

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

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## Comprehensive Partnership Nudges U.S.-Indonesia Relations to New Levels of Cooperation

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Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met September 20 for the third annual U.S.-Indonesia Joint Commission Meeting in an effort to solidify strategic cooperation between the world's second- and third-largest democracies. The concrete steps taken in a number of key areas demonstrate the extent to which U.S.-Indonesia relations have matured since President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono proposed a Comprehensive Partnership in 2008.

Since the partnership was initiated, some of the most dramatic strides have been made in military relations. In contrast, few areas have faced as many difficulties as investment and trade have. The recent Washington talks focused on democracy and development, trade and investment, energy policy and green technology, and regional security.

Sustaining collaborative initiatives in these sectors is central to building trust and habits of collaboration between two countries that do not know each other very well. Partnership with the United States strengthens Indonesia's role as a political and economic leader in Southeast Asia. And it sends a signal to U.S. investors and other Southeast Asian leaders that the United States is committed to the region at a time when some criticize the so-called U.S. rebalancing toward Asia as largely rhetorical or aimed mainly at containing China.

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The democracy-building aspects of the Comprehensive Partnership dovetail with Indonesia's own democratic initiatives. Open Government Partnership activities spearheaded by Obama's White House and civil society networks encourage those who want to address Indonesia's governance challenges and ease the doubts of potential U.S. investors. In a gesture of respect, the United States again committed to sending a high-level delegation in November to the fifth Bali Democracy Forum, Indonesia's flagship democracy initiative. Obstacles to this budding collaboration include human rights problems in Papua and Indonesia's pervasive corruption.

The Comprehensive Partnership also includes a \$600 million compact through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). MCC will invest in renewable energy, maternal and child nutrition, modernization of Indonesia's public procurement system, and "green prosperity." These initiatives will provide alternative livelihoods for Indonesians eager to take part in their country's economic rise without despoiling its environment.

Recognition of Indonesia's role in maintaining maritime security in the South China Sea dispute was another outcome of the U.S.-Indonesia strategic dialogue. Foreign Minister Natalegawa's shuttle diplomacy between member states following ASEAN's failure to issue a joint communiqué in July demonstrated Indonesia's commitment to cooperation through regional institutions.

One blot on improving ties is trade and investment, an area in which U.S.-Indonesia relations have made limited progress since the partnership was launched. U.S.-Indonesia trade last year totaled just \$7.4 billion, or about 10 percent of U.S. trade with ASEAN, even though Indonesia's economy makes up nearly half of Southeast Asia's combined \$1.8 trillion economy. Indonesia's trade with the United States lags behind that of much smaller countries like Peru and Panama.

But there have been a few recent successes, including Lion Air's order last year of 230 aircraft from Boeing worth \$22.4 billion—a record for the plane maker—and the more recent agreement for Dallas-based Celanese to build a \$2 billion facility that will convert coal to ethanol. This deal is a true win-win because it not only lessens Indonesia's reliance on imported oil but also helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



*Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton meeting for the second U.S.-Indonesia Joint Commission Meeting in Bali in 2011. The two recently held the third commission meeting in Washington. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/statephotos/5978220869/>*

## Comprehensive Partnership Nudges U.S.-Indonesia Relations to New Levels of Cooperation *(continued)*

There is a long way to go, however. Indonesia last year attracted investment of almost \$20 billion, but the U.S. share was just \$1.5 billion, roughly 5 percent of the total.

One problem holding U.S. companies back from expanding trade and investment is Indonesia's steady stream of new regulations and decrees that create uncertainty and increase the cost of doing business in the country. In recent months, new regulations have been issued on investment in banking and mining, restrictions have been introduced on food imports, and oil and gas companies face calls to renegotiate their production-sharing contracts.

Indonesia ranks 129 out of 185 in the World Bank's annual Ease of Doing Business survey. Manufacturing's share of the country's GDP has dropped over the past decade, and Indonesia is pretty much bypassed in the global supply chain as companies like Intel and Foxconn look to Vietnam instead.

In contrast to the difficulties facing their economic relations, U.S.-Indonesia security ties have emerged as a bright spot. Some of the most dramatic improvements in bilateral ties have occurred in military relations since the United States lifted its sanctions against Indonesia's Kopassus special forces in July 2010. Those sanctions were imposed in the wake of violence in Timor-Leste following that country's 1999 vote for independence.

Indonesia has dramatically bolstered its security ties with the United States as it has sought to professionalize and modernize its military. This year, the two countries are scheduled to have nearly 200 joint engagements including senior visits, training, exercises, and staff talks. These engagements are focused in four main areas: maritime security, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and reform and professionalization.

Indonesia and the United States held joint military exercises in June involving 450 Indonesian and 100 U.S. troops under the aegis of Garuda Shield 2012, the sixth round of such exercises since Garuda Shield was established in 2007. Indonesia also participates with the United States in a raft of regional exercises, including Cobra Gold in Thailand.

Defense trade is also increasing as Indonesia grows its military budget. The United States is providing Foreign Military Financing funds to



*Indonesia recently asked to purchase Apache helicopters from the United States in a highly visible sign of increased military-to-military relations between the two countries. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usaghumphreys/6834419572/>*

## Comprehensive Partnership Nudges U.S.-Indonesia Relations to New Levels of Cooperation *(continued)*

upgrade aging Indonesian C-130 cargo planes and is selling Jakarta two dozen refurbished F-16s. More recently, Indonesia has asked to purchase Apache helicopters and is exploring buying additional equipment ranging from new radar systems to drones and training aircraft.

Despite its relatively late start, the Comprehensive Partnership between Indonesia and the United States is turning out to be strengthening ties between the two countries as well as bolstering U.S. engagement with Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific as whole. ■

# The Week That Was



Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi meets Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during a 17-day visit to the United States. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/statephotos/8000222693/>

## MYANMAR

- **Aung San Suu Kyi urges easing of U.S. sanctions.** Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi September 19 called for an easing of U.S. sanctions on imports into Myanmar. While expressing appreciation for U.S. efforts in promoting democratic change in Myanmar, Suu Kyi said she believes the people of Myanmar should take control of their political transition. She made her comments during a 17-day visit to the United States, during which she also received the Congressional Gold Medal that she was awarded in absentia in 2008 and met with President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.
- **Myanmar pardons 500 prisoners.** The Myanmar government September 17 pardoned more than 500 prisoners, at least 80 of whom were prisoners of conscience. The decision is the latest wave of amnesty for prisoners in Myanmar in the last 18 months and appeared geared to garner goodwill ahead of President Thein Sein's trip to the United States September 25 for the United Nations General Assembly. Activists estimate that 200–400 political prisoners remain in jail in Myanmar. The United States has called for their release.
- **Kachin group refuses to hold peace talks.** The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) September 19 turned down Naypyidaw's invitation for peace talks, citing ongoing fighting between its troops and the national army near the town of Laiza. The two sides could not reach agreement on the withdrawal of army troops from Kachin territory or the location of the talks. Kachin religious leaders September 18 urged an end to the fighting that has displaced over 60,000 people since June 2011.
- **House of Representatives supports Myanmar aid bill.** The U.S. House of Representatives September 19 passed a bill that would lift the requirement for the United States to vote against assistance to Myanmar from international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The bill requires Myanmar to clear its overdue debt at these international institutions before receiving funding. It would also require that Congress be given 15 days' notice before any assistance is approved for Myanmar. The House September 20 sent the bill to the Senate, which has to vote on it.
- **Peace protesters march for end to civil war.** Hundreds of protesters September 21 marched thorough Yangon to commemorate International Peace Day and call for an end to conflicts in Myanmar's ethnic minority

territories. It was the largest demonstration since the 2007 monk-led Saffron Revolution. Protesters gathered despite not having received written government approval to stage a protest, as required by law. A smaller protest took place in Mon State, while the Karen National Union asked President Thein Sein to observe a one-day cease-fire in Kachin State to mark the occasion.

## INDONESIA

- **Exit polls show Jokowi wins Jakarta governor race.** Exit polls indicated that Solo governor Joko “Jokowi” Widodo secured 54 percent of the votes in the September 20 election for Jakarta governor, defeating incumbent Fauzi Bowo. Official results are not expected until October. Jokowi is credited with reestablishing the rule of law and limiting space for religious extremists in Solo. His campaign was targeted at Jakartans dissatisfied with a political establishment perceived as corrupt and inefficient.
- **Indonesia, United States hold Joint Commission Meeting.** Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met September 20 in Washington for the third U.S.-Indonesia Joint Commission Meeting. The annual meeting aims to deepen the bilateral cooperation established by the 2009 U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership agreement. Working groups discussed initiatives on education, security, democracy and civil society, environment and climate change, trade and investment, energy, and people-to-people ties.
- **Shares in Bumi fall as investigation leads to CEO’s resignation.** Mining giant Bumi Plc launched an investigation September 24 into financial irregularities at its Indonesian subsidiary PT Bumi Resources involving the write-down of more than \$500 million. The shares of Bumi, one of the largest suppliers of coal to India and China, plummeted 37 percent following the news before rebounding modestly the next day. The company is partially owned by the family of 2014 Indonesian presidential candidate Aburizal Bakrie. Shares in other Bakrie-affiliated firms also fell due to fears of about the company’s high debt and perceived mismanagement.
- **Indonesian forces arrest 10 militants.** Indonesian antiterror forces arrested nine suspected militants in Solo and one in Melawi during a crackdown on domestic terror plots. Authorities located and defused homemade bombs that targeted the Indonesian parliament. Evidence obtained from 30 similar arrests made since March suggests that militants are increasingly targeting Indonesian state and security



Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her Indonesian counterpart Marty Natalegawa speak at the second U.S.-Indonesia Joint Commission Meeting in 2011. The two met September 20 for the third annual meeting of the commission. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usembassyjakarta/5977314202/>

forces rather than foreign nationals. It is unclear how the 10 arrested are connected to other extremist groups in Indonesia.

## PHILIPPINES

- **Philippine central bank authorizes sale of \$1.5 billion in dollar and peso bonds.** The Philippine central bank September 20 approved the sale of up to \$1 billion in peso bonds to global investors and \$500 million in dollar bonds to local investors. The bond sales are meant to ameliorate the government's borrowing costs and reduce its reliance on foreign borrowing. Some of the proceeds will be used as part of a liability management program to buy back foreign debt.
- **Aquino signs controversial law to tackle cybercrime.** President Benigno Aquino September 15 signed into law the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012. The bill enhances the capacity of law enforcement to charge people with cybercrime by expanding its definition in the penal code to include "offences against the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of a computer system." Press and Internet-freedom groups have protested the law, arguing that its broad definition of cybercrime curbs freedom of the press and the Internet, especially by defining libel on the Internet as cybercrime.
- **Government and guerilla representatives draft initial framework to resolve conflict.** Mohagher Iqbal, principal negotiator for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), said September 10 that he and government officials were close to formalizing a peace plan to end the MILF's decades-long rebellion in Mindanao. Iqbal said half of the outstanding issues had been resolved, including plans for a new governing system for the province by 2016. Despite the progress, however, Iqbal said September 18 that the MILF will not end its insurgency until a final pact is signed.

## THAILAND

- **Truth commission releases long-anticipated report.** The Truth for Reconciliation Commission of Thailand September 17 released its final report on the political violence that rocked Bangkok from April to May 2010. The report is not without critics, but is largely seen as being fair in its judgment and recommendations. It apportions blame for various incidents during the violence to both sides—the government and security forces as well as members of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship, also known as "red shirts." Prime Minister Yingluck



*President Aquino is facing criticism from media groups in the Philippines over the controversial new cybercrime law's criminalization of Internet libel. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/worldbank/6170232825>*

Shinawatra has pledged to study and implement those recommendations deemed “useful” to bringing about national peace.

- **Government cooperates with opposition to tackle insurgency in the south.** Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra chaired a meeting September 18 with opposition leader Abhisit Vejjajiva, members of his Democrat Party, and representatives of the Thai security forces to discuss how to restore peace in the country’s insurgency-plagued southern provinces. Violence in the three predominantly Muslim provinces has grown steadily this year, leading critics to argue that Yingluck’s reliance on security forces failed to solve the problem. The Democrats, who have a strong political foothold in the region, support a more comprehensive approach to combating the insurgency.
- **Government attempts to minimize flood risk as heavy rains continue.** Thailand’s government is scrambling to reinforce flood barriers as heavy rains inundate the country’s northern provinces. Flooding has not yet approached the devastating levels seen in late 2011, but observers say it may already be too late for the country to take sufficient preventative measures to prevent serious flooding this monsoon season. Four people had died in the flooding as of September 21.

#### MALAYSIA

- **Demonstrations over anti-Islam video spread through region.** The U.S. embassies and several missions in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand were periodically closed throughout the week of September 17-21 in response to security concerns over anti-American protests. Demonstrations September 21 over the video “The Innocence of Muslims” resulted in closures in Indonesia and Malaysia following Friday prayers, and the embassy in Bangkok was closed September 18 following massive demonstrations. In Singapore, the government September 21 requested that Google block the video. Protests in Southeast Asia have been relatively peaceful compared to those elsewhere in the Muslim world.
- **Rare earths plant gets go-ahead with two-year temporary operating license.** The Malaysian Atomic Energy Licensing Board September 5 granted Australian-based mining giant Lynas a two-year temporary operating license for its plant in Kuantan that will process rare earth minerals shipped from Australia. Opponents of the project say they will continue to protest the plant and will attempt to block shipments of rare earths into Malaysia. They are concerned the plant will cause



*Demonstrators protest Australia-based Lynas’s rare earths plant in Kuantan, Malaysia. The plant received a two-year temporary operating license September 5. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/avlxyz/6807645576/>*

environmental damage and negatively impact local communities' health and well-being. Licensing for the controversial plant, estimated to cost \$230 million, had been debated for the previous nine months.

- **Date of general election remains uncertain, could be pushed to 2013.**

Prime Minister Najib Razak said during a September 20 press conference that he may not call general elections until after his ruling UMNO party holds its general meeting, possibly at the end of November. That could mean that elections will not be called until early 2013, just before the April deadline to do so. Some observers took Najib's remarks as disproving widespread speculation that the government had stepped up spending in recent months in preparation for a November election. Najib was careful to note that UMNO could postpone its general meeting.

#### VIETNAM

- **Prime minister says no need for rescue loans from IMF or neighbors.**

Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung September 16 dismissed speculation that Vietnam might need to seek a rescue loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or neighboring countries. The statement followed an alleged National Assembly Economic Committee report that suggested Vietnam should consider seeking IMF aid to restructure its banks and economy. Prime Minister Dung said he is confident about the country's improving macroeconomic conditions, citing controlled inflation, growing foreign exchange reserves, and a current surplus balance of payments.

- **Vietnamese police to pursue more charges against tycoon Nguyen**

**Duc Kien.** The Ministry of Public Security September 19 announced more serious charges against banking tycoon Nguyen Duc Kien, cofounder of Asia Commercial Bank (ACB), a month after his arrest. The new charges are "deliberate wrongdoing causing serious consequences," which carries a 20-year sentence, and "fraudulence," which carries a maximum life sentence. Three ACB board members resigned on September 20 for health and personal reasons. The bank moved to appoint a new chairman the same day.

- **Three bloggers sentenced in Internet crackdown.**

A Vietnamese court September 24 sentenced three bloggers to lengthy jail sentences in a decision that left outside groups like [Reporters Without Borders](#) worried that authorities are attempting to tighten control over the country's already highly restricted Internet. The bloggers, Nguyen Van Hai, Ta Phong Tan, and Phan Thanh Hai, were sentenced to 12, 10, and 4 years in prison, respectively, for political articles they posted online. Reporters Without

Borders has labeled Vietnam an “Enemy of the Internet,” behind only China and Iran.

- **National Assembly Standing Committee wants revision of draft land law.** The National Assembly Standing Committee September 17 agreed on the need to revise land pricing in an amended draft land law. Providing transparent guidelines for land pricing and compensation rates is seen as crucial to protecting the interests of both farmers and developers, and to resolving land disputes. The draft law is set to go into force in 2013.

#### SOUTH CHINA SEA



*The Philippine Navy patrols waters off the country’s western coast, which President Aquino has formally renamed the West Philippine Sea. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dndphl/6910095041/>*

- **Philippines officially renames part of the South China Sea the West Philippine Sea.** President Benigno Aquino September 12 passed an administrative order officially renaming parts of the South China Sea—the waters off the coast of the Philippines and around disputed features it claims—the West Philippine Sea. Aquino urged other claimant nations not to view the order as a provocative act, emphasizing that it covers only the waters within the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone. China’s official media derided the move, with *Xinhua* calling it “political short-sightedness” and the *China Daily* describing it as a “reckless decision.”
- **Panetta warns that maritime disputes could develop into war if governments continue “provocative behavior.”** Defense Secretary Leon Panetta September 16 called on the South China Sea claimants to exhibit restraint amid rising tensions. He said that provocations raise the possibility of misjudgments on both sides and advised countries to pursue peaceful resolution of their differences. Panetta made the comments ahead of a trip to Asia that included Japan and China, which are also locked in a territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.
- **ASEAN body proposes advisory group to address South China Sea tensions.** Southeast Asian legislators at the September 16–22 ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) in Lombok, Indonesia, proposed the creation of an eminent persons advisory group to find “new political channels” to resolve the South China Sea dispute. The group would include parliamentarians from all ASEAN countries. The AIPA also adopted 11 resolutions addressing regional issues, including one encouraging the South China Sea claimants to finalize a code of conduct with China.

## ASEAN

- **ASEAN exchanges launched in Malaysia and Singapore.** The Malaysian and Singaporean stock markets September 18 became the first to offer cross-border trading as part of the ASEAN Exchanges (AE) initiative. This trading initiative aims to link the stock exchanges of Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Thailand is expected to join next month and together with Malaysia and Singapore will account for two-thirds of the total market capitalization of the initiative. AE seeks to create a single Southeast Asian trading platform and create more investment opportunities across the region.
- **ASEAN secretary general announces start date of ASEAN Economic Community.** ASEAN secretary general Surin Pitsuwan September 13 announced that the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) will officially begin December 31, 2015. Surin reaffirmed that ASEAN is on track to realize the planned AEC and member countries are maximizing their efforts to achieve economic integration by the deadline.

## TIMOR-LESTE

- **Timor-Leste hosts conference on peace building in Asia.** Sixty representatives from 18 Asia Pacific countries met in Dili September 19-21 for the Action Asia Peacebuilders' Forum. The biannual forum brings together representatives from across Asia to discuss strategies for conflict management and prevention being implemented across the region. Timor-Leste's president, Taur Matan Ruak, and his predecessor, Jose Ramos-Horta, both critical figures in the independence struggle against Indonesia, gave keynote speeches.
- **New Zealand foreign affairs minister pledges \$18 million in aid during visit.** New Zealand foreign affairs minister Murray McCully pledged \$18 million over three years to help boost private investment, education, capacity building, security, and justice in Timor-Leste during a September 17-23 visit to the country. He also highlighted a four-year \$12 million pledge New Zealand has made to help Timor-Leste transfer policing responsibilities from UN forces to its own National Police. McCully met with Timor-Leste president Taur Matan Ruak, Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão, and Foreign Minister Jose Luis Guterres during the visit.
- **Indonesian foreign minister reaffirms support for Timor-Leste's ASEAN membership.** Indonesian foreign minister Marty Natalegawa September



*An officer in Timor-Leste's National Police. New Zealand has pledged \$18 million in development aid to Timor-Leste and \$12 million to boost the capacity of the National Police. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/globalcitizen01/7765108744/>*

11 reaffirmed his country's support for Timor-Leste's bid to join ASEAN. Speaking alongside his Timorese counterpart, Jose Luis Guterres, Natalegawa cited Timor-Leste's recent appointment of Roberto Soares as deputy minister for ASEAN affairs as evidence of its seriousness. Indonesia has actively advocated for Timor-Leste's membership in ASEAN despite some member countries' concern that it could upset the organization's plan to launch an ASEAN Economic Community in 2015.

#### SINGAPORE

- **Head of Singapore's Catholic Church withdraws letter condemning Internal Security Act.** Singapore Archbishop Nicholas Chia sparked controversy after a blog post September 18 revealed that he had withdrawn a letter criticizing Singapore's Internal Security Act. Archbishop Chia had submitted the letter to Function 8, a group that works to increase civic dialogue and awareness in Singapore. He told the *Straits Times* September 20 that he withdrew the letter because of concerns about how Function 8 might use it, although Alex Au, the blog's author, claimed the real reason was government pressure. The Internal Security Act is a colonial-era law that grants the government wide-ranging power to arrest and hold without trial citizens considered a threat to public security. ■

- **Muhamad Chatib Basri to speak at CSIS.** The CSIS Chair for Southeast Asia Studies will host a discussion September 28 with Muhamad Chatib Basri, chairman of Indonesia's Investment Coordinating Board. The event will be held as part of the [Derwin Pereira Indonesia Initiative](#) at CSIS, which seeks to enhance understanding of Indonesia and its public policy. The event will take place from 12 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. in the CSIS B1 Conference Center, 1800 K St., NW. Please RSVP to the CSIS [Chair for Southeast Asia Studies](#).
- **Philippine film about WWII to be shown.** The Sigur Center for Asian Studies at the George Washington University will present *Aishite Imasu*, a 2004 Philippine film about World War II, on September 27. A reception will begin at 5:30 p.m., followed by the film screening at 6 p.m. The event will take place in the Chung-wen Shih conference room, Suite 503, 1957 E Street, N.W. Please RSVP [here](#).
- **Philippines to host inaugural expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum.** Representatives from the 18 members of the East Asia Summit (EAS) will meet in Manila October 3–5 for the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AEM). This year's AEM will be the first to include the eight non-ASEAN members of the EAS. Participants will discuss ways to increase cooperation in maritime security. The Philippines, as the host and a claimant in the South China Sea, will likely use the forum to raise the issue of a code of conduct for the South China Sea.
- **Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations to be held in New Zealand.** The next round of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade negotiations will be held December 3–12 in Auckland. New members Canada and Mexico will join these negotiations for the first time, increasing the group membership to 11 countries. The last TPP negotiating round was held in Leesburg, Virginia, in early September, but differences over state-owned enterprises and intellectual property rights reportedly remained sticking points between various parties. ■

## SOUTHEAST ASIA FROM THE CORNER OF 18TH & K STREETS

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