

U.S.-Southeast Asia Relations:

Philippines Withdraws from Iraq and JI Strikes Again

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The early withdrawal of the Philippines' small armed forces contingent from Iraq in response to a militant group's threat to murder a Filipino hostage disappointed the United States but has not damaged Washington-Manila counterterror cooperation. U.S. forces continue to train Philippine soldiers in counter-insurgency. The early September Jakarta truck bomb attack on the Australian Embassy has reinforced U.S. and Australian police and intelligence collaboration with their Indonesian counterparts. Washington hopes that the election of S.B. Yudhoyono as Indonesia's next president will strengthen joint efforts against the Indonesia-based *Jemaah Islamiyah* – Southeast Asia's al-Qaeda-linked and most lethal terror organization. Washington is also offering technical assistance to Southeast Asian navies patrolling the Malacca Strait just as China proposes to raise its maritime profile in the region.

Philippine withdrawal strains U.S. relations

Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, one of America's earliest and staunchest Asian supporters in the war on terror, withdrew the small Philippine contingent of 51 peacekeepers from Iraq in July, a month before its scheduled departure. The kidnapping of a Filipino truck driver and threat of his execution by militants fueled already negative Philippine public opinion over the country's participation in the Iraq occupation. President Arroyo's decision occurred only days after U.S. Pacific Commander Adm. Thomas Fargo had praised the country for its support in Iraq.

With approximately 4,000 civilian Filipinos in Iraq, most working for the U.S. Army and civilian contractors, insuring their safety is an important political concern for Manila. While the government has not ordered all of them to leave – the ultimate goal of most of the insurgents who kidnap foreign workers – President Arroyo called a halt to any future Filipino laborers bound for Iraq. U.S. officials expressed dismay at the president's decision. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher averred that it sends "the wrong signal" to terrorists. "Making concessions to hostage takers only encourages their behavior." With its troop withdrawal, the Philippines became the first country to yield to kidnappers' demands. (Washington fears that others would follow as occurred after Spain pulled out earlier this year; the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Honduras appear to have done just that.)

Overseas Filipino workers are a significant contributor to the Philippine economy; remittances in 2003 reached an all-time high of \$7.6 billion to account for nearly 10 percent of the country's GNP. As a key ally in the U.S. war on terror, President Arroyo does not want to damage Manila's important relationship with Washington, which has granted the Philippines "major non-NATO ally" status. The Philippines is also the largest recipient of U.S. aid in Southeast Asia.

However, given her slim victory in the hotly contested recent presidential election and her memory of how President Fidel Ramos' popularity plummeted after the execution of a Filipina maid in Singapore, President Arroyo seemed to conclude that calming public opinion was worth the risk of annoying the country's superpower ally. The Philippine presence in Iraq was a token humanitarian contingent composed of noncombat troops, but their withdrawal damages a key element of the Bush administration's strategy in the Iraq occupation/reconstruction, which is to put an international face on these activities. The troop withdrawal also appeared to contradict Manila's internal policy toward Muslim militants in Mindanao where negotiations and ransoms to release kidnap victims have long prevailed. In the Iraq case, there was no effort to negotiate a ransom for the hostage release. The Philippine government simply complied with the militants' demands.

President Arroyo's gamble may have paid off when, on July 14, U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Francis Riccardone affirmed the alliance relationship and stated: "We are here for you." Nevertheless, Secretary of State Colin Powell admonished the Philippines when he stated that the U.S. was "very disappointed in the action of the Philippines government" in which "the kidnapers were rewarded for kidnapping." Justifying her decision, Mrs. Arroyo called upon the Philippines' allies to understand "that the Philippines is in a special circumstance unlike the U.S., Australia ... and other countries" with "1.5 million of its citizens in the Middle East." She believed that the threat to these civilians "has now been relieved as a result of the ... departure of Philippine troops." (Nonetheless, within a week after the Philippines withdrew its forces, hostage takers seized workers from Kenya, India, Pakistan, and Egypt, demanding that their employers or home countries withdraw from Iraq.)

Subsequently, Manila has reaffirmed its continued commitment to "the campaign against international terrorism" through cooperation with its neighbors and "our strategic partnership with the United States." And, in August, Philippine Foreign Secretary Delia Albert stated that the Philippines remains committed to helping rebuild Iraq and remained open to sending peacekeepers under a UN framework.

U.S.-Philippine war games and the MILF

Over the past several years, Manila has attempted to move the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) – seeking autonomy for the southern Philippines – from rebellion to negotiations. In that same time frame, however, some members of the MILF had been cooperating with elements of the Indonesia-based *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI) – Southeast Asia's largest and al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamist terrorist organization. In 2002, U.S. Army forces began training Philippine elite troops and special forces in the south to suppress

the *Abu Sayyaf* kidnap-murder gang and any MILF allies. By 2004, MILF leaders chose to open negotiations with Manila again, and Malaysia offered its good offices. As a sign of its good intentions, the MILF has also agreed to assist Manila in locating JI operatives in Mindanao who are training *Abu Sayyaf* and those MILF fighters who have not joined the peace talks. For the United States, isolating and apprehending JI members constitutes a major benefit from its training program in Mindanao. An additional hope is to deny the southern Philippines as a training ground for Southeast Asian Islamist militants.

In July, Philippine and U.S. forces began a series of counterterrorism training exercises in areas where MILF secessionists maintain camps. To insure that the exercises do not provoke clashes with MILF forces, Philippine Defense Secretary Eduardo Ermita said that the government would share training schedules, venues, and the numbers of participating troops with the MILF leadership. In return, the MILF expressed no objection. Unlike previous exercises, no heavy U.S. equipment is involved this time; and most of the field exercises would be confined to the grounds of a Philippine military camp in the region. Moreover, the number of U.S. training staff is much smaller than in previous exercises, with only 40-50 in total. Missions outside the camp were to be humanitarian and civic action, which have generated goodwill from local populations in the past. Nevertheless, some local protests occurred, especially in Kabocan town next to the Philippine military site because local authorities were not consulted about the billeting of U.S. soldiers in a University of Southern Mindanao hostel. Concurrent with the exercises, the U.S. financed the Philippine purchase of 20 military helicopters, to be delivered by the end of 2005. U.S.-trained Philippine forces will remain deployed in the south to hunt down about 20 JI militants – mostly Indonesians – hiding in remote MILF camps. By December, U.S. special forces will have trained about 1,000 Philippine troops in counter-insurgency during 2004.

The United States also renewed an order classifying the Communist Party of the Philippines as a terrorist organization. Its New Peoples Army has been fighting the government for years in both Luzon and Mindanao, though there is little evidence that it collaborates with Moro insurgents. The U.S. terrorist list renewal led the communist National Democratic Front to postpone peace talks with Manila.

U.S. warily observes closer Philippines-China ties

In what several Philippine commentators described as a “diplomatic breakthrough,” President Arroyo visited China in early September and agreed to expand military exchanges. The newly appointed Philippine Defense Secretary Avelino Cruz Jr. stated that “defense cooperation will ease out the irritant issue of [the] South China Sea disputes....” A spokesman from the Philippine President’s Office reassured Washington that China-Philippines defense ties would not in any way affect existing bilateral security ties and military pacts with the United States. Nor would there be joint exercises between Chinese and Philippine forces.

Nevertheless, new Philippine security relations with Beijing and possible joint oil exploration in the South China Sea coming soon after Manila withdrew forces from Iraq are causing some apprehension in Washington. U.S. Charge d'affairs Joseph Mussomeli warned Manila that relations with the U.S. face "erosion" if there are additional setbacks in bilateral ties. Washington may be concerned that PRC-Philippine joint exploration in the Spratly Islands allows Beijing to project its navy permanently into the area. China also gave President Arroyo \$1 billion in soft loans and investments, some of which will involve Beijing in the Subic-Clark area, enhancing the latter's role as a logistics and service hub in Southeast Asia.

Fighting terrorism still tops the U.S.-Indonesia agenda

A terrorist attack on the Australian Embassy, the election of a new president, and controversies over U.S.-Indonesian counterterrorist plans dominated bilateral relations in this quarter. A massive truck bomb exploded adjacent to the Australian Embassy in Jakarta on Sept. 9, killing 10 and injuring 180, all Indonesians. The Australian Embassy may have been chosen by the terrorists – believed to be JI – because the U.S. Embassy was better protected and set back from its main thoroughfare. Indonesian police say the truck bomb was similar to those used to attack the Jakarta Marriott in 2003 and Bali in 2002. Those arrested for the earlier atrocities were all JI operatives. Ironically, just days before the recent attack, the U.S. and Australian embassies had issued travel warnings for Indonesia that Jakarta had labeled "exaggerated."

Although the Indonesian police are doing a good job tracking and apprehending JI terrorists, the government of President Megawati Sukarnoputri has still not acknowledged the Islamist terror organization's existence nor publicly laid out a case against it or plans to counter it. Neither has the government tackled the corruption that allows would-be terrorists to buy guns and explosives as well as false passports and identity cards. The government also needs to take action against the small number of schools that have produced a disproportionate share of the bombers. Meanwhile, the purported spiritual leader of JI, in police custody for an alleged role in the earlier bombings, condemned the attack on the Australian Embassy, denied that it could have been perpetrated by Muslims, and laid the blame on an Australian-U.S. conspiracy to divide Muslims. In late September, an Indonesian police general stated that the money for the attack was probably what remained from \$50,000 that JI had been given to bomb the Jakarta Marriott.

The September election of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) as Indonesia's next president has heartened those who hope Indonesia will adopt a stronger counterterrorist posture. As coordinating minister for security under Mrs. Megawati, he was the government's most outspoken critic of Islamist terror. Having served two stints in U.S. military educational institutions, SBY desires a full resumption of military relations with the United States. The U.S. training program was stopped more than a decade ago after the Clinton administration and Congress objected to human rights abuses by the Indonesian military in East Timor. The Bush administration and Congress are discussing the restoration of military training to bolster Indonesia's counterterror cooperation. The

key is whether the U.S. Congress is satisfied with Jakarta's findings in a Papua murder investigation of the killings of two U.S. teachers. The FBI concluded that the assailant was a rebel with the Free Papua Movement and not the Indonesian military as many U.S. Congressmen believed.

On the other hand, the Indonesian appeals court's August decision to overturn the conviction of four security officials convicted of atrocities in East Timor that accompanied that province's 1999 independence vote elicited an angry reaction from the State Department. With their convictions voided, out of 18 Indonesians tried for atrocities in the former Indonesian province, only two were found guilty and both of them are ethnic Timorese. By contrast, in a parallel investigation, the UN's Serious Crime Unit in East Timor has indicted more than 375 people and obtained over 50 convictions, mostly militia men who said they were acting under the orders of the Indonesian armed forces. Some 280 of those indicted remain at large in Indonesia, including the Indonesian commander at the time, Gen. Wiranto. So far, however, the United States is the only major power that has publicly stated it wants to see justice for East Timor. Ironically, the new state itself, eager to maintain good relations with its more powerful neighbor, opposed the idea of an international tribunal and has refused to forward Gen. Wiranto's arrest warrant to Interpol.

Regional security concerns involve the United States and China

Last quarter's U.S.-Southeast relations piece in *Comparative Connections* discussed U.S. backtracking on a proposal for an enhanced role in patrolling the Malacca Strait against terrorism and piracy when Indonesia and Malaysia rejected the idea as an encroachment on their sovereignty. Nevertheless, because Jakarta is promoting the concept of an ASEAN Security Community that requires some sacrifice of the group's noninterference principle, President Megawati urged ASEAN to react positively to Washington's renewed interest in Southeast Asian security when she addressed the July ASEAN Ministerial Meeting. At that meeting, Secretary Powell reiterated U.S. interest "in working with ASEAN countries to strengthen maritime security in the region." The U.S. Pacific Command now offers technical assistance and training to the littoral states rather than direct participation. In a separate development, on July 20, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore signed an agreement for joint patrols in the Malacca Strait to combat piracy. The specifics of those joint patrols have yet to be defined, however, and neither Indonesia nor Malaysia have mentioned antiterrorism as an objective. Meanwhile, in mid-August, Singapore began its own negotiations with the United States for defense cooperation based on the belief that a more formal U.S. presence in Southeast Asia will enhance regional stability.

Interestingly, China has also proposed deepening security ties with Southeast Asia in response to what the PRC sees as too much U.S. influence in regional security forums such as the annual Shangri-La dialogues. ASEAN has agreed to attend a new security forum in Beijing later this year. At a seminar on ASEAN-China relations in Singapore at the end of June, Chinese participants floated the idea of joint naval patrols and maritime

military exercises, possibly as a way of urging other ASEAN members not to follow Singapore's lead in establishing closer defense ties with the United States.

On the counterterror front, Washington has contributed to an Asian Development Bank trust fund to assist member countries in dealing with terrorist finance and money laundering as well as improving port security. The funds can be used to establish financial intelligence units and to upgrade customs security. The fund grew out of an U.S. initiative at the 2003 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. In late August, Washington pledged \$468 million in aid to Indonesia over five years, much of it to reform school curriculum to combat Islamist extremism. A new U.S.-trained police counterterrorism detachment, "Team 88," captured a top JI operative who entered Indonesia from the southern Philippines on June 30. He and his associates are linked to bombings in Indonesia over the past six years. Many of the U.S. instructors for Team 88 are retired special forces personnel. While Indonesia has been criticized by outsiders for not giving the war on Islamist terror high political visibility, in fact, Jakarta has more home-grown terrorists in custody than any other Southeast Asian country.

Thailand and Malaysia cool to U.S. war on terror

Thailand and Malaysia have been only marginally involved in Iraq. Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra dispatched 447 peacekeepers possibly as the basis for securing lucrative reconstruction contracts. However, after a year's deployment, they were withdrawn in late September with no indication that fresh troops would replace them – despite UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's request that the troops remain in place prior to scheduled January elections because of Iraq's ongoing security crisis. In fact, the Thai engineers and medics had stayed in their camp since April because of rising violence.

Malaysia has offered to send a military medical team to Iraq as a sign of the government's "very strong" relations with the United States. No Malaysian peacekeepers have been sent, however. Nor are there any plans to do so. Moreover, Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar warned in mid-July that the U.S. invasion of Iraq had backfired and "the incidence of terrorism ... has increased." However, as current chair of the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak has urged the OIC to discuss the possibility of sending an all-Muslim force to Iraq but only if there is some way of determining whether such a force would be acceptable to the Iraqi people. The United States privately expressed disappointment at the stringent conditions outlined by Malaysia before any mission would be sent. In mid-September, after Secretary General Annan declared the U.S. intervention in Iraq to be a violation of international law, Foreign Minister Hamid Albar noted that Malaysia had stated from the beginning that the U.S. action was illegal and that U.S. and allied forces "should pull out from Iraq as soon as possible."

Despite this harsh rhetoric, routine joint military exercises continued between Malaysia and the United States. The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *U.S.S. John Stennis* and its battle group arrived in Malaysia for a four-day visit in early September, while earlier in August a fleet of five U.S. Navy ships conducted exercises in the South China Sea with

the Malaysian Navy. The *U.S.S. Stennis* commander, Rear Adm. Patrick Walsh, told reporters, “Malaysia has been a good friend to the United States, and we want to reciprocate.”

U.S. pleased as Malaysia releases Anwar from prison

Former deputy prime minister and one time heir apparent to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad, Anwar Ibrahim, was released from prison Sept. 2. His sodomy conviction was widely believed to be trumped up by a vindictive Mahathir whose policies during the 1997 Asian financial crisis were challenged by Anwar. After serving six years, the Malaysian high court overturned Anwar’s conviction, stating the original evidence was unreliable. The U.S. Embassy in Kuala Lumpur immediately welcomed Anwar’s release stating: “It was gratifying to see that justice has now been served.” The court let stand Anwar’s earlier corruption conviction, which effectively bars him from running for office before 2008.

Anwar’s 1998 arrest had soured relations between the United States and Malaysia. Vice President Al Gore rebuked Mahathir to his face at a 1998 dinner meeting of Asia-Pacific leaders in the Malaysian capital for the manner in which Anwar had been treated. Subsequently, the Malaysian prime minister maintained a critical stance toward the U.S. until his retirement in October 2003. The new prime minister, Abdullah Badawi, has patched up relations with Washington. Anwar’s release can be seen as evidence that the Malaysian judiciary will be more independent than it was under Abdullah’s predecessor. Malaysian commentators are divided over whether Anwar can make a political comeback because domestic politics have significantly changed while he was incarcerated.

Implications

Both the Philippines and Thailand have withdrawn their small military contingents from Iraq, and no other Southeast Asian states deploy armed forces there. Their absence reflects the war’s political unpopularity in the region as well as Southeast Asia’s consensus that U.S. involvement in Iraq is not part of the war on terror. Nevertheless, 4,000 Philippine contract workers remain in Iraq, and their safety is a serious concern for President Arroyo’s government.

Regional terrorist activities burgeon with the JI bombing in Indonesia, continued Muslim unrest in southern Thailand, and more killings by the *Abu Sayyaf*, the communist NPA, and rogue elements of the MILF in the Philippines. Moreover, JI instructors and recruits from Indonesia continue to train in remote areas of the southern Philippines. Therefore, Southeast Asian governments welcome U.S. counterterror assistance through counterinsurgency training (Philippines) technical assistance to the police (Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand), and intelligence sharing.

The United States should encourage efforts by the littoral states to collaborate in Malacca Strait patrols against piracy (and potentially maritime terrorism). Washington should offer whatever assistance Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore are willing to accept

without appearing to usurp their regional authority. In time, U.S. participation in Malacca Strait surveillance may be accepted – provided U.S. Navy plans are vetted by the countries bordering these waters. Given China’s growing presence in Southeast Asia, regular U.S. Navy patrols might be favorably received as part of a Southeast Asian balance strategy.

Chronology of U.S.-Southeast Asian Relations July-September 2004

July 1, 2004: In formal remarks at the U.S.-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Secretary Powell states U.S. “interest in working with ASEAN countries to strengthen maritime security in the region.”

July 2, 2004: Secretary Powell at an ARF meeting in Jakarta expresses regret over the difficulty foreigners have obtaining visas for the U.S. and promises that “a more normal set of standards” will be restored.

July 2, 2004: ARF agrees to create a small permanent Secretariat for the first time, a plan long backed by the United States.

July 6, 2004: Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter visits Indonesia as an election observer, declares the round of the presidential election a success for democracy with “no real challenge to secular governments.”

July 7, 2004: U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Francis Riccardione calls for a tougher campaign against *Jemaah Islamiyah* in Mindanao and announces the U.S. is withdrawing \$30 million offer to aid Mindanao development because the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is not cooperating in the peace process.

July 7, 2004: U.S. Congress agrees to finance the purchase of 20 of the 50 military helicopters to be acquired by the Philippines in the next 18 months for the fight against insurgents and terrorists, says Philippine Defense Secretary Eduardo Ermita.

July 8, 2004: Philippines bars citizens from traveling to Iraq after kidnappers threatened to kill a Philippine hostage. The Philippines has 51 soldiers and police officers in Iraq and about 4,000 contract workers with the U.S. military.

July 9, 2004: Indonesia serves as venue for former U.S. Army Sergeant and alleged deserter Charles Jenkins to reunite with his Japanese wife who had been kidnapped by the DPRK in the 1970s. Indonesia was chosen because Jakarta has no extradition treaty with the U.S. Secretary Powell said the U.S. would not protest because the meeting was “a humanitarian issue.”

July 12-13, 2004: Philippine President Arroyo promises to withdraw 51 peacekeepers from Iraq “as soon as possible” to halt the execution of a captured Filipino. The U.S. government urges the Philippines not to comply with terrorists.

July 14, 2004: Philippines announces it has withdrawn some of its peacekeepers from Iraq despite the Bush administration’s opposition. The full contingent of Philippine forces was scheduled to go home in August.

July 16, 2004: Indonesia and Cambodia are among a group of countries that will share in a \$50 million aid plan announced by President Bush to combat human trafficking.

July 19, 2004: Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi meets President Bush in Washington to discuss Muslim issues.

July 19, 2004: Philippines completes withdrawal of 51 military and police peacekeepers from Iraq as Arab militants release a Philippine hostage. The U.S. and other governments with forces in Iraq say the decision will encourage further hostage taking.

July 20, 2004: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore signed an agreement for joint patrols in the Malacca Strait to combat piracy.

July 23, 2004: U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Riccordione returns to Washington for “consultations” following the Philippines’ withdrawal of its 51 peacekeepers from Iraq.

July 26, 2004: Joint Philippines-U.S. counterterrorism exercise begins in North Cotabato province, an MILF stronghold. The exercise is confined to the grounds of a Philippine military camp.

July 28, 2004: Indonesian prosecutors drop charges against jailed cleric Abu Bakar Bashir for the 2002 Bali bombing after the Constitutional Court rules that a counterterror law passed after the Bali bombing cannot be applied retroactively. Bashir remains in jail, however, and will be charged with leading the regional terrorist organization, *Jemaah Islamiyah*.

July 29, 2004: U.S. missionary Gracia Burnham identifies six of her *Abu Sayyaf* kidnapers in a Manila court. She and her husband, who was killed in their rescue by Philippine forces, were held with 19 others for more than a year after being seized in 2002.

July 29, 2004: U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia Ralph Boyce congratulates President Megawati Sukarnoputri on Indonesia’s successful first round of presidential elections and expresses surprise at criticism of foreign election monitors for allegedly interfering.

Aug. 3, 2004: U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge attends Singapore National Day celebration at the Washington, D.C. Embassy, praising Singapore for sharing its homeland defense expertise with the United States.

Aug. 3-4, 2004: U.S. Pacific Command J-5 Maj. Gen. Karl Eikenberry meets Indonesia's military chief Gen. Sutarto in Jakarta for discussions about improving military ties.

Aug. 4, 2004: North Korea accuses Vietnam and the United States of "conspiring" to help several hundred North Koreans to defect via Vietnam to South Korea.

Aug. 6, 2004: Arrests in Pakistan of a top al-Qaeda computer specialist reveals electronic mail to sleeper cells in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the U.S. among other countries.

Aug. 6, 2004: U.S. State Department expresses "dismay" and "profound disappointment" over the decision by an Indonesian appeals court to overturn the conviction of three Indonesian army officers and a policeman convicted of the massacre of hundreds of East Timorese during the 1999 independence referendum.

Aug. 7, 2004: Manila and Washington reaffirm alliance against global terrorism after disagreeing about the Philippines' early withdrawal of forces from Iraq.

Aug. 9, 2004: Secretary Powell renews order declaring the Philippine Communist Party a terrorist organization even though Philippine President Arroyo plans to hold peace talks with communist guerrillas this month.

Aug. 25, 2004: More than 1,500 unregistered Hmong refugees in a Thai camp attempt to join others who have been cleared for immigration to the U.S. They were detained by the Thai military because they missed the 2003 registration deadline. U.S. and Thai authorities are reportedly working to resolve the unregistered refugees' plight.

Aug. 29, 2004: U.S. pledges \$168 million in aid over five years to Indonesia, much of it to reform school curriculum in hopes of combating Islamist extremism. Of the total, \$236 million is earmarked for other human services and \$75 million to food assistance.

Aug. 30, 2004: Singapore rejects U.S. government human rights report alleging it tolerates illicit trade in prostitutes and some foreign maids. The U.S. report accused Singapore of having no action plan to battle this trafficking, an allegation Singapore denies by pointing to stringent immigration controls.

Aug. 30, 2004: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration launches a month-long counternarcotics training program for the Philippine National Police and Army, emphasizing identifying and preserving evidence.

Sept. 1, 2004: The *USS John Stennis* nuclear-powered carrier and accompanying battle group begin a rare four-day visit to Malaysia. Commander Rear Adm. Patrick Walsh avers America's commitment to regional security and support for Malaysia, "a loyal and faithful partner and friend."

Sept. 2, 2004: Former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim is released from jail after serving six years for corruption and sodomy convictions, widely believed to have been political revenge at the behest of then Prime Minister Mahathir. The U.S. Embassy stated it is "gratifying to see that justice has now been served." The Malaysian high court called the evidence used to convict Anwar "unreliable."

Sept. 3, 2004: U.S. issues new warnings to its citizens to avoid Western hotels in Jakarta following fresh concerns that terrorists are targeting locations frequented by Westerners. Indonesian police said they were unaware of any new threats.

Sept. 8, 2004: U.S. Embassy officials in Manila illustrate new fingerprint scanning technology being required of foreign visitors to the United States. The embassy stressed it would not be harder to visit the U.S., and the new technology would stop the use of stolen and counterfeit visas.

Sept. 9, 2004: Suicide truck bomber kills 10 people and injures 180 when his vehicle detonates adjacent to the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, the third major suicide bomb incident in Indonesia after Bali 2002 and the Jakarta Marriott in 2003.

Sept. 16, 2004: Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz publishes Op-Ed in *The New York Times* condemning the Indonesian government's prosecution of Bambang Harymurti, chief editor of *Tempo*, the country's leading news magazine. Bambang had written an article speculating that an open-air market fire had been arson to benefit a well-connected entrepreneur who planned a large commercial development on the location. Wolfowitz sees the prosecution as a strike against freedom of the press.

Sept. 18, 2004: Vietnam denounces U.S. State Department list naming it a "country of particular concern" with respect to religious freedom. Burma was also cited for religious persecution.

Sept. 20, 2004: Presidential run-off elections in Indonesia. The official results to be announced on Oct. 5.

Sept. 23, 2004: U.S. Embassy in Jakarta criticizes Indonesian police for detaining without charge several U.S. executives of the P.T. Newmount mining company over allegations of dumping hazardous waste into Buyat Bay in North Sulawesi. While expressing support for Indonesia's judicial system, the embassy warned that arbitrary arrests could further harm the investment climate in the country.