



Written by on July 22, 2009

Clinton Statements from ASEAN Forum Revealing

While in Thailand to attend the 16th regional forum of the Association of Southeast Nations, or ASEAN, to be held at the nation's resort island of Phuket on July 23, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton repeated earlier calls to enforce the latest UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea.



And just prior to the start of the forum, the [State Department announced](#) that on July 22 Clinton had "signed the United States' Instrument of Accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. At the same time, the ten ASEAN Foreign Ministers signed an Instrument of Extension of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, completing the United States' accession to the Treaty."

Also during her visit, Clinton made a statement on Thai television that if Iran succeeded in producing nuclear weapons, the United States would arm its allies and extend its "defense umbrella" across the Middle East.

A report made by VOA (Voice of America) News summarized Clinton's statements to reporters that any military ties between the authoritarian regimes of North Korea and Burma would pose a direct threat to Burma's neighbors, including Thailand. She said it is important for Burma's neighbors to pose a united front against a possible Burma-North Korea military alliance. VOA (which is the official external broadcasting service of the U.S. federal government) also referred to Clinton's signing of ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, noting that the United States has never joined the treaty since it was drawn up in 1976. According to VOA, the pact is aimed at peacefully resolving regional disputes.

AP noted that Clinton consulted with her counterparts from China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea on a strategy for enforcing the latest UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea before making her statement. She told reporters: "We have made it very clear to the North Koreans that if they will agree to irreversible denuclearization that the United States, as well as our partners, will move forward on a package of incentive and opportunities — including normalizing relations — that will give the people of North Korea a better future."

"We do not want to be in another negotiation that doesn't move us toward the goal of denuclearization," added the secretary. "So we want verifiable, irreversible steps taken."

While advocating "denuclearization" in Asia, Clinton seemed to be advocating a slightly different approach to Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program by suggesting the United States would extend a "defense umbrella" over its allies in the Middle East to prevent Iran from dominating that region "once they have a nuclear weapon." "We also have made it clear that we'll take actions — as I've said time and time again, crippling action — working to upgrade the defenses of our partners in the region," said



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Clinton, adding: "We want Iran to calculate what I think is a fair assessment: that if the United States extends a defense umbrella over the region, if we do even more to develop the military capacity of those (allies) in the Gulf, it is unlikely that Iran will be any stronger or safer because they won't be able to intimidate and dominate as they apparently believe they can once they have a nuclear weapon."

Secretary Clinton's statement apparently did not go over very well in Israel, where Dan Meridor, Israel's minister of Intelligence and Atomic Energy, told Army Radio: "I was not thrilled to hear the American statement from yesterday that they will protect their allies with a nuclear umbrella, as if they have already come to terms with a nuclear Iran. I think that's a mistake."

It would be hard to find precedent for the above-stated policy. For example, when communist China developed nuclear weapons, the United States did not offer to arm U.S. allies in the region such as Japan, South Korea, or Taiwan with equivalent offensive — or even defensive — weapons.

Clinton's signing of the ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation can be considered a significant milestone in U.S. foreign and economic policy in Asia. An AFP reporter said the event signaled "Washington's re-engagement with the region after years of neglect." China signed the same treaty in 2003.

"The United States is back in Southeast Asia," Clinton said of the signing. "President Obama and I believe this region is vital to global progress, peace, and prosperity."

A reporter noted in the *Wall Street Journal* for July 22: "Signing the treaty is also a first step which could potentially enable the U.S. to join a rising economic cooperation bloc in a region which comprises the ten Asean nations plus countries such as China, South Korea, Japan, India, and Australia."

More revealing was the *Journal* writer's assessment that the ASEAN treaty was, in effect, an end-run around trade agreements proposed by the World Trade Organization that had never come to fruition. He noted: "International trade analysts say a number of countries have been driven by the continuing failure of the World Trade Organization to conclude the Doha round of trade liberalization talks to look at other trade deals as an alternative to the stalled WTO process."

The report quoted Steven Wong, assistant director general of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, who said: "Countries are looking for the best trade deals they can get at the moment, and the U.S. is preparing the ground politically if they choose to get more involved at a later date."

The historic natural trend for regional trade agreements, however limited in the beginning, is eventually to lead to more involvement at a later date. The classic example is the European Union, which originated among six nations in 1951 and eventually became not only an economic trade group, but a regional political union consisting of 27 members. The proposal of May 9, 1950 to create the community, presented by the French foreign minister Robert Schuman, contained an almost prophetic sentence predicting: "The pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe."

The EU also has an interest in joining with ASEAN, though its foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, stated: "It's a little more difficult for us, because we are a group of countries." But the *Journal* noted that Solana said there was reason to be hopeful that the long-stalled Doha round of negotiations at the WTO can still be passed after the next Group of 20 economies meeting in Pittsburgh in September.

Apparently, the almost ubiquitous flood of Chinese-made goods that have all but pushed U.S. products



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from the shelves of our stores has not been enough. U.S. officials continue to search for the "best trade deals they can get" — most of which remind us of the Biblical story of Esau trading his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of pottage.



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