

U.S.-Southeast Asia Relations:
Elections, Unrest, and ASEAN Controversies

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While congratulating President Bush on his reelection, Southeast Asian leaders warned that the U.S. war on terror and its Middle East policy must be altered to demonstrate that the U.S. is not attacking Islam. Washington welcomed S.B. Yudhoyono's election as president of Indonesia as a vibrant demonstration of democracy and applauded his cooperation in fighting terrorism. Nonetheless, the continued U.S. arms embargo is leading Jakarta to seek military equipment from Russia, Eastern Europe, and possibly even China. Washington has also expressed concern over southern Thai Muslim deaths at the hands of the military. Indonesia and Malaysia are stepping up maritime security cooperation, while the United States offers technical assistance. Meanwhile, ASEAN struggles with Burma's abysmal human rights record and looks forward to an East Asian summit covering Northeast and Southeast Asia in 2005, a gathering that does not include the United States.

Mixed Reactions to President Bush's Reelection

Southeast Asian reactions varied to President Bush's re-election victory, primarily reflecting each country's evaluation of the U.S. war on terror and each state's desire for U.S. assistance. In the election campaign, neither candidate featured Southeast Asia, though President Bush mentioned the Philippines in the first presidential debate as a location where the United States is "helping ... to bring al-Qaeda affiliates to justice. ..." Philippine officials welcomed the president's statement, highlighting U.S. military training in the south and its civic action programs in Basilan "which was the former hotbed of the Abu Sayyaf." A prominent Thai economist, Sarasin Viraphon, voiced concern over Sen. Kerry's proposal to reduce the outsourcing of U.S. jobs, warning Southeast Asian economies could be harmed if the Kerry plan was adopted.

Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, a long-time critic of U.S. policy toward the Muslim world, urged Muslims living in the United States to vote President Bush out of office. In a hyperbolic "Open Letter to American Muslims," Mahathir accused the Bush administration of "oppression and humiliation [toward] the Muslims and their countries ... as never before in the history of Islam." In a more even-handed assessment, Singapore Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong endorsed U.S. military leadership in the war on terror but emphasized that the United States was in no position to take the

ideological lead because it is not a Muslim country. Goh went on to lament that, “there’s no clear leader amongst the Muslim countries in tackling this problem,” though he cited Turkey’s potential if it succeeds in joining the European Union as well as Malaysia under Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi. Goh concluded that from ASEAN’s point of view, the best U.S. election outcome would be a president who will continue the fight against terrorism but is also sensitive to Muslims and does not create the impression that all Muslims are suspects.

After the U.S. election, Southeast Asia’s most effusive praise came from Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo who associated her country with the U.S. “in defending the ramparts of freedom” (although all Philippine troops had been withdrawn from Iraq last July to save a kidnapped Filipino truck driver). U.S. forces continue to train and provide equipment to their Philippine counterparts in their efforts to suppress terrorists in Mindanao. Indonesia’s Foreign Ministry emphasized the high voter turnout in the United States as a successful model of democracy, noting that the two countries now “share democracy as a common trait,” a basis for future relations.

Commentators in Indonesia noted, however, that President Yudhoyono had to deal with a complex domestic political situation in which cooperation with the United States against jihadist groups in Indonesia had to be balanced to accommodate the interests of Muslim political parties that are part of the Indonesian president’s coalition. Jakarta’s ambassador to the U.S. looked forward to future cooperation in education as pledged by President Bush during his Bali visit. The ambassador also hoped that military relations with the United States would be restored since the FBI cleared the Indonesian armed forces of involvement in the killing of an American teacher in Papua. Such a change in U.S.-Indonesia military relations remains improbable, however, as long as Indonesian officers responsible for the 1999 East Timor atrocities are not convicted in Indonesian courts. The Indonesian ambassador also urged the U.S. to relax its strict visa rules so that students from Muslim countries would once again be better able to study in the United States.

In congratulating the U.S. president, Malaysian Prime Minister Badawi urged him to make a deeper commitment to resolve the Middle East crisis. He also emphasized that good relations between the two countries were the norm. Thailand promised continued cooperation in the war on global terrorism, though it has not asked for U.S. assistance to cope with Muslim unrest in the south (discussed below).

Indonesia: Democracy and Terrorism

The United States enthusiastically welcomed Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s Oct. 4 victory as president in Indonesia’s first popular election for the office. Generally peaceful and with a high voter turnout, the election was important to Washington both because it demonstrated the compatibility of Islam with democracy and because SBY’s background in national security portended a more vigorous campaign against Islamic militancy than his predecessor, Megawati Sukarnoputri. Under Megawati, Indonesia’s efforts against terrorism were uncoordinated and sporadic with military and police units

often fighting each other as much as they fought the militants. Human rights abuses drew criticism from several Western governments, including the United States.

If the Indonesian security situation improves and Yudhoyono is able to reestablish military ties with the United States, foreign direct investment – essential for the country's economic growth – may also pick up. Indonesia experienced an FDI outflow of almost \$600 million in 2003. It sorely needs more investment in factories and industry to create jobs, as nearly 40 million people, or 40 percent of Indonesia's labor force, are either jobless or underemployed. The precipitous investment drop has also resulted in Indonesia becoming a net energy importer for the first time. Investment is required to restore oil and gas field productivity.

Indonesia's new defense minister, Juwono Sudarsono, has emphasized the need to reestablish military ties with the United States, though that goal may be difficult to achieve because of Jakarta's failure to meet international demands for heavy sentences for officers guilty of human rights abuses. The United Nations charged the Indonesian military and militias under its control with the murder of 1,400 people during East Timor's 1999 independence vote. Subsequently, the U.S. Congress sharply reduced military assistance to Jakarta until Indonesia provides accountability for the atrocities.

President Yudhoyono is emphasizing Indonesia's role as a leader among Islamic moderates. Sponsoring an early December International Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation in Yogyakarta, the president urged world leaders of all religions to rise up against the scourge of terrorism and demonstrate that faith can be a force for peace. Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Confucians represented 13 Asia-Pacific countries at the conference, though Malaysia was absent from the meeting. Indonesia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Hassan Wirayuda stated that the gathering was part of a long-term effort to empower religious moderates.

Illustrative of SBY's efforts to bring Indonesian terrorists to justice is the new trial of alleged Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) spiritual leader Abu Bakar Bashir, who is now charged with possession of explosives that implicate him in the 2003 bombing of the Jakarta Marriott. Bashir and his attorneys accuse the Indonesian government of caving into pressure from the United States and Australia to convict the radical cleric. The current indictment against him claims that while at a JI training camp in the southern Philippines, Bashir read a message from Osama bin Laden calling on JI recruits to kill Americans and their allies. A problem for Indonesian prosecutors, however, is that the key witnesses against Bashir are in U.S. custody at secret locations, and the Bush administration has barred Indonesian investigators from interrogating them. One, Hambali, captured last year in Thailand, is a top JI operative and a high-level al-Qaeda member who, the U.S. claims, has told them that Bashir gave him his marching orders. It will be hard for Indonesian prosecutors to use this information unless Hambali is made available for the trial. A senior American official said the decision not to turn Hambali over to the Indonesians was made by the White House.

Several key Muslim leaders representing moderate Islam have visited Bashir in jail and protested his rearrest. They view him as a scapegoat and blame interference from the United States and Australia for his trial.

Meanwhile, President Yudhoyono has said he is willing to submit legislation to Parliament proscribing JI but only if “proof” is provided that the organization even exists. In effect, the conviction of Bashir could well be that “proof.” On the other hand, the cleric’s exoneration may further entrench the political and legal limbo that JI inhabits—its de facto terrorist operations alongside its legal invisibility. With three major terrorist attacks in Indonesia and 100 of its members incarcerated, it is almost incomprehensible that the government is still so cautious about JI’s “existence.”

The five-year hiatus in U.S. military relations with Indonesia has led Jakarta to discuss defense cooperation with both China and Russia as potential arms suppliers. A U.S. demand in late November that Indonesia suspend military officers suspected of rights violations served to further hamper efforts to rebuild military ties. The Indonesian defense minister responded that these matters “should be handled by the Indonesian courts and should not involve demands from other countries.” Moreover, if the United States continues its embargo on defense equipment, “we will have to turn to other countries and develop military relationships with them.”

At an Indonesian defense exhibition in late November, Russian defense industries were prominently represented. The chief of staff of the Indonesian armed forces stated that the military would buy more *SU-30MK* and *SU-27SK* aircraft as well as anti-aircraft systems and naval hardware. Russian small submarines, capable of patrolling shallow areas and straits, are of great interest to the Indonesian navy. For fiscal year 2005, the government has allocated \$2.3 billion for defense. In addition to Russian suppliers, a number of Eastern European companies have shown interest. Last year’s purchase of two *SU-30s* and two *MI-35* assault helicopters constituted the first purchase of Russian weapons since 1965. Critics claim, however, that much of Indonesia’s defense budget is squandered because of rampant corruption in the armed forces. These same analysts say that more than 70 percent of the military’s funds come from “off-budget” operations, including protection, extortion, illegal exploitation of natural resources, prostitution, gambling, and narcotics trafficking.

Muslim Unrest in Southern Thailand Raises Concern

The past year has witnessed the revival of what seem to be separatist attacks in the Thai south sufficiently serious that the Thaksin government has placed three provinces – Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat – under martial law. After armed attacks in January and April on security checkpoints and state-run schools to which the military responded with overwhelming force on Oct. 25, Thai troops killed 9 protestors at Tak Bai, arresting 80 others who suffocated after being piled in army trucks. For Malay-speaking Muslims in southern Thailand, there is a strong belief that their ethno-religious identity is under siege. While Thai security officials have cooperated with their Malaysian counterparts to arrest separatist leaders on both sides of the border, the large number of southern Thai

Muslim deaths in 2004 have caused dismay in neighboring Malaysia and raised concerns throughout Southeast Asia as well as the United States that Muslim unrest in the region could become a new breeding ground for JI involvement. Hundreds of Malaysians demonstrated outside the Thai embassy in Kuala Lumpur after the October incident, and the prominent Thai newspaper, *The Nation*, cited a Thai intelligence report that fingered the Malaysian Islamist opposition party, PAS, as supporting southern Thai violence. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir's suggestion that Bangkok grant political autonomy to the south was equally unhelpful.

Unfortunately, with one exception, Thaksin's government has stonewalled international inquiries about the southern turmoil. At an ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) meeting of defense representatives in Beijing on Nov. 4, Thai representatives declined to discuss the situation with their Indonesian colleagues, declaring it was an internal matter. At the annual APEC summit in mid-November, Secretary Powell expressed concern over the Tak Bai incident and at the same meeting demurred from endorsing Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart for the next UN Secretary General after Kofi Annan's term expires in two years. Diplomats in Bangkok have reduced Surakiart's chances of winning the UN post after a number of Muslim countries and the UN Human Rights Commission criticized the government's heavy-handed tactics in the south. The single exception to Thailand's general disregard of international opinion is Bangkok's request that Malaysia send moderate Islamic teachers to Muslim religious schools (pondoks) in the Thai south. As current leader of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Malaysia is also in a position to explain Bangkok's actions to the global Muslim community. In sum, the situation in the Thai south promises to be a serious test for ASEAN solidarity.

Malaysian Opposition to U.S. Foreign Policy

Both the Malaysian opposition and the government continued to snipe at U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and the U.S. war on terrorism. In early December, Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar stated that the attack on the U.S. consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, as well as the heavy tempo of terrorist operations in Afghanistan and Iraq show that U.S. efforts in the Middle East are not succeeding. Recently released from prison, popular Malaysian politician Anwar Ibrahim also weighed in, stating the President Bush's actions and "arrogance" had created a deeper rift between Muslims and the West. Anwar averred, "It is simplistic for President Bush to suggest the world is a safer place because certainly Iraq is not a safer place today. Terrorist cells are actually increasing, mushrooming....I am not aware in modern times of an American leader so much resented and hated abroad." Anwar then offered to undertake a bridging role to facilitate dialog between Islam and the West. Finally, Malaysia's opposition party, PAS, offered the most bizarre interpretation of the U.S. war on terror when its Youth chief claimed in early October that the bombings in Bali and Jakarta were perpetrated by the CIA to discredit Muslims and that captured JI and al-Qaeda leader Hambali was also on the CIA payroll. After all, the PAS youth leader observed, "These kind of sophisticated bombs could only be bought by the U.S."

Maritime Security, APEC, and ASEAN Meetings Dominate Regional Affairs

Last quarter's U.S.-Southeast Asia *Comparative Connections* article discussed Indonesian and Malaysian objections to a direct U.S. role in patrolling the Malacca Strait, insisting that task was the responsibility of the littoral states. In October, the Indonesian and Malaysian navies conducted a six-day antipiracy joint training exercise that also reportedly covered counterterrorism. The Indonesian commander of the Western Fleet stated the exercise "aims to show the outside world that we have a commitment to secure the Strait of Malacca from crime and the threat of terrorism." The Malaysian navy chief, Commodore Muhammad Som, agreed, saying that, "Three of our warships are mobilized from the tip of Langkawi (Island) to Singapore 24 hours a day."

In fact, Indonesian and Malaysian authorities worry that a U.S. presence in the Malacca Strait would actually attract terrorist attacks and bolster the appeal of extremists. Moreover, Southeast Asian maritime states have different priorities than the United States. For example, Malaysia's maritime concerns include threats to its sovereignty, threats to the ocean environment and fisheries from oil spills, and Indonesian pirates' threats to Malaysian fishermen. U.S. concerns about piracy against foreign ships, arms smuggling, and terrorism are not high priorities for Malaysia. Indonesia's perceptions are similar to Malaysia's with the exception of arms smuggling to separatists in Aceh. Only Singapore whose economy is heavily dependent on global commercial traffic through the Malacca Strait views piracy and terrorism as a major threat.

Nor were Malaysia and Indonesia pleased with joint naval patrols conducted by the United States and India for several months in 2003. The patrols created the suspicion that Washington was involved in a broader strategy favoring a permanent Indian naval presence in Southeast Asia that seemed also to be endorsed by Singapore. Hence, Malaysia's subsequent proposal for joint antiterrorism maritime training and exercises among Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore to demonstrate the ability of the strait-bordering states to insure maritime security. Indonesia's 2004 ASEAN Security Community proposal included a similar maritime component. Washington's Regional Maritime Security Initiative has been modified in the face of Indonesian and Malaysian concerns, de-emphasizing direct U.S. patrols and, according to an October statement from the U.S. embassy in Kuala Lumpur, focusing primarily on capacity building for law enforcement agencies in crisis prevention and management.

Differing priorities among some Southeast Asian states and Washington were also apparent in this year's November APEC meeting in Chile. President Bush couched his discussion of trade liberalization in the need to promote prosperity in developing countries by eradicating the conditions that breed terrorists. Malaysian Trade Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, however, urged the gathering not to stray from its original trade and economic mandate by introducing security and political agendas. In fact, the final "Santiago Declaration" incorporated both by pledging to pursue trade and investment liberalization as well as fight terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, corruption, and the spread of epidemics. APEC leaders agreed to take further steps to cut

off terrorist access to the international financial system and approved an embargo on shoulder-fired missiles.

With U.S. endorsement, the Philippines was elected by APEC to lead its Counter-Terrorism Task Force. In a side meeting at the summit with President Arroyo, the U.S. president praised intelligence cooperation between the two countries that led to the capture and trial of important members of both the Abu Sayyaf and JI terrorist groups.

Tensions at the Vientiane ASEAN summit in late November centered on whether ASEAN would take up the situation in southern Thailand and condemn Burma's military junta for its continued suppression of the democratic opposition. A Malaysian opposition member of Parliament criticized Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra for threatening to walk out of the ASEAN summit should its leaders raise the violent deaths of 87 southern Thai Muslim protesters. At the APEC summit the previous week, Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart explained the Thai government's position when the issue was raised by Secretary of State Colin Powell. Thailand's insistence that the unrest in its south is an exclusively domestic concern reverses Bangkok's stand of a few years ago when under Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai it championed ASEAN's involvement in members' internal affairs if they affect the region. Now, newly democratic Indonesia and sometimes Malaysia support the discussion of domestic security matters with regional implications while Thailand has reverted to the traditional ASEAN position of noninterference in domestic matters.

Malaysia's foreign minister pressed Burma to release Nobel-laureate Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest to restore the international community's trust. He noted the U.S. warning that it might review its ties with ASEAN if the Burmese opposition leader was not released. In fact, the military junta recently extended her house arrest for another year. An ASEAN Interparliamentary Caucus stated Nov. 29 that Burma should not serve as ASEAN chair in 2006 and that the country's membership in ASEAN be suspended for lack of progress toward democratization.

Australia and New Zealand were invited to ASEAN's summit for the first time to begin negotiations on free trade accords. However, Australian Prime Minister John Howard refused to sign the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) – a nonaggression pact signed by China last year – because it would interfere with Australia's alliance with the U.S. ASEAN members are skeptical of Canberra's explanation since Japan and South Korea, both U.S. allies, have signed the TAC and treat it as a code of regional conduct for peaceful coexistence.

Finally, ASEAN leaders agreed to hold an East Asian summit next year involving the leaders of ASEAN Plus Three that will bring together all East Asian heads of government for the first time. Some U.S. policymakers are concerned that Washington is left out of this group since the United States considers itself a major East Asian actor on both economic and security dimensions.

U.S. Responds to Indian Ocean Tsunami

Reacting to one of the greatest natural disasters in modern history, the United States is taking a leading role in coordinating and contributing to relief efforts in the aftermath of an horrific undersea earthquake off the Sumatra coast. The resulting tsunami created by the quake, which topped the Richter scale at 9.0, affected Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and a number of the Indian Ocean islands near Southeast Asia as well as Sri Lanka and India. By the end of December, the death toll was approaching 150,000 with literally millions of people made homeless and without access to food and water in the South and Southeast Asian coastal regions inundated by massive waves that washed away resorts and towns.

Although initially criticized as slow to react, though probably simply unaware of the enormous scale of destruction for the first two days after the event, by Dec. 28 Washington had sent aircraft from Japan as well as Seventh Fleet ships to Thailand which would serve as a coordinating location for relief efforts directed by the United States, Australia, Japan, and India. Among the U.S. equipment sent into Southeast Asia from Japan are six *C-130* transport planes, nine *P-3* surveillance aircraft, an aircraft carrier, and six ships with the ability to produce hundreds of thousands of gallons of fresh water daily. Acknowledging that relief and reconstruction would take years and billions of dollars, Secretary Powell said the U.S. would increase its contribution and work with other donors to reach that goal.

The U.S. response to this crisis provides President Bush with a political opportunity to improve the U.S. image in Asia generally and in Muslim Indonesia specifically. If the United States shows compassion with large-scale humanitarian assistance, it may be able to alter the dominant popular image in Southeast Asia that the Bush administration is only concerned with counterterrorism. A major U.S. relief effort for Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand could go a long way to improve that image and undercut the claim by Islamic extremists that the U.S. pursues an anti-Muslim agenda.

Conclusion

Southeast Asia is wary of President Bush's second term. It worries the United States will not consult more closely with the region's members and not take into account their security and economic priorities. While terrorism is undoubtedly a regional concern, it is not the top priority of any of the Southeast Asian states with the possible exception of Singapore. Rather, there is fear that U.S. actions in the Middle East are increasing the prospects for radical Islam in Southeast Asia. Policy priorities within ASEAN are economic and focus on free trade agreements within ASEAN and with its major external partners. China has taken the lead on this dimension with Japan and the EU coming from behind. Only the United States seems to hesitate. Once again, a manifestation of differing priorities.

Chronology of U.S.-Southeast Asian Relations October-December 2004

Oct. 7, 2004: King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, 81, announces that he has abdicated, ending a reign of 63 years. Claiming to have been marginalized by a “Kafkaesque kingdom,” the king’s abdication requires that a nine-member Throne Council arrange for a successor. The country’s constitution does not mention abdication. Sihanouk’s youngest son, Prince Sihamoni, was selected the new king.

Oct. 8, 2004: Sen. Mitch McConnell criticizes Japan for funding 28 new assistance projects for Burma worth more than \$18 million. McConnell argues Japan should join the U.S. and EU in economic sanctions against the repressive Burmese junta, not aid it.

Oct. 9, 2004: With a good luck message from President Bush, Australia’s Liberal Party Prime Minister John Howard wins a rare fourth term in elections. He had sent combat forces into Iraq with the U.S. invasion but withdrew most of them soon after. Fewer than 200 Australian forces are in Iraq today, mostly securing the Australian embassy.

Oct. 9, 2004: U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia Ralph Boyce congratulates Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on his election as president of Indonesia.

Oct. 11, 2004: U.S. political counselor in Kuala Lumpur states that Washington’s Regional Maritime Security Initiative was not a “stalking horse” for U.S. naval patrols in the Strait of Malacca but a capacity building measure for law enforcement agencies.

Oct. 15, 2004: On his website, former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir urges U.S. Muslims to vote President Bush out of office for policies that have caused “oppression and humiliation” to Muslims throughout the world.

Oct. 19, 2004: Singapore defends its anti-money laundering policies after a State Department report lists the country as a hub for financial crime. The report acknowledged Singapore’s anti-money laundering efforts but noted that large-scale money laundering continued.

Oct. 19, 2004: Burma’s military junta ousts Prime Minister Gen. Khin Nyunt on corruption allegations, though outside analysts see his removal as a power play by generals who opposed Khin Nyunt’s reforms. A State Department spokesman lamented what he saw as a further retreat from “political and human rights.”

Oct. 21, 2004: The Philippines announces it will receive 30 helicopters from the U.S. during the next six months and additional military assistance over the next six years.

Oct. 21, 2004: Philippine military detains three Mindanao-based militants accused of plotting to bomb the U.S. embassy in Manila.

Oct. 21, 2004: State Department spokesman Richard Boucher denounces deposed Burma Gen. Khin Nyunt's successor, Lt. Gen. So Win, as the officer responsible for the May 2003 attack on democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's caravan in which 70 people are said to have died.

Oct. 29, 2004: U.S. announces it is monitoring hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid to the Philippines because of a corruption scandal involving a Philippine general.

Nov. 16, 2004: The United States scales back participation in the "Talon-Vision-05" joint military exercise in Luzon because of commitments in Iraq. Held annually since 2001, this year only 70 U.S. marines from Okinawa are involved.

Nov. 19, 2004: Commander of U.S. marines in the Pacific, Lt. Gen. Wallace Gregson, meets Indonesia Chief of Naval Staff Adm. Bernard Kent Sandakh to discuss enhanced cooperation.

Nov. 20, 2004: Indonesian Minister of Manpower and Transmigration Fahmi Idris urges Indonesian workers not to work at U.S. military installations in Persian Gulf states because their safety cannot be guaranteed.

Nov. 20, 2004: Secretary of State Powell meets Thai counterpart Surakirat Sathirathai on the sidelines of the annual APEC meeting and remains noncommittal on a U.S. endorsement of the Thai foreign minister's bid to be the next UN secretary general.

Nov. 21, 2004: U.S. nominates Philippines to chair APEC counterterrorism task force.

Nov. 23, 2004: Philippine diplomat Angelito Nayan, abducted by a pro-Taliban group in Afghanistan in late October, is released unharmed. U.S. authorities worked closely with Manila to secure his release and that of two other hostages.

Nov. 25, 2004: Based on an Indonesian government report, Jakarta decides to prosecute the U.S. gold mining company, Neumont, for polluting Bayut Bay in North Sulawesi. In October, U.S. managers of the company had been arrested but were later released.

Nov. 28, 2004: Thai army proposes that 2.2 billion baht be spent on new *M16-A4* rifles and 12 used *Cobra* attack helicopters from the U.S.

Nov. 29, 2004: Philippine President Arroyo, pleased about the unexpected 6 percent Philippine growth rate this quarter, thanked the Philippines' major trade partners and singled out the U.S.

Dec. 6, 2004: Six hundred U.S. Marines from Okinawa and other U.S. specialists in the Philippines for joint exercises extend their stay to assist Philippine armed forces in relief operations after typhoons in northern Luzon left 168,000 residents homeless.

Dec. 7, 2004: Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi and Foreign Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar condemn the terrorist attack on the U.S. consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, but the foreign minister insists that these despicable actions are a reaction to developments in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Palestinian issue.

Dec. 29, 2004: President Bush announces that the U.S., Australia, Japan, and India will form an international coalition to lead relief efforts after the devastating Dec. 26 earthquake and tsunami that claimed more than 150,000 lives. The U.S. has already pledged \$35 million and sent its navy to help the aid effort.