the PRC. In welcoming the Supreme Court decision, Kerry reiterated that “the United States has an ironclad commitment to the security of the Philippines.”

Philippine leaders have also praised EDCA’s promise. Sonny Solma, a spokesman for President Benigno Aquino, called EDCA a “generational” leap in defense capabilities for the Philippines, which has one of the weakest militaries in Asia. Senator Antonio Trillanes, chairman of the national defense and security committee, said the stronger US military presence “will have some psychological effect on the Chinese, knowing that the Philippines won’t be alone in this part of the world anymore.”

Under the agreement, the US will only build facilities within Philippine military bases, and no US troops, ships, or planes will be permanently deployed in the country. Much of the US effort under EDCA will be devoted to revamping the Philippine armed forces, particularly the Navy and Air Force. Until this year, the latter had only two flyable jet aircraft; the largest ship in the Navy is a second-hand US Coast Guard cutter. Last year, the Philippines asked for \$300 million in US military aid. Manila was given \$80 million by Washington, continuing to make the country the largest recipient of US military aid in Southeast Asia. On its own, the Philippines has appropriated funds to acquire a dozen *FA-50* fighter jets from South Korea, the biggest modernization project for the armed forces. The Navy is also purchasing two frigates.

Philippine opponents of the EDCA, though reluctantly acquiescing to the Supreme Court decision, argue that the agreement does not, in fact, commit the US to come to the defense of Philippine forces in the event of armed conflict with China over disputed islands or shoals. The 1951 Mutual Security Treaty refers only to an attack on Philippine territory and does not provide any assurance with respect to territories in dispute with other countries. However, Philippine media have praised EDCA’s validation. Typical was a Jan. 15 editorial in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* that extolled the public’s support for the agreement.

US Ambassador to the Philippines Philip Goldberg in early February announced that Washington has earmarked funds under EDCA for the preparation of US facilities on five Philippine bases. Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin said the initial five locations are Antonio Bautista Air Base in the western island of Palawan near the South China Sea, Basa Air Base in Pampanga, Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, Lumbia airport in Cagayan de Oro and the Mactan-Benito Ebuen Air Base in Mactan. All US deployments from these bases require Philippine approval. However, it is noteworthy that all five locations are Philippine air bases rather than naval facilities. Neither of the traditional US bases, Clark Air Base and Subic Bay, was included, though Subic Bay can be used to resupply US ships. EDCA requires the US to operate only within existing Philippine military bases and neither Subic nor Clark is a military base any more. The latter is one of the country’s busiest airports and a booming economic zone, while the former is a commercial port and industrial zone. Nevertheless, visiting the Philippines in April,

Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter said that more bases could be added to the number available for US rotations and that both Clark and Subic in some form could be used by US forces.

When the US and Philippine foreign and defense ministers met in a 2+2 meeting in January, Manila proposed joint maritime patrols on the South China Sea. In early February, Ambassador Goldberg stated that the US could consider the possibility of conducting “freedom of navigation” patrols in contested waters. *Reuters* reported in mid-April that joint patrols had begun in March and were continuing. Also in April, the two allies launched the annual *Balikatan* military exercises that have evolved from counterterrorism maneuvers against radical Islamists such as the Philippines’ Abu Sayyaf to current scenarios that involve retaking territory controlled by an adversary. There were 55 US combat aircraft involved in this year’s exercises as well as 5,000 US forces and 3,500 Filipinos, plus smaller contingents from Australia and Japan. A major purpose of the exercises is to enhance interoperability among the participants. For the first time, Secretary of Defense Carter observed a portion of the maneuvers, indicating their importance for the US rebalance to the region. During *Balikatan*, Carter also stated that a small number of US marines will remain in the Philippines on a rotational basis.

Subsequently on April 15, Secretary Carter stated that the US would position 200 pilots and crew members as well as six aircraft and three helicopters at the former Clark Air Base. Five of the aircraft will be *A-10* ground attack planes, which seem more appropriate for counterinsurgency than maritime surveillance. Another aircraft is designed to transport Special Forces – again suggesting a counterinsurgency mission. Nevertheless, the US defense secretary emphasized that flight operations would “lay the foundation for joint air patrols to complement ongoing maritime patrols.” The US also plans to establish a command-and-control center in the Philippines to coordinate the joint operations. An open question remains as to how “joint” the patrols will be since the Philippines possesses one of the weakest navies and air forces in Southeast Asia. While these particular US forces will probably rotate out of the Philippines in May, others are scheduled to replace them. Time will tell whether the next air force infusion is more appropriate for sea surveillance.

Closer defense ties with Vietnam

Vietnam-US defense ties have developed gradually in recent years. The legal underpinning for current military relations is found in the 2011 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on five areas of defense cooperation covering dialogue, exercises, and training. US Navy ships visit Vietnam’s ports and top defense officials travel to each other’s capitals. The two defense organizations cooperate in the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM+). Nevertheless, full-scale defense cooperation is restricted because of the continuation of a partial US arms embargo, Washington’s slow approval process for weapons sales, and the generally negative attitude in the US Congress toward Vietnam’s human rights record. Moreover, Hanoi’s need to balance ties between the US and China means that Vietnam cannot move entirely into the US camp. Strategically, Vietnam follows a “three no’s policy”: no foreign troops on Vietnam’s soil, no alliance with one country against another, and more generally, no alliances with foreign powers at all. However, as Vietnam specialist Carl Thayer noted in his January 2016 *Background Briefing*, since the mid-2014 Chinese deployment of an oil rig in Vietnam’s EEZ,

eight members of the Vietnam Communist Party's 14-member Politburo have visited the United States. And, Washington has pledged to help Vietnam enhance its Coast Guard.

Hanoi is also an original signatory of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement in an effort to reduce economic dependence on China. Whether Vietnam can meet the TPP's high standards for free labor unions and privatizing state-owned enterprises is problematic, however, though the US has granted Vietnam a five-year transition period plus another two years during which Washington will judge Hanoi's progress.

Cambodia: improving economic relations, continuing political problems

Of the ASEAN 10, Cambodia and Laos have been the outliers with respect to the South China Sea. Cambodia particularly has been dependent on the PRC for economic aid and political support. Prior to the Sunnylands ASEAN-US Summit, Secretary of State Kerry visited both capitals in an effort to urge ASEAN unity at the California meeting. He was unsuccessful. Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong stated his country's position on the South China Sea remained unchanged – individual countries should settle disputes among themselves without involving ASEAN, mirroring China's position that ASEAN is not a party to territorial disputes.

While the US is Cambodia's biggest trade partner with over \$3 billion in annual textile exports to the US, this has not led to any political leverage for Washington. In fact, Foreign Minister Hor Namhong said he was unhappy with the Secretary Kerry's complaint that Cambodia was siding too much with China. In a Jan. 27 commentary carried by Phnom Penh's *Sin Chew Ri Bao Online*, he complained that Kerry had "interfered in Cambodia's independence and sovereignty." The reference was probably to Kerry's statement in Phnom Penh that democratic governments must ensure that elected representatives can do their jobs "without fear of attack or arrest" – a veiled allusion to self-exiled opposition leader Sam Rainsy and others facing politically motivated charges.

Japan's growing South China Sea involvement

Under Prime Minister Abe Shinzo over the past two years, a number of legislative changes have been made that permit Japanese forces to deploy more actively in adjacent seas and to collaborate more closely with friends and allies, particularly with respect to maritime security. Japan signed a defense cooperation agreement with the Philippines early this year, permitting the transfer of military hardware to the Philippine Coast Guard. The two countries are also discussing an agreement that would enable Japanese ships and aircraft to refuel and resupply in the Philippines. In late February, Tokyo announced it is also working to conclude agreements to transfer defense equipment to Indonesia and Malaysia.

In particular, Manila is asking for sea surveillance aircraft from Japan, and, in early March an agreement was reached to lease five *TC-90* training aircraft, which will be used to patrol Philippine maritime boundaries. The Philippines is the first ASEAN country to sign such an accord with Japan. The agreement stipulates that Manila may not transfer the equipment to third countries or use it for purposes other than those specified in the document.

Japanese naval ships are also visiting Southeast Asian ports, including the Philippines and Vietnam. In April, two guided-missile destroyers and a submarine arrived first in Subic Bay and then moved on to Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay where joint drills were conducted with the Vietnam Navy. While the ships were in Vietnam, Tokyo's Defense Minister Nakatani Gen said at a news conference that he expects defense cooperation between the two countries to grow. India has also agreed to build a satellite tracking station in Ho Chi Minh City, which will bolster the country's maritime domain awareness.

Finally, in mid-March, Japan and India were in talks to upgrade the infrastructure in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the eastern Indian Ocean northwest of the Malacca Strait. This is part of a broader Tokyo plan to enhance India's connectivity to Japan and ASEAN. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are an ideal location to track ship movements into and out of the Malacca Strait.

Freedom of navigation patrols broadened

Although Tokyo does not participate directly in "freedom of navigation" patrols directly, it has been helping Southeast Asian navies beef up their security capabilities. Japan is providing coastal patrol craft to the Philippines and Vietnam and offering exchanges and training to a number of ASEAN states' armed forces. In other words, Japan is helping ASEAN states to build their own naval capacities to participate in these kinds of patrols should they choose to do so.

Meanwhile, in late January the head of the US Pacific Command in a speech at CSIS in Washington reiterated that "freedom of navigation [is] a matter of fundamental principle" to the United States and that there will be more operations in the South China Sea that will become more complex. In mid-March, US Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson also stated that the US would welcome the participation of other countries in joint patrols. Additionally US Pacific Air Forces Commander Gen. Lori Robinson in Canberra stated that the Air Force would also fly daily patrols over the South China Sea. On Feb. 22, Commander of the US 7th Fleet Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin urged Australia to carry out its own FON patrols in those waters.

However, in April, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunsford acknowledged that "while our exercise of freedom of navigation provides some assurance to our allies and partners, it hasn't stopped the Chinese from developing military capabilities in the South China Sea, to include on territories where there is a contested claim of sovereignty."

Persistent Thai-US tensions

Thai-US political relations have been constrained since the 2014 armed forces coup. Military relations have been particularly affected, including a US embargo on the sale of military equipment. The one remaining significant military relationship is the annual *Cobra Gold* multi-nation joint military exercise, which held its 35th iteration in February. This year over 8,500 personnel participated with 3,600 from the US, a reduced number similar to last year. Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea were also involved and an additional 21 countries sent observers. US Ambassador to Thailand Glyn Davies, at the exercise's opening ceremony, reiterated Washington's call for free elections in Thailand and the restoration of democratic

governance, stating that while the US-Thai partnership remains “deep and broad,” only with a “strengthened, sustainable democratic system,” can the alliance “reach its full potential.”

A 1961 US law requires the United States to cut aid to any country when the “duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup or decree.” Currently, Washington has suspended \$4.7 million in security-related aid. Similar to last year’s *Cobra Gold*, the emphasis was on humanitarian assistance. Although there was a live-fire exercise, there was no scenario involving storming a beach or liberating an area controlled by a hostile power. Some Thai commentators have accused Washington of using a “double standard” that holds Thailand to a higher level of democratic governance than other countries to which the US supplies military assistance, mentioning, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and even Vietnam.

In April, the US State Department criticized a new Thai order giving the Army police-like powers to arrest and detain civilians. The Thai junta justified the decision as a way for soldiers to support police efforts to crack down on “influential criminal figures.” At a Bali press conference on March 21, Assistant Secretary of State for Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel expressed “worry ... that the country is not being unified, that there are remaining divisions and polarization within Thailand that raise the question of whether...even after democracy is restored, the country can be fully united behind a single government....”

Looking ahead: America’s new maritime security initiative for Southeast Asia

On April 2, writing in *The Diplomat*, Prashanth Paraneswaran assessed the Obama administration’s legacy for its rebalance efforts in Southeast Asia: the Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative (MSI). Originating in the US Senate Armed Services Committee led by John McCain, the concept was first publicly announced by Defense Secretary Carter at the June 2015 Shangri-La Dialogue. MSI has been officially incorporated into Department of Defense plans, and the Congress has begun the process of authorizing \$425 million for maritime capacity building by Southeast Asian countries. More than \$250 million has been allocated through 2016. Its goal is to build the region’s capacity to meet a range of maritime challenges, improve maritime domain awareness (ships for patrolling, radars for monitoring), expand joint exercises, and increase officer-rank exchanges.

Even before MSI’s inauguration, the Obama administration had engaged in maritime security assistance to Southeast Asia, helping the Philippines build a national coast watch center, assisting Vietnam construct a Coast Guard training center, and enhancing the surveillance capabilities of Indonesia and Malaysia. The US is also rotating up to four littoral combat ships for extended deployments to Singapore. A particular purpose of MSI is to move toward a common operating picture of Southeast Asian waters so that littoral states will be able to share information about air and maritime activity in the South China Sea.

In Congress, the MSI has created a pool of pre-allocated Department of Defense funding drawn from existing appropriations to be administered through the Foreign Military Funding program run by the Department of State. One possible reason for the ease with which the \$425 million has been approved by Congress at a time of fiscal austerity is that as a portion of the

approximately \$600 billion DoD budget, it is considered small potatoes. As one recent former Obama administration Pentagon official put it: “The problem with MSI is that it’s ‘budget dust’ ...; you can’t do much with \$425 million.”

Within the five-year program most of the money will go to the Philippines. In 2016, \$79 million is allocated for the transfer of another retired US Coast Guard cutter that will make a total of four for the Philippine Navy. A research vessel is also being transferred. For Vietnam, \$40 million is scheduled to be allocated as well as the lifting of the US embargo on the provision of “maritime-related lethal capabilities.” Indonesia is to receive \$20 million and Malaysia \$2.5 million.

While most Southeast Asian recipients of MSI largess welcome the prospect, Indonesia has hesitated. On April 13, Jakarta’s *Merdeka* newspaper reported that Defense Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu declared that an initial US offer of \$2 million to purchase weapon systems would be declined, saying that the Indonesian government already had a sufficient budget to meet its weapons requirements. Although the amount seems trivial and would not affect future US appropriations for Indonesia, Jakarta may be sending a signal to China that although Indonesia is angry over the recent incident between the two countries’ coast guards, Jakarta is not abandoning its overall nonaligned posture toward the South China Sea.

Chronology of US - Southeast Asian Relations January – April 2016

Jan. 12, 2016. Philippine Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of the Philippine-US Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), saying the pact provides leverage to counter Chinese pressure on Philippine territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Jan. 12, 2016: Secretary of State John Kerry and Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter meet Philippine counterparts Alberto del Rosario and Voltaire Gazmin in Washington. Kerry welcomes the decision that the EDCA is constitutional. Del Rosario and Gazmin also meet Senate Armed Services Chairman and Ranking Member Senators John McCain and Jack Reed, thanking the committee for calling for a stronger US presence in the Asia-Pacific.

Jan. 18, 2016: Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken visits Myanmar, meeting key government officials and leaders of the opposition. He expresses US support for the country’s democratic transition and concern over discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities.

Jan. 21-23, 2016: Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel visits Singapore to lead the US delegation at the fourth US-Singapore Strategic Partnership. He delivers a major Asia policy address to the Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy.

Jan. 25, 2016: Secretary of State Kerry visits Laos to discuss the agenda for the mid-February ASEAN-US leaders meeting held in Sunnylands, California. He emphasizes the US Lower Mekong Initiative as beneficial for all riparian states and highlights the role of Laos as ASEAN chair for the year.

Jan. 26, 2016: Secretary Kerry visits Cambodia and discusses the UN-based trials of Khmer Rouge leaders, the country's political future, human rights, and the US-ASEAN summit.

Jan. 30, 2016: Guided-missile destroyer *USS Curtis Wilbur* passes within 12nm of Tritan Island during a freedom of navigation (FON) exercise in waters near the Paracel Islands.

Feb. 3, 2016: US Ambassador to the Philippines Phillip Goldberg states the US is open to conducting joint patrols with the Philippine Navy in disputed waters in the South China Sea.

Feb. 9, 2016: US Senate confirms Scot Marciel as the new ambassador to Myanmar (Burma).

Feb. 9-19, 2016: US and Thailand host the annual *Cobra Gold* military exercise, focusing on multilateral anti-piracy cooperation as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The scope of the exercise is scaled down as it was last year because of US disapproval of the Thai military's continued rule of the country.

Feb. 15-16, 2016: President Obama hosts the first US-ASEAN summit in the United States at Sunnylands, California. Economic and maritime security issues dominate the agenda.

Feb. 19, 2016: US business associations in Myanmar call on the US government to lift the remaining economic sanctions on the country when they expire in May, claiming the sanctions harm their ability to do business in the country.

Feb. 24, 2016: In testimony before the US House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, Adm. Harry Harris, commander of US Pacific Command (PACOM), states that the US would conduct more FON voyages and flights in the South China Sea "and will be doing them with greater complexity in the future."

March 1, 2016: In a speech in San Francisco, Secretary of Defense Carter announces that the US will spend \$425 million through 2020 for more exercises and training with Southeast Asian countries that are concerned about China's actions in the region.

March 2, 2016: US State Department criticizes the Malaysian government for freedom of the press restrictions.

March 9, 2016: Philippine Defense Secretary Gazmin welcomes deployment of the *USS John C. Stennis* carrier battle group to the South China Sea as a deterrent to Chinese provocations.

March 14-25, 2016: Cambodia and US militaries conduct seventh annual *Angkor Sentinel* humanitarian and disaster relief exercise focusing on military engineering, explosive-ordnance disposal, and leadership development. More than 150 personnel participate.

March 15, 2016: US State Department sends congratulations to Htin Kyaw, elected by parliament to be Myanmar's next president. (It is widely expected the National League for Democracy (NLD) leader Aung San Suu Kyi will actually rule from behind the scenes.)

March 17-19, 2016: Commander of US Pacific Fleet Adm. Scott Swift and Commander of US Marine Corps Forces in the Pacific Lt. Gen. John Toolan visit counterparts in Hanoi to “explore ways to bring naval forces together.”

March 18, 2016: Sixth annual US-Philippines Strategic Dialogue is held in Washington. Defense officials announce that five bases have been selected to implement the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement.

March 21, 2016: US State Department labels Myanmar’s treatment of the Rohingya minority “persecution” but says it has not reached the level of “genocide.”

April 4-16, 2016: *Balikatan* joint US-Philippine military exercises are held with 4,900 US troops and 3,773 Philippine forces participating. They are joined by a small number of Australian and Japanese personnel.

April 14, 2016: In the Philippines to observe *Balikatan* exercises, Secretary Carter announces the two countries are engaging in joint patrols in the South China Sea that began in March.

April 15, 2016: Secretary Carter announces five US Air Force aircraft and 200 personnel will remain in the Philippines after the conclusion of *Balikatan* to support joint patrols in the South China Sea.

April 15, 2016: On board the carrier *USS John Stennis*, Secretary Carter states that FON patrols are designed to “stand up for ... a rules-based order that has benefited so many for so long.”

April 20-22, 2016: Deputy Secretary of State Blinken travels to Hanoi and Jakarta. In Hanoi, he meets entrepreneurs, members of civil society, students, and government officials. He also gives a speech on US policy toward Vietnam and the Asia-Pacific region. In Jakarta, Blinken meets government officials, civil society leaders, and entrepreneurs.