

## Southeast Asia from the Corner of 18th &amp; K Streets

Hillary Clinton—A Secretary of State  
Fluent in ASEAN

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This should be a good week for U.S. engagement in ASEAN. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton arrives in Vietnam for the seventeenth annual ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as most of you read this note. By definition, that means a good week for U.S. strategy in Asia.

Setting a strong ASEAN foundation will provide Americans a balanced perspective on which to build an enduring Asia strategy. *Enduring* in this context means strategic pillars that will serve U.S. interests in the region for two to three decades. A strong presence and good ties in Southeast Asia will help the United States and Asian partners welcome China to continue a relatively peaceful and constructive entrance onto the regional and global stage. That welcome applies not only to China, but to India, a giant country with massive contributions to make and equal claims to historical trade, cultural, and social ties to Southeast Asia. ASEAN is the dynamic center for a new Asia, and the United States has well-established interests and strong ties in the region. Secretary Clinton recognizes that fact, even if she has not yet connected all the dots to take full advantage of the U.S. leadership position in the region. The good news is that not only is she showing up, but she is armed with ideas and initiatives.

This is a secretary of state who is fluent in ASEAN—one who not only knows what the multiplicity of ASEAN acronyms stand for, but also understands the concepts and history behind most of them. This high-level ASEAN fluency is welcome and represents a significant opportunity for the United States in Asia. Clinton has prepared well for the ARF and has also deployed her deputies to prepare the ground before she arrives. Kurt Campbell has been a forward-deployed ASEAN-focused assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific affairs, even while dealing

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*Secretary of State Clinton upholds perfect attendance record at the ARF ([www.flickr.com/photos/nrbelex/2232632457/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/nrbelex/2232632457/))*

## Hillary Clinton—A Secretary of State Fluent in ASEAN *(continued)*

with the unwelcome surprise of a Japan relationship gone rogue, real threat of confrontation in the Koreas, and the need for laser-like focus on China. Under secretary of state for political affairs Bill Burns is wrapping up a visit to Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, reconfirming U.S. commitments and highlighting key issues ahead of the secretary's arrival. Deputy Secretary of State Jim Steinberg has also been a key actor in Foggy Bottom's ASEAN initiative, having made several trips to the region with a follow-up planned after the ARF meeting.

The Americans have some heavy lifting to do in Hanoi. For one, it is time to show the U.S. hand on regional architecture. Look for Secretary Clinton to indicate that the United States is interested in joining the East Asian Summit (EAS). The United States will likely join with Russia, and the EAS will then consist of the 10 ASEAN countries forming its core—plus Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea, and New Zealand. In terms of U.S. commitment, the EAS would require the U.S. president to participate every year, as the EAS is held back to back with the annual ASEAN Summit. In terms of a long-term U.S. approach to Asia, the EAS was the only realistic choice for regional architecture. It puts the United States fully at the table, with ASEAN at the center of the structure. The hard parts will be building the EAS into an effective organization, overcoming the battle with domestically focused scheduling mandarins at the White House, helping ASEAN to become a stronger and more unified organization so the foundation of Asian regionalism is sound, and, last but not least, rationalizing regional structures to clean up redundancy and use that most precious commodity, the bandwidth of leaders, efficiently.

The last of these will require some hard decisions. The intention of the EAS is to create an effective regional organization that can provide direction and real results in economic, political, and security affairs. To do this well, it will need to reconcile, absorb, or establish real coordination with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)—coordinated by the ministries of foreign affairs and including 17 ASEAN dialogue partners and observers; the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting +8 (ADMM+8)—coordinated by the ministries of defense and consisting of ASEAN and the same eight partners within the EAS; and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum—coordinated by the ministries of foreign affairs and trade, including 21 economies from around the Pacific. Arguably, ARF and ADMM+8 can serve the EAS as direct inputs, but APEC is a more significant challenge.

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## Hillary Clinton—A Secretary of State Fluent in ASEAN *(continued)*

It has primarily delivered results in economic and related areas, some very practical such as the APEC visa program, but most have tended to be more aspirational than concrete. The Transpacific Partnership (TPP) is, from an American perspective, probably the most serious Asia-wide trade enabling initiative at this time, and while its eventual goal is to be a Free Trade Area for the Asia Pacific (FTAAP) and expand to cover all eligible Asian countries, it is not technically part of APEC.

Therefore, it is likely that APEC economies will need to take a hard look at whether leaders—meaning the top official managing the affairs of state for each entity—will still need to meet annually if EAS summits are held annually. Don't look for strong U.S. leadership on this decision until after President Obama hosts APEC in Hawaii in 2011. After that date, there will likely be a hard look at how APEC can be effective as a bridge to the Americas, an investment that should not be taken lightly or discarded. However, the question of continuing annual APEC Leaders meetings will certainly come under serious scrutiny.

Turning back to Secretary Clinton's visit to Hanoi, we can expect to see a real test for the dialogue on the South China Sea set of issues. While Burma and North Korea will feature prominently on the agenda, all parties agree privately that the South China Sea is a priority issue. China has worked tirelessly over the last weeks and months to ensure that the issue is not on the agenda at the ARF. Meanwhile, most Southeast Asian countries want light shed on the issue, particularly those that are claimants in the Spratley Islands disputed territory. Like the case of the sunken South Korean frigate *Cheonan*, there is need for transparency, dialogue, and a clear statement of interests so diplomacy has a chance to be effective. China's mixed messages, stating that the South China Sea is one of its "core interests" while at the same time trying to keep it off of the agenda for regional political and security discussions, is not a recipe for peace and mutual prosperity. Such an approach can lead to serious misunderstandings and, worse, maritime confrontations that are not in the interests of any country.

U.S. interests should be well served by having a secretary of state fluent in ASEAN at the ARF. It doesn't hurt that Mrs. Clinton also has a perfect attendance record at the annual ASEAN meeting and is focused on the right issues. The outcomes of the ARF discussions will be an important point of departure for the next round of discussions on U.S.-ASEAN relations and regional architecture. Watch the cables from Hanoi carefully this week.

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# The Week That Was



(top) Thongloun Sisoulith, Foreign Minister of Laos, increases bilateral engagement with the United States. ([www.flickr.com/photos/un\\_photo/3963201112/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/un_photo/3963201112/))

## ASEAN

- **Undersecretary Bill Burns travels to Southeast Asia.** Burns will visit Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines from July 14 to 22 to deepen engagement with the respective administrations and advance cooperation on mutual interests. Specifically, he will participate in the Lower Mekong Initiative discussion, the Comprehensive Partnership meeting with Indonesia, and the 60th anniversary of U.S.-Cambodia bilateral relations.
- **EU gives ASEAN €1.27b to set up single market by 2015.** The EU originally proposed a comprehensive FTA with ASEAN in 2007, but switched to negotiating economic deals with individual ASEAN countries due to conflicting political conditions among ASEAN members. An ASEAN statement said the EU was confident the Southeast Asian group would achieve the “ASEAN Community by 2015.”
- **New USAID Assistant Administrator for Asia.** Nisha Desai Biswal is nominated for assistant administrator for Asia, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), by the White House. Ms. Biswal is the Majority Clerk for the State Department and Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations, which has jurisdiction over the State Department, USAID, and other aspects of the international affairs budget.

## LAOS

- **Lao foreign minister visits U.S. Secretary of State.** Foreign Minister Thongloun Sisoulith of Laos met with U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton on July 13, marking the highest-level visit by a Laotian official to Washington since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. The two countries signed an Open Skies Agreement to expand their civil aviation relationship. This agreement will facilitate U.S. trade and tourism with Laos and provide new commercial opportunities to both countries’ airlines. In addition to signing the Open Skies Agreement, the two officials discussed ways to expand USAID’s work in Laos and increase military-to-military cooperation.
- **Laos voices interest in joining the WTO.** The Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR), like its neighbor Vietnam, has expressed interest in joining the World Trade Organization and is seeking better trade relations with Washington. There is a strong possibility that the Laotian ambassador will meet with U.S. officials next month for more discussion on areas of cooperation.

## PHILIPPINES

- **Appointment of new DILG head.** Former Naga City mayor Jesse Robredo is the new secretary of The Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG). President Aquino was temporarily leading the DILG. Prior to Aquino's inauguration, Robredo and incoming vice president Jejomar Binay had both expressed interest in the DILG portfolio. Vice President Jejomar Binay has accepted the post as chairman of the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC).
- **Typhoon Conson death toll rises.** According to the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC), the death toll from Typhoon Conson has risen to 39 people, while 84 remain missing. A total of 1,757 families, or 8,918 persons, were still in 51 evacuation centers. Conson has caused massive blackouts in Luzon and Metro Manila. The typhoon also hit Vietnam and China, causing deaths and extensive property damage.
- **Negotiator named for separatist movement.** A law professor at the University of Philippines, Dean Marvic Leonen, has been named chief negotiator with the Islamic separatist movement in Mindanao in the southern Philippines. The other members of the government peace panel have not yet been announced. The government's peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) are expected to resume "in the next quarter."

## MALAYSIA

- **Malaysia to send military personnel to Afghanistan.** Twelve Malaysian military personnel arrived in Afghanistan last week and 28 others will join them by September. The troops, who include doctors and paramedics, are expected to be deployed for between six and nine months and will work with New Zealand's 140-strong provincial reconstruction team there. The team will focus on health services, dental care, and other community work.
- **Prime Minister Najib announces subsidy reduction on fuel and sugar.** Beginning July 16, 2010, subsidies for fuel, specifically petrol, diesel, and LPG, as well as sugar will be reduced. An estimated figure of more than RM 750 million in reductions in government expenditures is expected. These politically challenging measures are part of the New Economic Model and 10th Malaysia Plan aimed at improving competitiveness and market efficiency in Malaysia.



(top) Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III and Jesse Robredo flash "Laban" sign during a motorcade. Robredo supported Aquino's presidential bid in 2008. ([www.flickr.com/photos/45356271@N07/4416159763/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/45356271@N07/4416159763/))

(bottom) Malaysia sends military doctors and paramedics to Afghanistan. ([www.flickr.com/photos/mylifefory/1311413187/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/mylifefory/1311413187/))

## INDONESIA

- **Australia, Indonesia sign debt swap deal to fight TB.** In a creative and diplomatic approach, under a Debt2Health arrangement, Australia will cancel AUD\$75 million of Indonesia's debt. In return, Indonesia will invest half of this amount in national programs to combat tuberculosis through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Indonesia has the third-highest rate of tuberculosis in the world, with more than 90,000 deaths from the disease every year.
- **Indonesia's fight against corruption.** The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has urged 128 House of Representatives lawmakers to submit their wealth reports as soon as possible. Of the 560 lawmakers, 127 have yet to report their assets. The reports are due within two months of taking office. Lawmakers took office last October. As a corruption watchdog, the KPK does not have any power to impose criminal sanctions.

## SINGAPORE

- **GDP set to rise 13-15%.** The Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) updated its official growth forecast from the previous 7-9 percent to 13-15 percent, putting 2010 growth within reach of the nation-state's previous growth record of 13.8 percent in 1970. This figure is also higher than Bloomberg's News Survey forecast of 10.8 percent, as reported in the previous weeks' newsletter. Analysts report that despite the blistering growth, inflation is under control and commodity prices are moderating, which will help keep a cap on price pressures.
- **India-Singapore trade touches SGD 14.87 billion so far in 2010.** Singapore's Trade Ministry reported that trade between India and Singapore during the first six months of 2010 increased 45 percent from 2009. Further data released by International Enterprise Singapore revealed that June imports from India more than doubled to SGD 1.34 billion from 2009 while exports increased to SGD 1.75 billion from SGD 1.09 billion for the first six months ending June 30, 2010.



(top) Indonesia combats persistent health problems through the Debt2Health program. ([www.flickr.com/photos/jonathansull/68997406/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/jonathansull/68997406/))

(bottom) Singapore GDP growth rate upgraded to 13-15% by Ministry of Trade and Industry. ([www.flickr.com/photos/adforce1/3701188494/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/adforce1/3701188494/))

## THAILAND

- **President Barack Obama nominated Kristie Kenney as new U.S. ambassador to Thailand.** The White House announced on July 15 that career foreign service officer and former ambassador to the Philippines Kristie Kenney was the nominee to succeed U.S. ambassador Eric John in Bangkok. Kenney was a popular ambassador in the Philippines. She is the first American female ambassador nominated for Thailand.
- **U.S. Under Secretary of State William Burns visited Thailand** from July 16 to 17, and celebrated 177 years of U.S.-Thai diplomatic relations. He participated in the third U.S.-Thai Strategic Dialogue and reemphasized the pillars of close bilateral ties within the U.S.-Thai alliance. He also discussed the U.S.-Thai Creative Partnership, an initiative to be launched to introduce U.S. businesses to export opportunities in Thailand and support President Obama's National Export Initiative. . During his address at Chulalongkorn University on July 17, Burns urged Thai leaders "to recognize legitimate grievances of citizens and to support the equal and impartial application of the rule of law."
- **Formation of national reconciliation committees.** The Thai parliament formed a 19-member Committee on Reform Strategy—chaired by ex-prime minister and diplomat Anand Panyarachun—and a 27-member Committee on Reform Assembly—headed by prominent doctor and social critic Prawase Wasi. The parliament has sanctioned these groups to work over a 3-year period to bridge Thailand's political differences. Lastly, an independent fact-finding Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been created—headed by Dr. Kanit Na Nakorn—to probe the deaths and violence during the April and May protests. Despite government efforts toward reconciliation, these reform plans coupled with an extended state of emergency have been met with skepticism by the media and public. Meanwhile, Bangkok governor Sukumbhand Paribatra has floated the concept of bringing former prime minister Thaksin into the reconciliation discussions.
- **Aide of late Redshirt general arrested.** Surachai "Rang" Thewarit, a close aide of the late Redshirt general Seh Daeng, was apprehended in Lop Buri province on Thursday on charges of terrorism. Following his arrest, he confessed his involvement in firing an M-79 grenade launcher into the BTS station in Sala Daeng and the police checkpoint at Lumpini Park during the Red Shirt rally in May, killing two policemen. Surachai shared information concerning the "men in black," or the armed unit of the Red



*The Red Shirt movement put a choke hold on Bangkok's commercial district last April. ([www.flickr.com/photos/jaewalk/4538251451/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/jaewalk/4538251451/))*

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shirt movement. Reportedly, Surachai revealed that he and the other officers received their weapons and tactical training in Taiwan.

- **Abhisit’s impeachment probe continues.** The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) has dropped several corruption charges against Thai prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. The charges were dropped because Abhisit was not holding public office at the time of the incidents or because the incidents are related to another ongoing investigation. Three charges remain. The NACC extended probes into Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya’s involvement in a new draft legislation that would be favorable to the Yellow shirt siege on the airport, Deputy Prime Minister Suthep’s connection to the changes in the Culture Ministry, and the tax implications of the Short Message Service (SMSes) that were sent by Prime Minister Abhisit and organized by Finance Minister Korn Chatikavanij.

## BURMA

- **U.S. House renews ban on Burma’s imports.** On July 14, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to renew the ban on Burmese imports for another year. The Senate is expected to vote soon and send the measure to President Obama. The Obama administration has informed Burma’s military junta that the United States will lift the sanctions only if Burma demonstrates efforts to democratize and improve human rights problems.

- **Military junta may extend elections date.** It was reported that the upcoming elections, originally rumored to be on October 10, 2010, might be postponed to early December. The report attributed the postponement to the limited action by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)—backed by the junta and led by Prime Minister Thein Sein—to campaign and increase membership, as approximately 90 days remain before the originally scheduled elections date.

- **USDA disbanded to transfer assets to USDP.** Concurrently, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), the main support group for the military junta, disbanded last week and transferred its assets to Prime Minister Thein Sein’s new political party, the USDP. Currently, the USDP has about 24 million members, many of whom are conscripted.

- **Former Suu Kyi aide released from jail.** On July 15, Win Htein, a former

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aide to Aung San Suu Kyi, was released from prison after 20 years. He was briefly released by the military junta in 2008, but was imprisoned again on the charge of providing false information. In total, Win Htein was jailed three times from 1989 to 2010.

## CAMBODIA

- **Relations improve but debt remains.** U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, along with 200 diplomats, joined Cambodian ambassador Hem Heng for dinner on July 9 to celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Ambassador Heng noted the improved relations but also indicated that he would like to see the United States forgive Cambodia's \$300 million debt incurred prior to the Khmer Rouge regime.

- **Defamation case leads to UN concern.** Mu Sochua, a serving member of the Cambodian Parliament, was convicted last August for defaming Prime Minister Hun Sen. Mu had wanted to sue the prime minister for derogatory comments. She has refused to pay the fine imposed by the Cambodian courts and stands on the verge of imprisonment. As a result, the United Nations has claimed an alarming erosion of fundamental freedoms in Cambodia.

- **Cambodian government fights corruption.** In March 2010, the Cambodian government passed an anticorruption law, according to which officials found guilty of bribery could face up to 15 years in prison. The chairman of the Anti-Corruption Unit, Om Yenteng, said the law would require senior officials, including civil servants and police officials, to detail their assets as part of the effort to combat corruption.

## VIETNAM

- **U.S. House hearing on Agent Orange.** On July 15, the House Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment held its third hearing on Agent Orange to discuss recent developments in remediation. Chairman Eni Faleomaveaga (D-AS) notes reluctance by the U.S. government to admit causality between Agent Orange and the victims, but is optimistic that the new administration will take more action to contact chemical companies, veterans, and the Department of Defense to provide support and services for those affected by dioxin.



(top) Despite improved relations, Cambodia still owes the United States \$300 million. ([www.flickr.com/photos/davidt2006/2335352780/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/davidt2006/2335352780/))

(bottom) Da Nang International Airport is one of the hot spots in Vietnam that needs dioxin clean-up. ([www.flickr.com/photos/americanidle/2079244565/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/americanidle/2079244565/))

- **Vietnam and China resolve border disputes.** On July 7, three bilateral agreements—involving 1,921 landmarks and a 1,499.6-km borderline—between Vietnam and China went into effect. Both countries state that the new agreements will end the border disputes of the past 36 years and form a solid base for peaceful and friendly development. To enhance areas of cooperation in the future, a Vietnam-China Joint Committee on Land Borders was established.

- **Vietnamese Finance and Budget delegation visits the United States.** From July 12 to July 15, the vice chairman of the Vietnamese National Assembly Finance and Budget Committee, Phung Quoc Hien, met with Senator Robert Foster Bennett and Representative Charles Ruppertsberger, along with representatives from other U.S. agencies and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

#### AUSTRALIA

- **General Elections on August 21.** Prime Minister Julia Gillard has called a general election for August 21 to allow voters to choose their prime minister. She came to power three weeks ago after replacing Kevin Rudd.

- **Former prime minister Kevin Rudd in United States.** Former prime minister Kevin Rudd was scheduled to appear at the Australian-American Leadership Dialogue dinner in Washington, but he canceled at the last minute. However, he reportedly met with UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon and U.S. Secretary of State Clinton. Rudd's go-it-alone style diplomacy in Washington and New York City led to speculation that these high-profile visits were aimed at strengthening his credentials so he can frontbench Gillard's cabinet in the event of a Labor victory in the federal elections or assume an international position if he exits politics.

#### NEW ZEALAND

- **New Zealand provides US\$7 million aid to Vietnam.** New Zealand prime minister John Key has agreed to provide US\$7.1 million of aid to Vietnam for the upcoming fiscal year. During his visit to Vietnam last week, Key not only congratulated Vietnam on its outstanding performance as the ASEAN chair, but also indicated enthusiasm about strengthening bilateral relations as the two countries celebrate the 35th anniversary of their diplomatic ties.



*Julia Gillard, Australia's first female prime minister ([www.flickr.com/photos/m2photography/3773240745/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/m2photography/3773240745/))*

BRUNEI

- **64th birthday of His Majesty Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.** Sultan Bolkiah was born on July 15, 1946, in Bandar Seri Begawan, and ascended to the throne to become the 29th Sultan of Brunei on October 5, 1967. A working monarch, he is concurrently the prime minister, defense minister, finance minister, and head of religion of Brunei Darussalam.

MEKONG RIVER

- **Dry weather in the Mekong region.** As the world endures the hottest year on record, dry weather in the Mekong region has pushed the water levels there to new lows. People in China, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand rely on the Mekong River for irrigation and farming. Vietnam, currently the world's second-biggest rice exporter, has reported huge losses in its rice crop due to this year's unexpected drought.

APEC

- **APEC launches new Cross-border Data Privacy initiative.** The APEC Cross-border Privacy Enforcement Arrangement (CPEA) facilitates information sharing and cooperation between authorities responsible for data and consumer protection in the APEC region. The CPEA also reportedly encourages cooperation between authorities with APEC and their non-member counterparts, as the arrangement has been designed to work seamlessly with other regional and global schemes.



(top) Sultan Bolkiah of Brunei celebrated his 64th birthday on July 15. ([www.flickr.com/photos/amrufm/1310317953/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/amrufm/1310317953/))

(bottom) New measures by APEC improve data security. ([www.flickr.com/photos/psd/2592742563/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/psd/2592742563/))

# The Week Ahead

“Scot Alan Marciel, to be U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Indonesia; Judith R. Fergin, to be U.S. ambassador to Timor Leste (East Timor); and Paul W. Jones, to be U.S. ambassador to Malaysia.”

- **17th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).** Ministers will approve an action plan to implement the vision of the ARF statement by 2020. The ARF aims to enhance its capacity in defense and security via the ASEAN way of dialogue and consultation. Potential items for debate include condemnation of the North Korean attack on the Cheonan and human rights abuses by Burma’s military junta. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will attend the ARF.

- **43rd ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.** The ASEAN foreign ministers will meet in Hanoi from July 19 to July 23. Participating officials are expected to approve a joint statement and a plan to review the first five years of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Committee on Human Rights (ICHR). The ministers are also expected to sign a third protocol amending the region’s Treaty of Amity and Co-operation (TAC) for the European Union to officially accede to the treaty.

- **North Korean foreign minister to visit Burma.** North Korea’s foreign minister, Pak Yu Chun, is expected to visit Burma within the next 10 days after attending the ARF. Media have speculated that officials from the two countries will most likely discuss extensive military trade over the past decade and Naypyidaw’s recent attempts to develop a nuclear weapon.

- **Senate Foreign Relations Committee nominations hearing on ambassador appointments on July 21**—Scot Alan Marciel, to be U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Indonesia; Judith R. Fergin, to be U.S. ambassador to Timor Leste (East Timor); and Paul W. Jones, to be U.S. ambassador to Malaysia.

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