Comparative Connections
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US-Southeast Asia Relations:
High-Level Attention

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The importance of Southeast Asia in the US "rebalance" to Asia was underscored by President Obama's visit to Thailand, Burma (Myanmar), and Cambodia in November, covering both bilateral relations and the region's centrality in Asian multilateralism. Secretaries Clinton and Panetta also spent time in the region, the latter reinvigorating defense ties with Thailand and linking US security interests among Australia, India, and Southeast Asia. While visiting Jakarta in September, Clinton reinforced US support for the ASEAN plan to negotiate a formal South China Sea code of conduct, endorsing the six-point principles Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa negotiated after the failed ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in July. At the East Asia Summit, the majority of ASEAN states, Japan, and the US insisted that the South China Sea appear on the agenda despite objections from Cambodia and China. Obama's visit to Myanmar occasioned the declaration of a "US-Burma partnership," though the visit was marred by violence against the Rohingya population in Rakhine (Arakan) state. Washington is also enhancing military ties with the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia as part of the "rebalance."

Southeast Asia in the Obama administration's Asia policy

Commentators on the US "rebalance" to Asia have tended to emphasize the two ends of the Asia-Pacific littoral – northeast Asia (Japan and the ROK) and more recently Australia. Yet, the Obama administration is accentuating Southeast Asia, both through bilateral relations and through the regional organizations in which ASEAN plays a central role. The region's salience was underlined by the president's first overseas trip after his reelection. From Nov. 17-20, he visited three mainland countries, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand – the first sitting US president to visit the first two. The primary purpose of the Cambodia visit was to attend an ASEAN Summit and the annual East Asian Summit (EAS).

Also in the region at the same time were Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Both were in Australia for the annual meeting of ministers (AUSMIN) and stressed the necessity of the US allies pulling their weight given newly constrained US defense budgets. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Kurt Campbell in Perth a few days before President Obama's Southeast Asia trip told the Australian press that Washington was not happy about Australian defense budget cuts, insisting that Australia must pull its weight and not become dependent on the US. (Of course, the decline in the Australian defense budget parallels the US situation.) The AUSMIN joint communiqué released on Nov. 14 highlighted the importance of the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue among Washington, Canberra, and Tokyo as well as trilateral defense exercises to enhance "air, land, and maritime cooperation" throughout east Asia. Indonesia's "strong regional leadership" in both ASEAN and the EAS was singled

out. The US and Australia pledged "to continue to work with Indonesia on increased defense cooperation." Also on defense relations, the AUSMIN partners acknowledged "India's growing regional and global role," promising "multilateral exercises to enhance Indian Ocean cooperation in maritime security…."

As for ASEAN, in a lengthy address delivered on Nov. 15 at CSIS in Washington, National Security Advisor Tom Donilon stated that the Asian rebalance was also "rebalancing within the Asia-Pacific with a renewed focus on ASEAN." He went on to cite Ernie Bower, the director of the CSIS Southeast Asia Program, who stated that President Obama's "new patterns for US engagement in Asia [have] ASEAN as its core." This could well be recognition that future Asian security issues will be debated predominantly in regional organizations with ASEAN as their central constituency and with ASEAN procedures as the *modus operandi.* Donilon also noted that although ASEAN ministerial meetings, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the Shangri-La Dialogue all placed security and strategic concerns on their agenda, only the EAS brought the region's political leaders together annually to consult.

Although the formal EAS agenda has been relatively noncontroversial – education, energy, environment, disaster management, pandemic diseases, and finance – in 2011, Washington added two new items: nonproliferation and maritime security. While China was less than enthusiastic about the US proposals, Washington not only got the topics on the EAS agenda but also managed to get 16 of the 18 leaders to reaffirm the importance of such international norms as freedom of navigation, respect for international law, and peaceful resolution of disputes – all of which are components of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Parallel to the president's Southeast Asian visits, Defense Secretary Panetta's Nov. 12-17 trip with stops in Australia, Thailand, and Cambodia served to reinforce US security commitments to the region. In Thailand, Panetta and Thai Defense Minister Sukampol Suyannathat signed a Joint Vision Statement for the Thai-US Defense Alliance, reinvigorating military ties that had weakened in the wake of the 2006 Thai military coup. Earlier, in June, in a New Delhi speech, Panetta averred that "the US will expand its military partnerships and its presence in an extended arc from East Asia into South Asia. Our defense cooperation with India is one of the linchpins of this strategy." Further mending fences during a September trip to New Zealand, Panetta announced that the US would lift restrictions on military exercises that had been imposed in 1986 when Wellington refused the US Navy access to New Zealand ports as long as the ships were not declared "nuclear free." While New Zealand is maintaining its prohibition on nuclear ships, the US is allowing New Zealand ships once again to call at US DoD and Coast Guard facilities. US Marines have also begun training in New Zealand. The New Zealand armed forces are keen to resume exercises with the US after being held in abeyance for 26 years.

US presses ASEAN States on South China Sea

US officials continue to press their ASEAN partners to emphasize their plans for a formal code of conduct in the South China Sea as the best way to resolve territorial disputes among the claimants. In a Jakarta visit in early September, Secretary of State Clinton said that a peaceful resolution of contested claims "must be resolved … by diplomatic means, based on the principles of international law and the Law of the Sea." Clinton endorsed ASEAN's six-point principles on

the South China Sea that had been reached in the aftermath of the failed ASEAN Phnom Penh summit in July through the diplomatic efforts of Indonesia's Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa. The Indonesian foreign minister warned that without a code of conduct on the South China Sea "we can be certain of more incidents and more tension for our region."

In testimony on Sept. 20 before the US Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific Affairs, Assistant Secretary of State Campbell laid out an array of dispute settlement mechanisms for the South China Sea claims, including international arbitration – although he undoubtedly knew prospects for that approach were slim to none. The main purpose of Campbell's appearance before the subcommittee was to once again make the case for the Senate to ratify UNCLOS, which provides the legal basis for global navigational rights. Any putative code of conduct would be based on UNCLOS, ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (to which Washington has acceded), and the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. In addition to navigation rights, a future code of conduct, according to Campbell, would "explore new cooperative arrangements for managing the exploitation of resources in the South China Sea … in areas of unresolved claims." While the Senate has not ratified UNCLOS, both Republican and Democratic administrations have stated that the United States will abide by its provisions.

At the November ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, the Chair – Cambodia – tried to repeat its July effort to exclude the South China Sea from regional dialogue. The Cambodian Foreign Ministry stated on Nov. 18 that Southeast Asian leaders "had decided that they will not internationalize the South China Sea from now on." Led by the Philippines, other ASEAN members disputed the Cambodia statement, obviously made at China's behest. Joining ASEAN objections to limit South China Sea discussions was Japanese Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko, who stated that blocking South China Sea debates could damage peace and stability in the region. (Japan has its own dispute with China over islands in the East China Sea.) Philippine President Benigno Aquino articulated the dominant ASEAN position succinctly: "Multilateral problems should have a multilateral solution." Directly contradicting China, which had stated there is no urgency in negotiating a code of conduct, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the EAS said he hoped ASEAN and China would begin formal talks soon that "will help manage the disputes and prevent conflict which will be bad for everyone."

Japan and India have also become actively involved in the South China Sea issue. With its concerns about China's claims to the Senkakus, Japan has begun assisting Southeast Asian coast guards and is participating in multinational naval drills in Southeast Asia. Tokyo is offering hardware and training in the region and in its biggest Southeast Asian security package yet is scheduled to provide the Philippine Coast Guard with 10 cutters worth $12 million each. According to a Nov. 27 *New York Times* article, Japanese officials have indicated they may offer a similar package to Vietnam. The Indian Navy was given the right to operate in the South China Sea soon after it was announced that Hainan Province approved laws that gave its maritime police the authority to search vessels transiting its territorial waters. India's state-run Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, has a 45 percent interest in exploration with Petro Vietnam. India Navy Adm. D. K. Joshi said his country's navy is preparing exercises to defend its rights in the region.

ASEAN: controversy over human rights and economic engagement

At its November meeting in Phnom Penh, ASEAN was expected to adopt a human rights charter – a significant feat given the variety of regimes in the group, some of which have less than sterling human rights standards. On Nov. 5, a team of international human rights organizations, including the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists and London-based Amnesty International, urged ASEAN to postpone the adoption of the draft charter because it did not meet international standards and would fail to protect rights within the region. The NGOs particularly objected to the provision that stated rights could be restricted on the grounds of "national security" and "public morality" and that the enjoyment of human rights should be "balanced" subject to "national and regional contexts" and "different cultural, religious, and historical backgrounds." These stipulations would place the ASEAN declaration outside existing human rights laws and standards in Europe, the Americas, and Africa. Moreover, UN human rights chief Nari Pillay and others criticized the absence of transparency in the drafting process and the fact that prior to the ASEAN vote, no version of the charter had been published and no international human rights groups had been consulted. The deputy director for Asia of Human Rights Watch stated: "As written, the declaration provides giant loopholes for ASEAN governments to justify abusing rights in the name of national security and local context." Washington joined the critics, though the charter was signed on Nov. 18. The Phnom Penh Statement does place ASEAN's human rights commitment under the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, though as in all such ASEAN statements, implementation is left up to each state and its legal processes. ASEAN has never been able to impose a governance structure on the region. Like many of its declarations, the new human rights sentiments seem to be more about aspirations than commitments.

While the Obama administration expressed disappointment with the manner in which the ASEAN human rights declaration was reached, the US president and the 10 ASEAN leaders welcomed the launch of the US-ASEAN Expanded Economic Engagement Initiative (E3), which is designed to expand trade and investment ties, business opportunities, and jobs in all eleven countries. The specific industries targeted will lay the groundwork for ASEAN countries to adhere to the high standards found in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which Washington is negotiating with some of the ASEAN states. Currently, ASEAN is the fourth largest export market for the US, includes two treaty allies, several emerging regional powers, and sits astride some of the world's most important trade routes. The US-ASEAN Leaders Meeting, in addition to launching E3, also raised the summit to an annual event. Further expanding its involvement in Southeast Asian maritime security, Washington announced its intention to join the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). In part, these US commitments are designed to show China that the US will sustain its high-level focus on Asia through the 21st century.

Restrictions eased on US-Myanmar relations

Honoring Aung San Suu Kyi's 17-day September visit to the US, the Obama administration announced plans to lift some import sanctions at the same time the Myanmar opposition leader urged greater economic engagement between the two countries. The announcement about the

lifting of some sanctions was made in New York in a meeting between Secretary of State Clinton and Myanmar's President Thein Sein. Lifting sanctions is a gradual process involving both the executive branch and Congress and could take some months, particularly for businesses tied to Myanmar's military. The hope is that easing trade and investment prohibitions will enable the country to create jobs and move beyond natural gas, oil, and timber as sources of economic activity. By early November, the US announced it was ready to vote in support of assistance to Myanmar at the World Bank's board meeting.

Renewed violence between the Muslim and Buddhist communities in Rakhine state on Oct. 21 threatened to derail the country's progress on human rights, especially when the government rejected an ASEAN proposal to involve the UN in a mediation effort. Myanmar's 800,000 Rohingya are seen by the government as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh even though they have lived in Myanmar for generations. The State Department condemned the violence, and the timing was particularly unpropitious for President Obama's Nov. 19 visit when he offered $170 million for a series of new US Agency for International Development projects. Several human rights organizations argued the president's trip was premature, especially with hundreds of political prisoners still behind bars, the sectarian violence in Rakhine state, and the military's continued offensive against the Kachin Independence Army in the north. In Bangkok on Nov. 18, somewhat defensively, Obama averred: "This is not an endorsement of the Burmese government." Rather it is "an acknowledgement that there is a process under way inside the country that even … two years ago nobody foresaw." President Thein Sein's office subsequently issued a statement that the government would "devise a transparent mechanism to review remaining prisoner cases" by the end of the year, the Red Cross would be allowed to resume prisoner visits, and the UN High Commission for Human Rights would be permitted to set up an office in the country. In a speech at the University of Yangon, Obama announced the creation of a "joint US-Burma partnership" to advance democratic reform with an ambitious agenda to promote transparent governance and rule of law as well as peace and reconciliation among the country's many ethnic groups, most particularly the Rohingya, of whom the riots of the last few months left more than 100,000 homeless.

Improvements were also made in strategic relations when Myanmar announced it would sign the International Atomic Energy Agency protocol that requires transparency in all its nuclear facilities and allows UN nuclear inspectors on its territory. While Myanmar's defense minister at the 2012 Singapore Shangri-La Dialogue announced that the country had abandoned all military cooperation with North Korea, this was the first time official statement that it would open the country to nuclear inspectors. Myanmar will also be invited to participate in the annual *Cobra Gold* multinational military exercise in Thailand scheduled for February 2013. Thailand has lobbied for Myanmar's participation for some time. Initially, the small contingent will be observers in the humanitarian assistance/disaster relief portion of the exercise.

The buildup of US allies in Southeast Asia – the Philippines and Thailand

One sign of the seriousness of intent in the US rebalance to Asia is whether its formal Southeast Asian allies are especially favored. For the Philippines and Thailand, this seems to be true. In late August, Washington announced it would deploy a new, powerful "X-band" early warning radar to Japan and the Philippines, giving Manila a greater overview of activities in the South

China Sea. Also this year, the US pledged to triple military assistance, deployed two nuclear-armed submarines for port calls at Subic Bay, and sent thousands of US forces for joint exercises. According to an Aug. 31 article in *Asia Times Online*, when Beijing sanctioned the Philippines by banning banana imports over a standoff at Scarborough Shoal, the US offered to buy the surplus fruit. In general, the US has increased ships visits and joint exercises with the Philippines as part of the "pivot" toward Asia.

Despite claims by Philippine human rights groups that the Aquino government has lied about continuing human rights violations to obtain an extra $13 million in US military aid, Washington appears ready to accept Manila's claim that extra-judicial killings have been suppressed, while ignoring rights groups' protests. Visiting US House of Representatives members in October accepted claims by President Aquino that the human rights situation in the Philippines had been ameliorated and that Manila was prosecuting cases of extrajudicial killings. In fact, no prosecution of these cases has occurred.

Perhaps the most important indicator of the Philippines importance to the US rebalance in Southeast Asia are the plans for Subic Bay – a natural harbor about 60 miles north of Manila that was used by the US Navy's Seventh Fleet's until 1992. Known now as the Subic Bay Freeport Zone, the port is set to host a new contingent of US ships, aircraft, and marines on a rotating basis. According to Visiting Forces Agreement Director Edilberto Adon, Subic will once again act as a support and servicing facility for the US Navy. However, as Michele Flourney, a former US defense official stated at a Nov. 29 conference at the Australia National University, Washington should be careful that its designation of the Philippines strategic importance not be used by Manila to provoke China into thinking that Washington has endorsed Philippine territorial claims in the South China Sea. The Obama administration, like its predecessors, has emphasized the importance of multilateral negotiations based on UNCLOS while not taking sides with respect to any particular claims.

The other longstanding US ally in Southeast Asia is Thailand. Burnished during Secretary of Defense Panetta's Nov. 16-17 visit and a one-day stopover on Nov.18 by President Obama, the two defense establishments signed a Joint Vision Statement for the Thai-US Defense Alliance, elevating Thailand's status to a major non-NATO ally. The goal is to revive the security arrangements that had been radically diminished in the wake of the US exit from the region in 1975. Panetta promised "an enduring presence in the Asia-Pacific" and recognized Thailand as a "regional leader." While Washington has no plans to turn U-Tapao Air Base into a US fortress, Thailand's air bases and ports have been a vital part of the US military's logistical network in Asia during both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and the Pentagon holds dozens of drills every year with Thai forces. The US is aware of Bangkok's close ties with China and sees the revitalized relationship as offering Thailand better hedging opportunities.

Indonesia-US comprehensive partnership

Since 2008, upon the initiative of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Indonesia and the US have engaged in a comprehensive partnership. Most of its activities have been in the military realm with the sale of *Apache* helicopters, Foreign Military Financing Funds to upgrade Indonesian Air Force *C-130* cargo planes, and the sale of two dozen refurbished *F-16*s. Talks

are also underway for new radar systems, drones, and training aircraft. According to a Sept. 18, 2012 CSIS Commentary, nearly 200 security engagements took place this year, involving military training, senior officials visits, exercises, and staff talks on maritime security, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief as well as the professionalization of the Indonesian armed forces.

The third annual Indonesia-US Joint Commission Meeting held on Sept. 20 in Washington focused on the more difficult areas of trade and investment and democracy promotion. Progress in these areas is important for foreign investors as well as demonstrating to other Southeast Asian leaders that the US is committed to multidimensional engagement in Southeast Asia that goes beyond balancing against China. Indonesian regulations on foreign investment have led to the country's ranking of 129 out of 185 in the World Bank's annual Ease of Doing Business Survey. These obstacles have led a number of major multinational companies to bypass Indonesia in the global supply chain for the more welcoming environment in Vietnam.

Cambodia: a human rights imbroglio

Washington's frustration with Hun Sen's Cambodia was underscored in a Nov. 15 press briefing by National Security Council Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights Samantha Power. Alluding to Hun Sen's efforts at the July ASEAN Summit to block any reference to disagreements over the South China Sea on behalf of China and to Cambodia's egregious human rights behavior, Power stated:

> All I would say about our engagement with the Cambodians on a bilateral basis is that the thrust of the message … is on the importance of free and fair elections, the end of land seizures, the protection and promotion of human rights. That's the core function of the engagement with Hun Sen. He is the host, Cambodia is the host of these important summits and these diplomatic gatherings, but our message to him on a bilateral basis is very much about the human rights abuses that are being committed within Cambodia's borders….

In late October, the Cambodian government threatened unspecified legal action against US-funded radio stations – *Voice of America* and *Radio Free Asia,* both of which broadcast in Khmer – as being anti-Cambodian and favoring opposition parties. In early November, the US-based Human Rights Watch charged that material assistance to Cambodia ended up in the hands of rights-abusing military units that have used US-donated trucks to forcibly move villagers from their land. Moreover, Human Rights Watch detailed more than 300 murders of political opponents, human rights activists, and labor leaders in Cambodia over the past 20 months.

In tense talks on Nov. 19 in Phnom Penh, President Obama spoke bluntly to Hun Sen about human rights, political prisoners, the persecution of land activists, and an unfair electoral system. In his defense, Hun Sen noted that other countries had dismantled political parties and imprisoned their politicians, but that in Cambodia people were free to join opposition parties and "do whatever they want in the framework of the law." Hun Sen went on to say that there were no political prisoners in Cambodia, only people who broke the law. Obama's talks with the Cambodian prime minister were closed to all media, including those from the US. According to

Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes, the president emphasized the need to create an independent election commission for the upcoming 2013 national polls. Obama also called upon Hun Sen to release the political prisoners and provide an environment in which opposition parties could fairly campaign. Needless to say, Cambodian media reported none of this. Hun Sen has ruled the country for decades and has demonstrated little tolerance for dissent.

No joint statement followed the talks as normally occurs with leaders who host the US president. Probably anticipating the President Obama's "woodshed" treatment of his regime, Hun Sen administered his own snub to the US. At the airport, there were no signs welcoming Obama. By contrast, the area was strewn with welcoming signs and flags for Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, who was arriving on the same day for the EAS.

Despite US distaste for the Hun Sen government, as Vannarith Chheang points out in Pacific Forum's *PacNet #80*, there is more than one variable in the relationship. The US has become Cambodia's biggest market for garments and textiles, an industry that employs 350,000. Even in the realm of defense, the two sides conduct joint training exercises in disaster relief, peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and demining operations. Two *CARAT* exercises have been held, the most recent this past October on maritime interdiction, and an annual bilateral defense dialog has been going since 2008.

An assessment

US relations with Southeast Asia fall along three dimensions (a) economic, (b) security, (c) political. The private sector is very much interested in expanding trade and investment in Southeast Asia. In 2011, US exports to ASEAN exceeded $76 billion, up 42 percent since 2009. The US has more than twice as much investment in ASEAN as it has in China. Economic activity seems to be robust. To back that activity, the US government promotes rule of law as well as trade and investment treaties such as the TPP. On the security dimension, US military forces have been training and exercising with all ASEAN counterparts for many years, bilaterally through such exercises as *CARAT* and multilaterally through exercises like *Cobra Gold*. Here the purposes include interoperability, military sales, and the development of compatible strategic understandings of the threat environment. Perhaps, the most problematic dimension is the political one because, in this category, Washington promotes its values of liberal politics and human rights. For some ASEAN governments, these are generally welcome (Indonesia, Philippines, and to a degree Thailand); for some they are tolerated (Singapore, Malaysia); for one it is too soon to tell (Myanmar), and for the three Indochinese states (Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia) they are seen as unwelcome interference in their domestic affairs. The differing dynamics of these three dimensions will continue to determine US relations with Southeast Asia – both compatibilities and contradictions.

Chronology of US - Southeast Asian Relations
September - December 2012

Sept. 2-9, 2012: The 20th Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leader's Meeting is held in Vladivostok.

Sept. 3, 2012: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visits Indonesia and says that China should start discussions with ASEAN to develop a code of conduct on the South China Sea and that the ASEAN states should present a united front in those talks.

Sept. 3, 2012: Secretary Clinton in a joint press conference with Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa supports Papua's continued inclusion in the Unitary Republic of Indonesia but condemns ongoing violence there.

Sept. 3-8, 2012: A US Navy *P-3C* surveillance aircraft joins the Philippine *Coast Watch 2012* exercise that incorporates the Philippine Coast Guard and maritime police.

Sept. 5, 2012: *Jakarta Globe Online* reports that Secretary Clinton expressed support for Indonesian mediation in Southeast Asia toward creation of a South China Sea code of conduct.

Sept. 6, 2012: Secretary Clinton becomes the first US secretary of state to visit Timor Leste (East Timor) since its independence from Indonesia 10 years ago.

Sept. 6-7, 2012: Secretary Clinton visits Brunei.

Sept. 14, 2012: Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono condemns the killing of US diplomats in Benghazi, Libya.

Sept. 14, 2012: Singapore government condemns the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi leading to the death of US Ambassador Chris Stevens and other US diplomats.

Sept. 15, 2012: Thailand sends a condolence letter to the US on the killing of the US ambassador to Libya in Benghazi.

Sept. 16, 2012: Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi leaves for a 17-day trip to the US.

Sept. 17, 2012: Hundreds of Muslim protesters burn US flags in the southern Philippine city of Marawai, triggered by a video made in the US that mocks Islam.

Sept. 17, 2012: Police fire tear gas and water cannons at hundreds of protesters around the US Embassy in Jakarta protesting the US-made video insulting Islam.

Sept. 19, 2012: Aung San Suu Kyi receives the Congressional Gold Medal and has a private meeting with President Obama.

Sept. 19, 2012: Three hundred protesters against the US-made video insulting Islam leads to the temporary closure of the US Consulate in Medan, Indonesia's third largest city.

Sept. 20, 2012: Third annual US-Indonesia Joint Commission Meeting chaired by Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is held in Washington. The US agrees to sell eight *Apache* gunship helicopters to Indonesia.

Sept. 21, 2012: The US lifts a 26-year ban on the visit of New Zealand warships to US Coast Guard and Navy bases around the world as Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta visits Wellington.

Sept. 21, 2012: The US removes sanctions against Myanmar President Thein Sein, permitting US citizens to do business with him.

Sept. 22, 2012: US Congress passes legislation supporting lending from international financial institutions to Myanmar, reversing a ban based on concerns that loans would benefit the previous military junta.

Sept. 24, 2012: The State Department says the US is "deeply troubled" by convictions of three Vietnamese bloggers who were sentenced to jail for criticizing their government – a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Sept. 24, 2012: US Pacific Fleet Commander Vice Adm. Scott Swift visits Brunei to promote defense relations. Discussions include US Navy participation in the inaugural Military Medicine and Disaster Relief Exercise next year under the auspices of the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus.

Sept. 25, 2012: Myanmar President Thein Sein arrives in New York for the annual meeting of the UN General Assembly.

Sept. 26, 2012: Meeting President Thein Sein in New York, Secretary Clinton announces that the US will begin lifting the decade-long ban on imports from Myanmar.

Sept. 26, 2012: Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra attends a dinner hosted by President Obama on the 180th anniversary of US-Thai relations. She states that Thailand is ready to cooperate with the US as a strategic partner.

Oct. 3-5, 2012: The Philippines hosts the Third ASEAN Ministers Forum in conjunction with the first expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, an affiliate of the East Asia Summit. All 18 EAS members are represented. Maritime security is a primary focus.

Oct. 4, 2012: The initial company-size rotation (200-250) of US Marines completes their deployment in Darwin, Australia. Company-size rotations are scheduled to continue through 2013. It will be several years before larger contingents up to 2,500 will be deployed.

Oct. 7, 2012: The aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* exercises with the Malaysian Navy and Air Force.

Oct. 8, 2012: Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi declares willingness to serve as president if the country's constitution is amended to permit her to become a candidate. President Thein Sein says he could accept her in that office if the people of Myanmar supported her.

Oct. 8-17, 2012: The annual joint *Philippine-US Amphibious Landing Exercise* (*Phiblex)* is held in various locations in the Philippines. Both sides state the scenarios are not directed at a China contingency, though US Marine Corps Gen. Craig Timerberlake states the training is designed "to respond to issues, [including] national security."

Oct. 10, 2012: Cambodian authorities threaten US government's *Voice of America* and *Radio Free Asia* with unspecified legal action for being anti-Cambodia and favoring opposition parties. *A VOA s*pokesman says the stations value free speech and objectivity in their broadcasts.

Oct. 15, 2012: Former Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk, 89, dies in China. His body is repatriated to Cambodia on Oct. 17.

Oct. 16-17, 2012: Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Michael Posner meets Myanmar ministers for a human rights dialogue. Aung San Suu Kyi also attends.

Oct. 18, 2012: Senior defense officials from Thailand and the US meet in Washington for US-Thailand Defense Strategic Talks.

Oct. 18, 2012: *Reuters* reports that the US, Thailand, and other participants in the annual *Cobra Gold* military exercises will invite Myanmar as an observer at the 2013 annual joint maneuvers.

Oct. 20, 2012: Off the coast of Vietnam, the aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* welcomes Vietnamese officials to witness live firing exercises.

Oct. 22-26, 2012: Cambodian and US naval forces conduct their second *Carat* exercise – the first occurring in 2010. Training covers maritime interdiction, salvage operations, and disaster response. Civic action projects on land are also scheduled.

Oct. 27, 2012: Indonesian police arrest 11 terrorist suspects who were planning to attack the US Embassy in Jakarta among other Western targets. The suspects had collected explosives and a bomb-making manual.

Oct. 28, 2012: US State Department, responding to the killing of Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine state, urges "both sides [Muslims and Buddhists] to exercise restraint and immediately halt all attacks."

Oct. 30, 2012: US State Department condemns a Vietnamese court decision sentencing two musicians to prison for writing and distributing protest songs, one of which criticized the government for not taking a harder line against China in their South China Sea disputes.

Oct. 31, 2012: A bipartisan Congressional group sends a letter to President Obama urging him to condemn human rights violations under Hun Sen in his forthcoming trip to Cambodia.

Nov. 4-14, 2012: US Marines and elements of the Brunei Land Forces conduct a *CARAT* exercise, focusing on urban training against hostile forces in buildings.

Nov. 5, 2012: US State Department issues a statement urging Laos to delay construction of a huge dam on the Lower Mekong River until environmental impacts can be assessed and the other riparian states consulted.

Nov. 13-14, 2012: Secretary of State Clinton and Defense Secretary Panetta begin an Australia-Southeast Asia visit in Perth to strengthen security relations in the region.

Nov. 15, 2012: Thailand and the US release a Joint Vision Statement for the Thai-US Defense Alliance that outlines the goals for what is described as a 21st century security partnership.

Nov. 17-20, 2012: President Obama visits Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar.

Nov. 16, 2012: Reaffirming military ties with Cambodia, Defense Secretary Panetta also deplores the Hun Sen government's continued human rights abuses.

Nov. 16, 2012: Secretary Panetta attends the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting in Siem Reap.

Nov. 16, 2012: US lifts restrictions on most imports from Myanmar prior to President Obama's visit to the country.

Nov. 16, 2012: Secretary Panetta and Thai counterpart sign a new joint defense declaration for the 21st century, the first such document since 1962.

Nov. 16-17, 2012: Secretary of State Clinton visits Singapore.

Nov. 17, 2012: President Obama visits Thailand, the first stop on his three country Southeast Asian trip.

Nov. 18, 2012: The ASEAN heads of government initial the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration – years in negotiation – stipulating the individual to be the focus of human rights, though providing each state with implementation authority based on its national situation.

Nov. 18, 2012: Myanmar naval officers visit the amphibious assault ship *USS Bonnehomme Richard* in the Andaman Sea – the first such military contacts in decades.

Nov. 18-20, 2012: The 21st ASEAN Summit, ASEAN dialogue partner meetings, the 15th ASEAN Plus 3 Summit, and the 7th East Asia Summit are held in Phnom Penh.

Nov. 19, 2012: At the US-ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, the "US-ASEAN Expanded Economic Engagement Initiative" (E3) is launched to expand trade and investment ties.

Nov. 19-20, 2012: President Obama visits Myanmar, highlighting Washington's support for the country's democratic transition. The trip is the first-ever to the country by a sitting US president.

Dec. 6, 2012: State Department officials meet monks in Mandalay to discuss the government's crackdown during the previous week on protests at the Latpadaung copper mine. They also talk about sectarian tensions in Arakan state against the Muslim Rohingyas.

Dec. 11-12, 2012: Third US-Philippine Bilateral Strategic Dialogue is held in Manila. Agreement is reached to boost US ship, aircraft, and troop rotations through the Philippines.

Dec. 18, 2012: US Ambassador to Malaysia Paul Jones presents a memento to the Malaysian Defense Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi in recognition of the humanitarian assistance provided by Malaysian personnel in Afghanistan.

Dec. 19, 2012: A senior Pentagon official states the US is poised to take "nascent steps" to train Myanmar officers in non-lethal skills such as humanitarian assistance and military medicine.