



U.S.-Southeast Asia Relations:

## Burma Heats up and the U.S. Blows Hot and Cold

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Asia's largest multilateral naval exercise in decades took place in the eastern Indian Ocean Sept. 4-9, involving ships and aircraft from the U.S., India, Japan, Australia, and Singapore. Extensive combat, antiterrorism, and humanitarian assistance scenarios were included. President Bush condemned the Burmese junta for its brutal suppression of anti-regime demonstrations. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice bypassed the annual ASEAN Regional Forum gathering for the second time in three years while President Bush postponed the U.S.-ASEAN summit originally scheduled for September and left the Sydney APEC summit a day early, demonstrating that Asia's importance continues to take second place to Washington's Middle East tribulations. Antiterrorist support dominated U.S.-Philippine relations this quarter. The Indochinese states were featured in several U.S. statements on trade and human rights in Vietnam, Hmong refugees from Laos, and counterterrorism training for Cambodia. Washington continued to press for the restoration of democracy in Thailand, looking forward to elections in December.

### **Singapore participates in *Malabar-07-02* naval exercise.**

In the largest multinational Asian naval exercise in decades, Singapore joined large naval contingents from the U.S., India, Japan and Australia in *Malabar CY07-02* from Sept. 4-9 in the eastern Indian Ocean. While the 12 previous *Malabar* exercises were exclusively bilateral events conducted by India and the U.S. in the western Indian Ocean, this set of war games was held in the Bay of Bengal off the Andaman islands and near the western entrance to the Malacca Strait. It featured over 30 warships and 200 aircraft from the five nations. Singapore sent its most modern frigate, while the U.S. deployed two aircraft carriers, the *USS Nimitz* and *USS Kittyhawk*, a nuclear submarine, two guided-missile cruisers, and two guided-missile destroyers. India provided its single aircraft carrier, *INS Virant*, and a number of surface combatants, Japan two warships, and Australia a frigate and a tanker.

The exercises had a range of scenarios including mock air battles involving Indian and U.S. carriers, sea strikes near the Malacca Strait, as well as anti-piracy and anti-gunrunning drills off the Andaman island chain. The exercise comes at a time when the U.S. chief of naval operations, Adm. Mike Mullen, has called for a "1,000-ship navy" consisting of countries that have a common concern in protecting the sea lines of communication from piracy and illegal trafficking as well as the proliferation of WMD. Humanitarian relief from the seas was also a component of the exercises.

Some analysts have described *Malabar 07-02* as a response to China's "string of pearls" strategy, whereby the PLA Navy has gained access to Indian Ocean ports of Burma and Bangladesh. Others see the exercise as the beginning of an "alliance" of Asian democracies. However, the commander of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, Vice Admiral Doug Crowder, underplayed these speculations, insisting that the war games, held not far from Burma, were directed against no country but rather provided for the common good of keeping the sea lanes open for international commerce. Similarly, the commander of U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM), Admiral Timothy Keating, stated: "There's no – let me emphasize no – effort on our part or any of those countries' parts, I'm sure, to isolate China...." The high-level American assurances followed angry expressions from Beijing that the war games constituted an effort to "contain" it in the Asia-Pacific region. Nevertheless, the U.S., Australia, Japan, and India are all engaging in strategic consultations that began on the sidelines of the May ARF meeting in Manila.

A separate U.S. exercise, Southeast Asia Cooperation against Terrorism (SEACAT), was held in mid-August involving navies from Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand with U.S. ships from the Seventh Fleet. In this exercise, each Southeast Asian navy exercises bilaterally with the U.S. ships in a variety of scenarios. For example, the Singapore exercise focused on the tracking of ships transiting through the Singapore Strait as well as an anti-terrorist simulation involving the hijacking of a merchant ship.

### **U.S. backs ASEAN, but postpones summit**

Once again Secretary Rice bypassed the annual ARF meeting while President Bush postponed the scheduled September ASEAN-U.S. summit and left the Sydney APEC leaders meeting one day early – all because of pressing political concerns about Iraq. Reactions by ASEAN members were varied. ASEAN Secretary General Ong Keng Yong acknowledged that although Rice's absence and the president's summit postponement "would indeed be a great disappointment to ASEAN," the high-level State Department representative sent to the ARF meeting would "participate actively." Ong also asserted that "[a]ctive U.S. participation in ASEAN affairs remains crucial." (Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, a former U.S. ambassador to the Philippines, substituted for Rice at the ARF meeting.) The Singapore and Thai press labeled Rice's ARF absence as a "snub," "bad form," and "salt in the wound." They also noted that the U.S. secretary's absence left China as the "biggest beneficiary." A senior Thai official stated: "The U.S. must understand there is a cost to this, and the cost is that ASEAN countries will gravitate toward China." Singapore's foreign minister echoed this concern stating "there is a need to ensure that the regional architecture that is being constructed will be a balanced one, and the countries of Asia will want the U.S. to be part of it."

Meanwhile, Deputy Secretary Negroponte confirmed to ASEAN ministers that Washington's ties to the Association are "a critical component of its dealings with East Asia." He also applauded the incipient ASEAN Charter to be adopted by ASEAN at its November Singapore meeting. He particularly cited the draft Charter's provision for a

Human Rights Commission as well as its emphasis on good governance and the rule of law. And Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill noted: "Having more China does not mean less U.S. in Southeast Asia. There is plenty of room for all of us." Efforts to assuage ASEAN feelings center on the Bush administration's plans to appoint an ambassador to ASEAN who will be accredited to the Association's secretariat in Jakarta, enhanced Fulbright scholarships for ASEAN students, and a science and technology agreement to promote collaboration between research communities in Southeast Asia and the U.S.

At the Sydney APEC meeting in early September, President Bush extended an invitation to ASEAN leaders to hold the postponed ASEAN-U.S. summit at his ranch near Crawford, Texas in early 2008. Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loon immediately endorsed the invitation and agreed to coordinate the meeting. The prospect of Burma's attendance, however, remains in limbo as the president stated in his keynote APEC speech: "We must press the regime in Burma to stop arresting and harassing and assaulting pro-democracy activists for organizing or participating in peaceful demonstrations." Nevertheless, insofar as President Bush's invitation to ASEAN includes Burma it constitutes a new diplomatic approach closer to the European Union's which provides for engagement rather than isolation. Some ASEAN leaders are reticent about a Texas venue for a summit with President Bush. Other locations are preferable to what might be seen in Southeast Asia as ASEAN reporting directly to the president.

On other matters, ASEAN revived a request in July for the five nuclear weapons states that are permanent members of the UN Security Council to sign the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ) treaty that came into existence 10 years ago. As part of its effort to keep Southeast Asia free of nuclear weapons and to reduce the possibility of terrorist groups acquiring them, ASEAN reminded nuclear weapons states that SEANWFZ does not permit the storage or transport of nuclear weapons in the region. Washington's policy, however, has always been neither to confirm nor deny whether its ships have nuclear weapons on board. While all ASEAN states have signed the treaty, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand have not yet ratified it, thus weakening ASEAN's call for the nuclear weapons states to sign on. Of the latter, only China has signaled an intention to sign, though Beijing has taken no action yet.

### **Philippine antiterror law controversy as U.S. continues its support**

The Philippine 2007 Human Security Act (HSA) has generated considerable controversy among human rights groups and leftist politicians. Church groups have denounced the law as "a wholesale weapon for political harassment and persecution." They point to the Arroyo government's unsavory record of extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances and predict that the law's provision of allowing arrests without warrants will continue to undermine political freedoms. In hearings before the U.S. House and Senate Appropriations Committee examining both economic and military aid to the Philippines, the committees authorized funding beyond the Bush administration's initial request but expressed "deep concern" over extrajudicial killings allegedly carried out by the Philippine Armed Forces and National Police. As of August, the House bill provided for

an additional \$2 million if Secretary Rice reports to the Senate that the Philippines has implemented a UN Special Rapporteur recommendation designed to halt military violence and intimidation against human rights groups.

On the other side of the HSA argument is Philippine Defense Undersecretary Ricardo Blancaflor who, on Sept. 10, stated that the law hobbles Philippine law enforcement because its criteria for terrorism are too difficult to implement. There are 22 provisions in the HSA that can be used to punish law enforcement personnel who improperly arrest suspected terrorists, including hefty fines for each day the suspect is detained if acquitted. The U.S. State Department has also complained about antiterrorist prosecutions, noting that when the country files such cases, evidence frequently disappears. Nevertheless, at the Sydney APEC summit, President Bush singled out President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to praise the Philippine campaign “that is aggressively targeting Abu Sayyaf leaders.” And U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Kristie Kenney announced that Washington will inaugurate a new \$100 million development campaign for strife-torn Mindanao in October. Since the beginning of this decade, the U.S. has given nearly \$400 million in military aid to the Philippines.

U.S. Special Forces continue to train Philippine soldiers in the south, and U.S., Australian, and British military intelligence units are reported to be in the area. Some 5000 Philippine soldiers are on Jolo Island searching for rogue Moro National Liberation front units and Abu Sayyaf forces who beheaded several Philippine soldiers in August. Some Philippine legislators continue to express concerns that U.S. forces are actually fighting alongside Filipinos in violation of the Philippine constitution, although the Philippine and U.S. governments deny that U.S. actions go beyond training and observation. An embassy spokesman in Manila acknowledged that the U.S. also provides technical intelligence consisting of satellite imagery, communications intercepts, global positioning information, and aerial surveillance—all for the purpose of tracking the Abu Sayyaf. The closest the U.S. comes to combat operations, according to a Philippine official, is the disarming of land mines “because they have the know-how and tools.” USPACOM commander Adm. Timothy Keating has also offered to help the Philippine Armed Forces fight the communist New Peoples Army that has been designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. but not by the Philippines. Keating’s proposal was made in late July at a meeting of the Philippine-U.S. Joint Defense Board and declined by Manila, which is still negotiating with the communist National Democratic Front.

### **Mixed signals between Washington and Rangoon**

In a mid-July diplomatic initiative to improve relations with the U.S. and other critics of Burma’s military junta, Brig. Gen. Kyaw Hsan told reporters that his country wished to cooperate with the international community. At the same time, two other junta officials met with a U.S. team led by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Eric John, who reiterated the U.S. demand for the release from house arrest of opposition leader and Nobel-laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and thousands of other political prisoners. Subsequently, John laid out four conditions of U.S. policy toward Burma: direct dialogue between the junta and the

opposition National League of Democracy, the release of all political prisoners, permission for NGOs and the United Nations to work unrestricted inside Burma, and an end to ethnic violence. These exchanges led to naught.

By late August, Burma was undergoing more political turbulence than in the last several years. The junta suddenly and without warning raised fuel prices 500 percent, eliciting protests from city dwellers that spread to the Buddhist *sangha* (monks). The U.S. Congress urged President Bush to convene a UN Security Council meeting on Burma's demonstrations and subsequent military crackdown; and Bush remonstrated: "I strongly condemn the ongoing actions of the Burmese regime in arresting, harassing, and assaulting pro-democracy activists for organizing and participating in peaceful demonstrations." While significant, the demonstrations have been smaller than the 1988 riots that brought the current junta to power. To disperse its political enemies, the military regime has moved universities from major cities and created a new capital in a remote area. The core elements of the 1988 protests were students and members of the bureaucracy, who are no longer co-located.

By late September, the demonstrations had spread to all major cities in Burma and included civilians alongside the monks. On Sept. 25 in a wide-ranging UN General Assembly address condemning a variety of authoritarian regimes, President Bush singled out Burma's junta and announced tighter sanctions that aimed at specific individuals for the first time, those "responsible for the most egregious violations of human rights and their families." Fearing that Burma's government was about to crack down on the demonstrators, National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley also warned against suppressing the protestors. Nevertheless, the crackdown came. Thousands of protestors took to the streets of Burma's major cities calling for the end of the military's repressive regime that has been in power almost half a century. The protests are the largest since the army suppressed a 1988 popular uprising in which over 3,000 were killed. Casualties this time at the end of September may have been in the low hundreds; the world community has responded with shock and dismay. In addition to his Sept. 25 UN address denouncing the junta's actions, Bush in a written statement insisted: "Every civilized nation has a responsibility to stand up for people suffering under a brutal military regime...that has ruled Burma for too long." Already subject to large-scale U.S. sanctions, the Treasury Department placed 14 senior Burmese leaders under new restrictions freezing any assets they may have in the U.S. (doubtful) and forbidding Americans from doing business with them. More important, the Treasury Department is also pressuring foreign banks to follow suit.

President Bush met Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on Sept. 27 at the White House and pressed Beijing to use its influence to rein in the junta. Publicly, the Chinese have repeated their rejection of UN action delivered eight months ago: Burma's turmoil is an internal matter that does not affect international security. Secretary of State Rice and National Security Advisor Hadley also raised the issue with Chinese officials; Congressional resolutions were drafted condemning the junta.

Foreign ministers of several ASEAN countries (of which Burma is a member) met at the United Nations to condemn the junta's tactics while endorsing the intervention of a special UN envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, who traveled to Burma to confer with its military leaders. However, like China, the ASEAN ministers limited their statements to deploring the violence and calling for a peaceful settlement. They refrained from demanding an end to the regime, although they did call on the junta to carry out long promised reforms designed to move the country toward a civilian government. Little is expected from these appeals. From the junta's perspective, the protests threaten its survival.

### **Indochina: a slew of issues**

Outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Michael Marine said he would like to see U.S. bilateral trade with the country increase by 50 percent to \$15 billion annually. He also urged Washington to increase the number of Vietnamese students allowed in the U.S. beyond the current 4,500 limit. In a generally upbeat August assessment of his tour of duty, however, Marine nevertheless expressed disappointment over Hanoi's poor human rights record, especially its crackdown on religion and democracy activists, saying: "It's perhaps my biggest disappointment." Expanding his criticism, Marine cited laws that permit the authorities "to move against people for expressing their opinions, organizing in any way or calling for political change." The ambassador stated: "Those are fundamental human rights that I strongly believe are universal...."

While Hanoi seemed to ignore those criticisms, Vietnamese officials obliquely defended their country's political development after the end of the Vietnam War. On Aug. 22 at an address to the American Veterans of Foreign Wars, in referring to the chaos that would follow a precipitous U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, President Bush cited the bloodbath that followed America's withdrawal from Indochina in 1975. A Hanoi Foreign Ministry spokesman on Aug. 23 stated that the Vietnamese communist victory was "a just war of the people" and that Vietnam's "peace loving tradition" focuses on its "better future in the relations with other countries, including the U.S."

Another belated Indochina War legacy is the thousands of Laotian Hmong – allies of the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s – who fled their country for neighboring Thailand and have been languishing in refugee camps along the Laotian border, some for decades. Thai and Laotian military officials in August announced plans to repatriate 8,000 Hmong against their wishes. The U.S. Congress and a number of human rights groups weighed in against these plans. In response, Thai Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont stated on Aug. 7 that the Hmong would be repatriated, but only if representatives of a third country will be able to witness their just treatment after they return. Since Vientiane does not permit third countries to oversee repatriation, this new condition may once again postpone the repatriation. Hundreds of Hmong detainees have staged hunger strikes to protest possible deportation. Because many fled persecution by Lao authorities, they fear the prospect of arbitrary imprisonment and persecution if they return.

In a late August visit to Phnom Penh, the USPACOM commander, Adm. Keating, offered antiterrorist training that would include surveillance techniques, information

sharing, and financial monitoring. Cambodia is seen as a potential terrorist base because of porous borders and poor law enforcement.

### **Thailand: back to democracy?**

The new U.S. ambassador to Thailand, Eric John, in his July Congressional confirmation hearing, expressed confidence that the military coup in that country was temporary and that democracy would be restored through the forthcoming December election. In August, Thailand voted affirmatively on a controversial new constitution that paved the way for the December elections. Critics of the new charter claim it actually weakens democracy and shifts dominance from politicians and voters back to traditional military and bureaucratic elites. Moreover, former Prime Minister Thaksin's primary constituency in the northeast voted overwhelmingly against it. The new constitution gives the military oversight of political activities at all levels. While not criticizing the constitution, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Scot Marciel stated that Thailand should permit any candidate to run in the general election regardless of background – a clear reference to the Thai coup leaders' efforts to disenfranchise a number of Thaksin supporters. Washington suspended military aid to Thailand in the wake of the September 2006 coup, but has indicated it can be restored once free elections are held.

### **Conclusion**

Washington's mixed signals to Southeast Asia are perplexing to the region. On the one hand, high-level U.S. officials either pass on important meetings or leave them after only minimal participation, pleading the necessity of important business elsewhere. ASEAN members find this demeaning and frustrating, especially since China's diplomatic profile continues to rise. Above all, the region's members seek to insure a balance between Beijing and Washington in Southeast Asia, and they perceive the Americans to be slipping. On the other hand, President Bush is trying to reschedule the postponed U.S. summit with ASEAN for 2008, and he has promised to appoint an ambassador to ASEAN. If implemented, the U.S. would be the first major country to do so. Realizing this sooner rather than later could go a long way toward reassuring ASEAN that the U.S. intends to remain a major player in Southeast Asia.

## **Chronology of U.S. Southeast Asian Relations July - Sept. 2007**

**July 3, 2007:** President Bush postpones the U.S.-ASEAN summit originally scheduled for Singapore in September “for scheduling reasons.”

**July 3-13, 2007:** The U.S.-Malaysian navies *CARAT* exercise takes place with at-sea war fighting, safety, and boarding, search and seizure practice. Onshore activities include humanitarian medical aid and civilian construction activities.

**July 10, 2007:** The U.S. Navy ship *USS Peleliu* leaves the Philippines after providing medical and civic action services, the first stop on a four-month, five-country humanitarian visit in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

**July 10-12, 2007:** ASEAN-USPTO (U.S. Patent and Trade Office) Workshop for Intellectual Property Enforcement Officials, Public Health Officials, and Agricultural Officials on Intellectual Property Enforcement is held in Bangkok.

**July 11, 2007:** The U.S., India, Japan, Australia, and Singapore announce plans for a large-scale joint naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal to be held in September. China responds by asking for a clarification of the purpose of the exercise.

**July 16, 2007:** The White House confirms President Bush has postponed his September trip to the ASEAN summit in Singapore, but expects to meet Southeast Asian leaders later in the year.

**July 16, 2007:** U.S. lead trade negotiator for Southeast Asia Barbara Weisel tells reporters in Kuala Lumpur that the U.S. expects free trade talks with Malaysia by June 2008.

**July 18, 2007:** Burmese military leader Brig. Gen. Kyaw San states that his country wants to work with the U.S. for mutual benefit.

**July 23, 2007:** Indonesian and U.S. Air Forces begin a 10-day *Teak Iron* joint exercise involving cargo drops and paratroops.

**July 23, 2007:** The U.S.-based World Food Prize Foundation awards Thai King Bhumibol the first Dr. Norman E. Borlaug Medallion for his “great contributions to feeding people and enhancing human life.”

**July 24, 2007:** The U.S. extends political and economic sanctions for another year in Burma for continued human rights violations. The sanctions have been in place since 2003.

**July 30, 2007:** The *USS Peleliu*, operating as part of the Navy’s Pacific Partnership Program leaves Vietnam after a 10-day humanitarian visit where medical and dental personnel treated 3,500 patients in areas around Danang.

**July 30, 2007:** U.S. repatriates the head of an Angkor-era sculpture that had been stolen and smuggled from Cambodia. The U.S. and Cambodia have an agreement to protect Cambodia’s cultural heritage.

**July 31, 2007:** Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte holds bilateral talks in the Philippines prior to the ASEAN meetings.



**Aug. 1, 2007:** Secretary Negroponte praises ASEAN's proposed Charter, its human rights commission, and strengthened democratic values at the Manila ASEAN post-ministerial conference.

**Aug. 1-2, 2007:** Secretary Negroponte attends the 14th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference held in Manila as the designated U.S. envoy to the ARF. He reaffirms that the U.S. would remain strongly engaged in the region and that ASEAN ties are a "critical component" of U.S. dealings with East Asia.

**Aug. 6-9, 2007:** U.S. and Indonesian navies conduct an exercise on disaster response.

**Aug. 7-8, 2007:** U.S. Marines from the Special Operations Training Group conduct marksmanship training with Indonesian Marines at their camp as well as aboard the *USS Harpers Ferry* as part of the bilateral Naval Engagement Activity, Indonesia 2007.

**Aug. 8, 2007:** The U.S. Navy concludes a *CARAT* exercise with Brunei's navy, involving a U.S. ship and two Brunei vessels in boarding and search and rescue maneuvers.

**Aug. 14-22, 2007:** Navies from the Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the U.S. hold the sixth annual anti-terrorism Southeast Asian Cooperation against Terrorism (SEACAT) exercise.

**Aug. 19, 2007:** A referendum to approve a new constitution for Thailand, which paves the way for elections in December, is passed with 57.8 percent of the votes in favor.

**Aug. 20-24, 2007:** USPACOM and Indonesia co-host the "*Pacific Airlift Rally 2007*" that includes 21 countries focusing on dealing with natural disasters.

**Aug. 20-22, 2007:** USPACOM commander Adm. Timothy Keating visits Cambodia.

**Aug. 21, 2007:** Speaker of the Indonesian House of Representatives, Agung Laksono, requests through the new U.S. ambassador, Cameron R. Hume, that the U.S. to lift its weapons embargo and travel warning for Indonesia.

**Aug. 22, 2007:** Scot Marciel, U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia, urges Thailand not to exclude anyone from running in its forthcoming national election, including those who oppose the coup leaders.

**Aug. 22, 2007:** A State Department spokesman calls on Burma's junta to release 13 democracy advocates arrested for protesting the regime's human rights violations and the arbitrary doubling of fuel prices.

**Aug. 27, 2007:** A U.S. Congressional delegation visits Vietnam and discusses enhanced trade, investment, and public health concerns.

**Aug. 30, 2007:** U.S. Ambassador to APEC Patricia Hasloch asserts Southeast Asia's continued importance despite Secretary Rice's absence from the ARF earlier this month and Bush's decision to leave the Sydney APEC meeting before its conclusion next week.

**Sept. 4, 2007:** U.S. State Department dismisses Burma's new constitution as a sham because the national convention was made up of the junta's hand-picked delegates.

**Sept. 5-8, 2007:** U.S. and Malaysian defense intelligence chiefs convene a 19-country conference on Asian anti-terrorist intelligence cooperation in Kuala Lumpur.

**Sept. 7, 2007:** President Bush meets Philippine President Macapagal Arroyo prior to the Sydney APEC conference to discuss counter-terrorism and U.S. military assistance.

**Sept. 7, 2007:** President Bush hosts a lunch meeting for all ASEAN leaders attending APEC, as a substitute for the U.S.-ASEAN summit he canceled. At the luncheon, the president announces he intends to appoint an ambassador to the grouping.

**Sept. 8, 2007:** Six Burmese labor activists are sentenced up to 28 years in prison for organizing a seminar at the U.S. embassy last May.

**Sept. 14, 2007:** U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Ralph Boyce states that Washington has no plans to closely monitor the forthcoming December Thai elections, but would observe the elections in the same way it has in the past.

**Sept. 24-25, 2007:** Thousands of monks and supporters including students gather in Rangoon. Meanwhile, the government moves military forces into positions around the city, bans gatherings of more than five people, orders a dusk to dawn curfew in both Rangoon and Mandalay, and places both cities under the control of the local military commanders for 60 days.

**Sept. 25, 2007:** President Bush announces in an address to the UN General Assembly new economic and diplomatic sanctions against the leaders of Burma's military junta and its financial supporters. He also calls on other members of the UN to join the U.S. in forcing change in Burma.

**Sept. 26-29, 2007:** The military junta in Burma cracks down on protestors. Reports on the number of casualties vary widely from the official government figures of nine as the junta closes down telephone access to the country.

**Sept 29, 2007:** UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari arrives in Burma on what the UN secretary general calls an "urgent mission" to broker negotiations between the military government and the pro-democracy opposition.

**Sept 30, 2007:** UN special envoy Gambari extends his stay and travels to Naypyidaw with the hope of meeting Gen. Than Shwe.