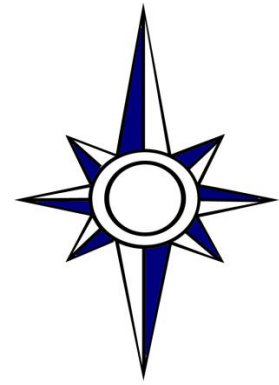


Comparative Connections

A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations



US-Southeast Asia Relations: Enhancing the Rebalance

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Senior US State and Defense Department officials emphasized the centrality of Southeast Asia in the Obama administration's rebalance policy. Highlighted were US presentations at several ASEAN-based venues, including ASEAN+1, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the preparatory gathering for the East Asia Summit, where US representatives stressed the roles of these organizations in regional diplomacy for resolving disagreements. At the ARF in August, Secretary of State Kerry proposed a freeze by South China Sea claimants – China, Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Taiwan – on activities that would unilaterally change the status quo. The ASEAN states generally support this approach because it can be interpreted as fulfilling a pledge made by ASEAN and China in the 2002 Declaration of Conduct on the South China Sea. US officials also stressed the importance of following the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in South China Sea dispute negotiations and endorsed the efficacy of the International Arbitral Tribunal to which the Philippines has filed an appeal. The US is negotiating the implementation of the Expanded Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the Philippines, determining five locations where US facilities will be set up within Philippine military bases. One will probably be Subic Bay – a major US Pacific Fleet base until the early 1990s. There is also talk of a more extensive security relationship with Vietnam. For some time Hanoi has desired more US intelligence on the South China Sea. Washington would like more access for Seventh Fleet ships to Vietnamese ports. In June, US Ambassador-designate to Hanoi Ted Osius stated the US might reconsider its ban on weapons sales to Hanoi, a prediction echoed in August when Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey visited Vietnam.

The rebalance advances

Despite a multitude of international crises over the past four months in Iraq/Syria, Gaza, Afghanistan, and Ukraine to which the US devoted diplomatic, financial, and military resources, the Obama administration insisted that its Asia emphasis remains robust – a claim for which there is substantial evidence. State and Defense Department officials articulated the new emphases of the *rebalance*: (1) Southeast Asia's centrality and within Southeast Asia, ASEAN's key role, and (2) building the maritime defense capacities of allies and partners.

Illustrative of the first emphasis were Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel's remarks in Rangoon (Yangon) Burma (Myanmar) on June 18 at the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting. Russel cited the succession of ASEAN-level gatherings through 2014, including the US-ASEAN Summit, the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), all listed as important components of "the long term US rebalance strategy" These venues permit countries to "deal with disagreements in a diplomatic manner

and a constructive manner.” The US has a particular interest in these discussions because it has “a longstanding and special responsibility for the ... peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region.” Russel went on to discuss a proposal he had made – subsequently presented more formally – based on the 2002 ASEAN China Declaration of Conduct on the South China Sea (DOC) that claimant states “identify the kind of behaviors that each find provocative when others do it and offer a voluntary freeze on those sorts of actions....” More specifically, at the Fourth Annual South China Sea Conference sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies on July 11, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Michael Fuchs spelled out what a “freeze” would entail: Based on the DOC, “claimants would recommit not to establish new outposts ... nor to seize features that another claimant has occupied before the 2002 Declaration of Conduct was signed.” Without naming China and the Philippines, Fuchs averred that “claimants could agree to refrain from unilateral enforcement measures against other claimants’ long-standing economic activities that have been taking place in disputed areas.”

In San Francisco on July 28, Assistant Secretary Russel, speaking on “ASEAN and America: Partners for the Future,” explained the importance of the relatively new EAS – an annual forum for heads of state to discuss common security concerns. He stated that the US believes “the EAS can become the premier forum for addressing pressing issues in the Asia-Pacific region” and that the US must be “at the table for a strategic discussion about how we build and shape this region over time.” He particularly pointed to the potential for cooperation on nontraditional security issues such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) for the weather-based disasters that plague Southeast Asia, noting that collaborative military exercises now always include these humanitarian scenarios. Russel reiterated US support for the use of a UN tribunal currently employed by the Philippines to determine the legal character of features in the South China Sea on which territorial claims can be based.

As for the second point of rebalance emphasis, the US is deploying close to 60 percent of its *F-22 Raptor* fighter inventory in and around the Pacific, and the region will be the first basing location for the new multi-role *F-35*. Sixty percent of the US naval fleet is also scheduled to be in the Pacific by 2020. President Obama’s 2015 budget request for Southeast Asian maritime capacity building over two years exceeds \$156 million and includes \$18 million for coastal patrol units in Vietnam, counter-piracy support for the littoral countries around the Malacca Strait, and counter-terrorism capabilities in the tri-border region of the Sulu Sea, involving the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The US is also ramping up joint exercises with Southeast Asian partners, most notably *Cooperation Afloat, Readiness, and Training (CARAT)*. These annual bilateral naval exercises in Southeast Asia partner elements of the US Seventh Fleet with Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia and Timor-Leste. Of one to two weeks duration, these exercises include HA/DR elements as well as gunnery, search and rescue, shipboard helicopter operations, anti-submarine warfare, and maritime interdiction. No other country outside Southeast Asia engages in the frequency and sophistication of *CARAT* maneuvers.

Leveraging the rebalance is military assistance to Southeast Asian states from US allies in Northeast Asia, particularly Japan. This fits well with the Obama administration’s view that partnerships are essential for international security in an era when the US no longer possesses the wherewithal to operate predominantly by itself. Thus, Washington welcomed Prime Minister

Abe Shinzo's new principles for arms transfers. The new criteria emphasized that arms aid must enhance Japan's own security, strengthen overall cooperation with partner countries, and insure that Japanese arms are not transferred to third countries. Several Southeast Asian states meet these standards; among them, according to the Japanese prime minister's keynote address to the May 30 Shangri-La Dialogue, was Tokyo's "utmost support for the efforts of the countries of ASEAN as they work to ensure the security of the seas and the skies and thoroughly maintain freedom of navigation and overflight." Abe was saying that Northeast and Southeast Asian security were entwined and that the sea lanes of international commerce passed through both regions. By adding to Southeast Asian security capabilities Japan was serving its own needs. Although not coordinating directly with the US, Tokyo's provision of coastal patrol vessels to selected ASEAN states reinforced Washington's efforts. Abe also announced that he would provide 10 new patrol boats to the Philippine Coast Guard and three vessels to Indonesia. Additionally Malaysian maritime law enforcement personnel were training in Japan. While in Vietnam in March, Abe also promised patrol boats through the Official Development Assistance Program. Six used vessels would be accompanied by training and spare parts.

South China Sea diplomacy

In a variety of venues, including ASEAN+1, the ARF, the EAS, the Shangri-La Dialogue, and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting, US officials have emphasized provisions of the 2002 ASEAN-China Declaration of Conduct on the South China Sea (DOC) that abjure the use of force in dealing with territorial disputes. Washington also backs ASEAN efforts to establish a code of conduct (COC) for the South China Sea that would formalize ways of peacefully resolving maritime confrontations in those waters. Finally, the US has endorsed the Philippine submission to an arbitral tribunal to define the legal status of South China Sea features that can be used to extend territorial waters. Going further, the US has implied that other claimants (read Vietnam) might also consider going to the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) for a ruling.

ASEAN as an organization, however, remains cautious on the South China Sea. At the May 24 ASEAN Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, the ASEAN foreign ministers managed to issue a standalone statement urging all involved parties to prevent violence as enshrined in the DOC, although no particular country was named. Moreover, the foreign ministers and ASEAN chairman's statements highlighted the importance of "freedom of navigation and overflight above the South China Sea" – an implicit rejection of any possible plan by China to declare an air defense identification zone in Southeast Asia comparable to its 2013 declaration in Northeast Asia.

Hanoi also reached out to the US over China's deployment in May of a massive oil rig in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) west of the Paracel Islands. Top Vietnamese officials in late May welcomed a visiting US Senate delegation studying South China Sea issues. Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and National Assembly leader Nguyen Sinh Hung expressed gratitude to that delegation for prompt US reactions to the rig's deployment and urged Washington to take "specific actions" in support of Vietnam. Subsequently, the Philippines, Vietnam, and other ASEAN states in June reacted favorably to the suggestion originally made by Assistant Secretary of State Russel during a visit to Burma that all South China Sea claimants

agree to a “voluntary freeze” on activities that seek to change the territorial status quo on the Sea’s features. A freeze would reduce tension in the area while a COC was being negotiated.

Secretary of State Kerry formalized Russel’s earlier suggestions and presented them at the August meeting with ASEAN foreign ministers. He specified the actions he believed should be frozen to include seizing unoccupied islands as well as land reclamation efforts – activities undertaken by China, though Kerry did not name any country. In July, the Philippines had called on the other ASEAN claimants – Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei – to meet with Manila to work out a common position for the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting and the ARF conclave that follows. Agreement to do so was not reached, however. (Brunei and Malaysia may not have wanted to antagonize China.) Nevertheless, in early August, Manila asked ASEAN and other foreign governments during the ARF meeting to support a “Triple Action Plan” (TAP) consisting of first the US-proposed freeze on construction of new facilities in the disputed waters. Second, full and effective implementation of the 2002 DOC, which had over a decade ago discouraged aggressive actions and barred new construction in the contested areas. Going on, the second action also called for the expeditious conclusion of the COC. The third the final component of the TAP called for international arbitration of the disputes, an action the Philippines had already taken that has been endorsed by the United States. On Aug. 3, the Philippine government claimed that its TAP proposal won support from Vietnam, Indonesia, and Brunei.

The Aug. 10-11 meetings in Nay Pyi Taw constituted a series of gatherings: initially the ASEAN foreign ministers, then the foreign ministers plus each dialogue partner separately (ASEAN+1), then the ARF, and finally a preliminary conclave for the November EAS. Foreign ministers of the ASEAN states and high-level diplomats from the partners were in attendance. In his opening remarks at the US-ASEAN meeting, Secretary Kerry reiterated ASEAN’s centrality to the region’s “multilateral architecture” and its “rules-based system in the Asia-Pacific.” The South China Sea was a hot topic at all the meetings, and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Joint Communique on Aug. 10 urged “all parties concerned” to exercise restraint and avoid actions that would complicate the situation, though once again China was not mentioned. The foreign ministers “noted” the Philippine three-part plan to freeze “destabilizing actions.” However, the statement did not mention the US proposal and did not endorse the Philippine submission.

Secretary Kerry argued for a moratorium on actions in the South China Sea at the ARF. In actuality, both the Philippine and US presentations merely asked for implementation of the 2002 DOC. That document, signed by ASEAN states and China, called on all claimants to abjure any activities that would alter the status quo. Both the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Statement and ARF Communique reiterated those commitments by reminding all those present of their obligations under the DOC.

ASEAN diplomats all agreed that a COC was needed because, as Secretary Kerry said, it would go toward “everybody clarifying claims under international law.” At a press briefing following the ARF, a “senior State Department official” said that implementing the already agreed DOC would result in a *de facto* freeze on destabilizing activities and that the US would be “monitoring the actual situation around the rocks, reefs, and shoals in the South China Sea.” How that would be accomplished, however, was left unsaid.

Philippines: debating EDCA

When President Obama visited the Philippines in late April, two years and eight rounds of negotiations were rewarded with the conclusion of a 10-year Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). It emphasizes “capacity building” for the country's armed forces in “external defense, maritime security and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.” So far, EDCA is just a framework the specifics of which have yet to be determined. It will include the construction of new facilities for US personnel and equipment within Philippine bases to which Philippine forces will have access; in other words, there is no return to US bases on Philippine territory. US forces will rotate through these facilities much like the current arrangement in Mindanao and in Darwin, Australia. Discussions in Manila focused on US assistance for Philippine armed forces’ transition from internal to external defense, particularly maritime security. However, Obama did not specify what conditions in the Sino-Philippine South China Sea confrontation would lead to the activation of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty. Instead, he reiterated that an enhanced US military presence in the region is not directed against China but will reassure Southeast Asia of US presence and its commitment to “international rules and norms that include the area of maritime disputes.”

Those in the Philippines who support the EDCA insist that it demonstrates to all of Southeast Asia that the US remains the region’s indispensable source of stability whose *bona fides* were based on the fact that it has neither territorial claims nor ambitions. Defenders of the EDCA also note that it is the only defense accord the US has with an ally that contains a consent provision. That is, all supplies the US plans to bring into the country must be preapproved by the Philippine Mutual Defense Board and the Security Engagement Board.

Concerns remain, however, over the reliability of the US commitment to defend Philippine forces if they are attacked in the South China Sea. Nevertheless, Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert Del Rosario characterized President Obama’s statements as affirming the US commitment if they are attacked in the Pacific, according to the April 30 *GMA News Online*. Further, in a one-day visit to Tokyo in late June, the July 3 *Philippine Star* reported that President Aquino was also interested in forging a stronger defense relationship with Japan similar to EDCA, implying that Japanese forces might also be offered access to the Philippines. Aquino’s statement was part of his endorsement of Prime Minister Abe’s reinterpretation of Japan’s pacifist constitution that for the first time permits collective defense.

Other signs of the US commitment to Philippine defense, according to Manila’s May 6 *Shi Jie Ri Bao*, was an assessment of this year’s *Balikatan* joint military exercises. In opening the exercises, Foreign Secretary Rosario stated that the maneuvers would boost his country’s maritime capabilities to deal with challenges from “a hostile neighboring country.” Past *Balikatan* exercises have focused on counter-terrorism and HA/DR. In late June, the Pentagon announced that the US counter-terrorism unit operating as trainers in Mindanao for over a decade was being phased out. Although US Special Forces would continue to help counter Al Qaeda-linked remnants in the southern Philippines, the mission size would be reduced from 320 to a dozen or so advisers. While the reduction in US Special Forces was explained as a result of their success in reducing the threat from Abu Sayyaf, it was also seen as a part of the new emphasis in EDCA that locates US forces in the country to address external threats.

Critics of EDCA abound. Some distrust US reliability as a protector, noting that the US will not automatically defend the Philippines in a confrontation with China and that the US public might not support military action in Asia. Others, representing leftist and nationalist groups, have appealed to the Philippine Supreme Court, arguing that EDCA violates the constitution because it sets up *de facto* US bases on Philippine territory. Moreover, contrary to the government's claim that the EDCA is an executive agreement, it is, in fact, a treaty and must be ratified by the Philippine Senate. This same argument was employed unsuccessfully over a decade ago when US Special Forces were deployed on the long-term training mission in Mindanao. Under the EDCA, the US will be allowed to build structures, preposition weapons and supplies, and station troops as well as civilian support staff on Philippine bases for a period of 10 years.

Left-leaning members of the Philippine House of Representatives have filed impeachment proceedings against President Aquino because of EDCA, though the action is not expected to succeed. At bottom, Philippine officials hope EDCA will dampen China's assertiveness in the South China Sea, giving the Philippines time to rebuild its cash-strapped military.

Vietnam-US: a warmer relationship

The summer months have witnessed continued warming of the Vietnam-US relationship, though the major obstacle to more military support from Washington has not yet been overcome: Hanoi's poor human rights record. Additionally, Washington is interested in more military access to Vietnamese ports, particularly Cam Ranh Bay. Currently, noncombat US ships put into Vietnamese ports for minor repairs, but no warships have been permitted. There are indications, however, that some of these roadblocks could be lifted. In June, US Ambassador-designate to Vietnam Ted Osius testified before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the US was reconsidering the arms sales ban to Vietnam, and Secretary Kerry announced \$18 million in nonlethal military assistance to support Vietnam's maritime security last December. Presently, Hanoi buys weapons from Russia, India, Israel, and South Korea. In his presentation on Vietnam's maritime forces to the Center for Strategic and International Studies July 10-11 conference on the South China Sea, Australian Southeast Asia specialist Carl Thayer sounded a cautionary note about whether Vietnam really wanted to add a significant number of US weapons to the variety of countries already supplying its forces as it would complicate logistics.

A probable breakthrough on US arms for Vietnam occurred when Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey visited Hanoi in mid-August. Dempsey stated that the arms embargo would likely soon be lifted after which the two countries would discuss the kinds of equipment that could be made available, most likely in the area of maritime surveillance. Dempsey cited the importance of Vietnam's capabilities for the future security of the South China Sea and said, "I would suggest as so goes Vietnam in managing its maritime resources and territorial disputes, so goes the South China Sea." In an apparent effort to assure both China and Vietnam, the general stated that his visit was not designed to force Vietnam to choose between the US and China. Nor will there be any change in Vietnam's restriction on US naval visits or the prospect of access of combat vessels to Cam Ranh Bay. Moreover, this author could detect no mention of Vietnam's human rights record attendant upon Dempsey's visit.

Other US-Southeast Asian links

Indonesia. Jakarta's interest in an ongoing US naval presence in Southeast Asia may well be piqued by China's nine-dash line map that encompasses Indonesia's EEZ north of the Natuna Islands. The Indonesian government has decided to deploy more forces to the Natunas to demonstrate its commitment to that region. New President Joko Widodo has stated that he would consider helping mediate South China Sea disputes if he was requested to do so by all parties involved, suggesting that he is prepared to continue the interlocutor role that Foreign Minister Marty Natelegawa has performed in ASEAN.

Indonesia also welcomed President Obama's speech at West Point in late May on countering terrorism that would fund counter-terrorism partnerships to assist countries in their own counter-terrorism endeavors. In a May 30 article in Singapore's *Straits Times Online*, Indonesian analysts were cited as estimating that over 100 Southeast Asian radicals were fighting in Syria with extremist groups, acquiring skills that could be used against their home governments upon their return. When Senators John McCain and Sheldon Whitehouse visited Jakarta on Aug. 12, their discussions with Indonesian leaders emphasized concerns about the return of radicalized Indonesians and Americans to their home countries and the need to monitor them carefully.

Thailand. After months of insisting it would not precipitate a coup, the Thai military did just that on May 22, removing Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and creating a conundrum for ASEAN, which is in the final stages of creating the ASEAN Community. Thailand is ASEAN's second largest economy and has been a leader in democratic consolidation. All of that has been thrown in reverse. The military-written interim constitution concentrates political authority in the armed forces. Adopting a tough line, the Thai junta rebuffed an Indonesian proposal to discuss Thai developments at a special ASEAN foreign ministers meeting with a Thai official insisting they are an internal matter and thus inappropriate for ASEAN consideration.

The US immediately denounced the military takeover. Secretary of State Kerry averred, "There is no justification for the military coup" and called for the release of all detained political leaders. He also urged the immediate restoration of civilian government. Kerry warned that the coup would harm US-Thai relations, "especially ... our relationship with the Thai military." At the time of the military political intervention, the US and Thailand were in the middle of a *CARAT* exercise, which was immediately halted by the US and US ships withdrawn. US Ambassador to Thailand Kristie Kenney also criticized the coup, leading to a social media campaign by Thai royalists – who back the coup – for her recall. In late June, Washington suspended \$4.7 million in military aid.

While the future of the next *Cobra Gold*, Asia's largest military exercise held annually in Thailand, is in doubt, in mid-July Ambassador Kenney reaffirmed US support for the Thai Air Force efforts to upgrade and modernize its *F-16* fleet. So, it appears that the commercial components of military relations continue while political relations are frayed.

Burma. President Obama's West Point speech in May attributed reforms in Burma to US diplomatic initiatives that have encouraged the growth of democracy and national reconciliation. However, a number of outside observers argue that these reforms have stalled, that the civil war

with ethnic insurgents persists, and that the military shows no sign of giving up the authority it maintains under the current constitution. Although the government of President Thein Sein has lifted press censorship, granted freedom of assembly, and freed hundreds of political prisoners, including Nobel-laureate Aung San Suu Kyi who now serves in Parliament, when these reforms actually threaten the military elite, the government has reverted to its old ways of jailing dissidents and cracking down on the media.

These deficits have led the Obama administration to keep some sanctions in place, in contrast to EU members who for the most part have lifted theirs. For example, military-to-military relations are limited to allowing Burmese armed forces observers to attend such exercises as *Cobra Gold* in Thailand but not to participate. US military representatives talk to their Burmese counterparts on human rights and rule of law but, so far, not on military tradecraft. The efficacy of these conversations is problematic. On June 9, the Thailand-based organization Fortify Rights issued a report saying that the Burmese military has “systematically tortured Kachin civilians” allegedly aligned with the Kachin Independence Army near China’s border.

Member of both houses of the US Congress have introduced bills that would block any US military assistance to Burma until its government undertook “meaningful accountability reforms including the fair and equal treatment of all ethnic groups, addressing human rights abuses committed by the military and cutting off military relations with North Korea.” The State Department has assured Congressional critics that US engagement with Burma’s military will be limited to discussions on human rights and civilian control of the armed forces. While visiting Burma in mid-August, Secretary Kerry was told by opposition groups that the US was too soft on the Thein Sein administration. Kerry stressed the need for continued political and human rights reforms in his talks with government officials and expressed concern over the attacks on Muslim Rohingya minority by Buddhist nationalists. These concerns have blocked the further advance of US-Burma relations.

Looking ahead: regional anxiety

The State Department’s Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs announced a 2015 budget request for a modest 5 percent increase, hardly an example of rebalancing to Asia. Given other global concerns and crises, a relatively calm Asia means a continuation of established policies. The rebalance, then, may be seen in Southeast Asia as rhetoric accompanied by little increase in diplomatic presence or development dollars. Moreover, US engagement is perceived in the region as primarily focused on the military. The economic component embodied in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is stalled because Southeast Asian states continue to protect uncompetitive sectors of their economies and resist US demands on labor and human rights components of the agreement. Moreover, the US Congress appears unwilling to grant the Obama administration a fast track procedure when and if a TPP is finalized meaning that Congressional approval of the agreement could be drawn out and subject to amendments that would then have to be resubmitted to the signatories. While Southeast Asian states welcome US assistance in building up their maritime domain awareness, this promises to be a long, drawn-out capability increase and hardly a near-term buildup of regional defense capacities.

Chronology of US - Southeast Asian Relations

May - August 2014

May 1, 2014: Malaysian elites, including former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and past editor of the *New Straits Times* Abdul Kadir condemn President Obama's comments to the Young Leaders Group of the University of Malaya in which he warned Malaysia would fall behind if it did not provide the same opportunities for non-Muslims as it does for Muslims.

May 3, 2014: US Congressional leaders assure visiting Philippine Vice President Jejomar Binay of continued aid for recovery from Typhoon *Yolanda* as well as congressional support for the new Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA).

May 5, 2014: Thailand's Constitutional Court dismisses Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra from office for abuse of power, along with nine Cabinet officials.

May 5-14, 2014: US and the Philippines conduct *Balikatan* military exercise featuring live-fire drills, landing exercises, search-and-rescue operations, humanitarian response operations, and demonstrations of maritime surveillance systems. A small contingent from Australia participates.

May 7, 2014: US State Department spokesperson says that China's movement of an oil rig into disputed waters near Vietnam "undermines peace and stability in the region."

May 9, 2014: US National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes affirms US opposition to Chinese military actions in response to an oil rig standoff between Vietnam and China in the South China Sea. He also says the US is strengthening military ties with such allies as the Philippines.

May 9, 2014: A bipartisan group of US senators from the Foreign Relations Committee urge passage of a resolution reaffirming support for freedom of navigation and the diplomatic resolution of outstanding maritime disputes. The statement condemns Chinese boats' ramming Vietnamese ships as interrupting the free flow of maritime commerce.

May 12, 2015: Greeting Singapore's foreign minister in Washington, Secretary of State John Kerry cites both countries' national concern over China's actions around the Paracel Islands.

May 15, 2014: Secretary Kerry in a phone call to Vietnam's deputy prime minister terms China's actions in the South China Sea "provocative" and urges safe conduct for all vessels in the vicinity.

May 15, 2014: State Department spokesperson cautions that any Chinese military construction on a disputed Spratly reef has the potential to raise tensions and calls on all parties to abide by the 2002 Declaration of Conduct on the South China Sea that prohibits such activity.

May 15, 2014: US extends sanctions against Burma for one more year, banning US companies from doing business with those involved in repressing pro-democracy movements.

May 15, 2014: Philippines offers the US access to a small naval base on Palawan facing the South China Sea. Manila hopes the US will rehabilitate the base.

May 19, 2014: Thai military declares martial law.

May 20, 2014: State Department issues a statement reacting to the Thai martial law declaration, urging the military to “honor its commitment to make this a temporary action to prevent violence and not to undermine democratic institutions.”

May 21, 2014: Thai military declares a coup and suspends the constitution. Army Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha is identified as the junta leader.

May 21, 2014: Vietnam’s Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh telephones Secretary Kerry to discuss implications of China’s deployment of an oil rig near the Paracel Islands.

May 22, 2014: White House announces it will support Vietnam if it chooses to take legal action in resolving its dispute with China in the South China Sea.

May 22, 2014: Secretary Kerry refers to the Thai coup as a “disappointment,” without justification and demands the release of detained political leaders. He warns that the coup could negatively affect US-Thai military relations.

May 24, 2014: State Department warns US citizens to “reconsider any nonessential travel to Thailand.” It also suspends \$2.5 million in military financing and training and says an additional \$10.5 million in assistance to the country is under review. It calls for “the immediate restoration of civilian rule.”

May 24, 2014: Pentagon halts an underway *CARAT* joint military exercise with Thai forces.

June 2-5, 2014: US Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker leads a delegation of US business executives and members of the US-ASEAN Business Council to Vietnam, the Philippines, and Myanmar for meetings with heads of state, cabinet officials, and business leaders.

June 9, 2014: The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Senior Officials meeting in Yangon discusses the South China Sea conflicts. Most delegates express concerns and urge the disputants to observe provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

June 9, 2014: In a joint exercise with Malaysia, the US deploys an *F-22* for the first time against a Malaysian *Su-30*.

June 10, 2014: Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel attends the preliminary meetings in Yangon for the ASEAN-related meetings. He calls on both Vietnam and China to withdraw their ships from disputed waters near the Paracel Islands and also asks Beijing to withdraw its oil exploration rig.

June 12, 2014: Australian Prime Minister Abbott meets with President Obama in Washington, emphasizing ASEAN's importance for maritime issues in the South China Sea.

June 17, 2014: State Department urges reforms in Burma to ensure free elections.

June 20, 2014: State Department publishes the 2014 Trafficking in Persons report, adding Thailand and Malaysia to the list of countries that have failed to tackle human trafficking. Both countries protest this characterization.

June 21-26, 2014: Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long visits the US and meets President Obama, Vice President Biden, and National Security Advisor Susan Rice. Lee calls for US support to finalize the TPP.

June 26-July 1, 2014. Annual US-Philippine *CARAT* naval exercise is held in the South China Sea adjacent to the island of Luzon. A total of 1,000 personnel from both countries participate.

July 11, 2014: Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Michael Fuchs stresses ASEAN's key role for US foreign policy in Asia.

July 17, 2014: China removes its offshore oil rig from contested waters near the Paracel Islands, a month before schedule.

July 18, 2014: State Department criticizes a Burmese court's sentence of four journalists and their newspaper's executive to 10 years of hard labor for reporting that a Defense Ministry factory was producing chemical weapons.

July 18, 2014: Former US President Bill Clinton visits Vietnam and meets President Truong Tan Sang and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. Among other issues, Sang calls for an early signing of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement.

July 23, 2014: Washington congratulates Joko Widodo on his victory in the Indonesian presidential election.

July 26, 2014: *USS Columbus* submarine calls at Subic Bay, one of the areas being considered as a site for US facilities formalized in the April EDCA.

July 29-Aug. 7: US and Singapore conduct their annual *CARAT* exercise, involving 1,400 personnel, nine ships, two submarines, and five naval helicopters.

Aug. 1-22, 2014: *Pitch Black* air combat exercise with fighter aircraft from the US, Singapore, France, Thailand, the UAE, New Zealand, and Australia is held near Darwin, Australia.

Aug. 4, 2014: US Sen. Bob Corker of the Foreign Relations Committee meets Vietnam's Deputy Defense Minister Lt. Gen. Truong Quong Keah in Hanoi where they discuss the possibility of the US lifting its ban on weapons exports to Vietnam.

Aug. 5-10, 2014: The 47th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting/Post Ministerial Conference, the 21st ASEAN Regional Forum, the 15th ASEAN Plus Three Foreign Ministers Meeting, and the fourth East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' Meeting are held in Nay Pyi Taw. Secretary Kerry expresses concern that the government was stumbling on the path to democracy.

Aug. 11-15, 2014: Singapore hosts annual *Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT)* naval exercises with personnel from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and the US participating.

Aug. 12, 2014: US Senators John McCain and Sheldon Whitehouse visit Indonesia and explain the US military action in Iraq. McCain warns that both Indonesia and the US could face the return of radicalized youth from fighting with ISIS.

Aug. 14-18, 2014: Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey visits Hanoi and discusses lifting the US arms embargo as well as Vietnam's military needs.

Aug. 25, 2014: Thailand's coup leader Prayuth Chan-Ocha is formally endorsed as prime minister by King Bhumibol Adulyadej.