



Remarks at Chulalongkorn University

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Thank you very much, Professor Weresak, Dr. Thitinan, members of the diplomatic corps. Let me say what a great pleasure it is to be here at Chula University, one of the oldest -- almost a century old -- one of the oldest institutions of higher education in Thailand.

I had some trouble deciding, should I give the speech here at Chula University or should I go to Thammasat? [Laughter]. I just couldn't decide. Then I thought, I'm just going to let their football teams make this decision. [Laughter]. So it's great to be here at Chula, and congratulations on the victory against Thammasat. [Laughter].

Let me just say to the students who are here, I know that this is the building where students study English. I guess there are a lot of English classrooms here. So if you think this is an English class, don't worry. There will not be a test at the end of my talk.

But let me just say especially to the students, congratulations for being at this wonderful university -- this university that for almost a hundred years has turned out some of the finest students in Thailand. Let me also congratulate your parents for putting up with you for all those years and making sure you studied for those very difficult exams to get here. So this is a great credit to your careers, and this is just the start -- because I think you're really the future of this country.

Let me also congratulate Chula University for opening in January the new American Studies Center. We were just delighted to hear that. I know that the American Ambassador here, Ambassador Eric John, whom I've known for 20 years -- I was very unhappy, actually, to let him go to Thailand, because I wanted him right next to me in Washington -- but I know he participated at the opening of the new American Studies Center, and I know he's very glad to be here in Thailand and not to be next to me in Washington.

It is really great to be here in Thailand. I just arrived at the airport yesterday. I gather I was not the only person who arrived at the airport yesterday. [Laughter]. Interesting day to arrive here. [Laughter]. It's great to be here.

The United States has had a very long and very special relationship with Thailand. Do you realize this is the longest relationship we've had with any country in Asia, some 175 years? It's really very special to us. For Americans, Thailand is a wonderful country, a country many Americans dream of visiting. Your culture is so famous in America, as is your food -- because we have Thai restaurants. We probably have more Thai restaurants in America than in Thailand. You can maybe look that up. [Laughter].

So you have a great reservoir of goodwill in America. We know that the foundation of this relationship between Thailand and the United States is in fact our people -- the fact that our people have known each other for so many years, the fact that we host so many Thai students in the U.S. In fact, I think we have some students here in Thailand as well. So it's a very, very special relationship.

I think this is a very important time in Thailand, because we really look forward to seeing Thailand in some ways reignite its leadership role throughout the region. I think the way that Thailand does that is not only through the very special bilateral relationships that it has -- not only with the United States but with many other countries, symbolized here by the presence of this distinguished diplomatic corps -- but also by Thailand's important membership in ASEAN.

When you look at the Asian landscape over the last 30 years, ASEAN is really, I think, one of the most successful, one of the most durable efforts to create a sense of community in East Asia. And Thailand has been very much a part of that. Indeed, Thailand is a founding member of ASEAN, which was created here in Bangkok way back on August 8, 1967. So I know that beginning in July the ASEAN presidency will be passed to Thailand and that, in fact, next November Thailand will again become the focal point, as the ASEAN leaders hold their summit.

I think the leaders will hope to bring the new ASEAN Charter into force, and it's very fitting that this very important next step in ASEAN's development will be taken here in Bangkok. I spoke this morning with ASEAN Secretary General Surin, and I reiterated the strong support of the United States for that charter and for ASEAN's increasing, continuing integration.

A clear sign of our support for ASEAN is the fact that the United States is the first of the partner countries actually to name an Ambassador to ASEAN, and he will be soon going through our confirmation hearings in the U.S. Senate. I think the naming of Scot Marciel as our first U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN is an important step in how the U.S. regards ASEAN.

If you look at the U.S. relationships in Asia, we have taken very seriously our ties in Asia, our bilateral but also our multilateral ties. What we have looked for in Asia is to have balanced relationships. There are many aspects of our relationships; there's not just one. We have an economic relationship in Asia. Indeed when you look at the importance of Thailand to the U.S. economy -- some \$20 billion in direct foreign investment from the U.S., some \$30 billion in bilateral trade -- I think that really speaks to a very important economic relationship.

But as I suggested earlier, we have very strong cultural ties, as symbolized by our educational institutions. And, indeed, to see the relationships that we have with some of our business schools here at Chula University is also a sign of how important those educational relationships are.

We have, of course, very important security ties. We have treaty alliances in Asia, including with Thailand and with other countries as well -- with Japan, with South Korea, with the Philippines, with Australia. So those bilateral treaty relationships are very important.

We have worked with countries bilaterally. We guarantee some of the most important elements of this landscape and seascape -- that is, freedom of commerce, freedom of navigation, and, frankly, freedom from coercion. We have worked very closely with countries in the fight against global terrorism. But we've also worked together to deal with humanitarian problems, most dramatically in recent years on the tsunami that also hit Thailand.

So I think the U.S. has a very balanced portfolio in Asia that really goes across the breadth of our interests.

Now one area where I personally have been working very hard is to try to develop the sense of community that we see developing in ASEAN in the last 30 years, to see that sense of community start to build in Northeast Asia. Of course we have a very serious problem in Northeast Asia that we're going to have to solve before we're able to build that community. That is, of course, North Korea's desire to build nuclear weapons. And understanding came to us pretty early in the process that the United States alone cannot deal with the problem of North Korea's desire for nuclear weapons. We needed to work with other countries as well. We needed to make other countries understand that nuclear weapons held by North Korea are not just a U.S. problem, they're a problem for all of North Korea's neighborhood.

And yet there really wasn't a sense of neighborhood in Northeast Asia. So what we tried to do was to bring together different countries in Northeast Asia to see if they could work together and try to impress upon North Korea the need to change this policy. So the United States reached out to China, reached out to Japan, to South Korea and to Russia, which have an interest in this issue. We put together something called the Six-Party Talks, and we've been engaged through the Six Parties in trying to ensure a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.

It hasn't been easy. And as I stand here some three years after I began, believe me, I look a lot more than three years older than when I began. It has been very tough. But on the other hand, I think with any long journey where you may be rather exhausted -- especially as you look forward and see all the work you have ahead of you -- in the case of the Six-Party Talks we can look behind us, and we can see that we have made some progress.

We convinced North Korea to shut off or shut down its nuclear facilities in this place called Yongbyon. Of course, just shutting it off isn't enough, because they can turn it back on. So what we then did was to work with North Korea on a package of incentives to get them to do something else. This was, in addition to shutting the facilities down, they also disabled them. So while I'm here in Chula University there are Americans who are in Yongbyon taking equipment apart, sawing things apart, leaving equipment out on the ground -- I hope to rust and not to be used again. So we can, I think, take some measure of pride that we have convinced North Korea to disable its facilities.

Now we have a long way to go. We would like this disablement, which involves taking things apart and in effect breaking some things so that they cannot easily be put back together -- we need to go beyond that. We need to dismantle things, cart some things out of the country, and make sure that it can never be put back together. But, certainly, getting North Korea to disable its facilities is something that was never done before, and we can take some heart from the fact that that's getting done.

We also need North Korea to give to us a complete and correct declaration of all of its nuclear programs. Now that complete and correct declaration requires a lot of work, because North Korea is not exactly in the information age. It's a country that does not give up information easily. So we've had to work very hard on getting North Korea to understand that when we talk about a complete and correct declaration, we really mean just that. So we're trying to work with North Korea to give us, first of all, a list of their nuclear materials, secondly a list of their nuclear facilities; and thirdly a list of their nuclear programs.

We know, for example, that they have a plutonium program operated in Yongbyon with a graphite-moderated reactor. But we also know that they've made some purchases for something else called highly enriched uranium, or a uranium enrichment program. Here too we need to find out more about that and where that precisely stands. We've made some progress on that, but we need some more progress on it.

Finally, we need to know that if North Korea has been engaged in sharing some of their technology with other countries. We need to know how far that went, when it started, and -- assuming it's stopped -- when it was stopped. So we have some more work to do to make sure that we have a complete and correct declaration. But we've been working very hard, especially with the chairman of the process, the Chinese, and we hope we can make some progress on that.

If we are able to get through this so-called second phase of the Korean nuclear issue, we will come to what we hope will be not only a third, but more importantly for me, a last phase. We will try to interest North Korea in giving up the plutonium that it has already produced. We believe they produced some 30, 40, maybe 50 kilos of plutonium. We don't know exactly how much until we actually see the declaration. So our hope is that when we get to this third phase, what the third phase will really be about is to get them to give up this plutonium.

We'll put a number of things on the table. One of the things we'll put on the table is our willingness -- that is, the willingness of the United States -- to have a normal, regular relationship with North Korea, establishing diplomatic relations. We will also put on the table a willingness to revisit the issue of the armistice in Korea and replacing the armistice -- which is, after all, a kind of elaborate ceasefire -- with an actual peace treaty. So we'd be prepared to sign a peace treaty with the North Koreans if they give up their nuclear programs. We'd be prepared to work with North Korea on some additional bilateral assistance packages and also on helping them gain access to international financial institutions. Once they give up their nuclear aspirations, rejoin the NPT, and sign on to international safeguards, we would be prepared to sit down and discuss with them their aspirations for having a civil nuclear program.

Finally -- and in many respects this is the most important element of all -- we're prepared to work with the other countries in the region to create a Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism. That's kind of a tentative name -- because I don't think anyone can remember it, let alone pronounce it. But our hope is that in Northeast Asia we can create the kind of community that we've already seen created in Southeast Asia. Through a Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism we would hope to begin by getting around the table and talking -- not just about the North Korean nuclear issue, but talking about some of the relationships among states in the region and looking for ways that these states can work together and form the kind of community-like structures that we've seen formed in ASEAN.

Now there's no easy shortcut to these things. And, frankly, as we sit down with the North Koreans, we're really doing this the old-fashioned way. It's called diplomacy. You sit down with someone that you disagree with, you try to listen and figure out what that person wants, and then you look at what you can offer the person and see if you can work something out. So that's the type of thing we're doing.

Multilateral diplomacy through the Six Parties is also a challenge because everyone has a slightly different take on how to solve the problem. From the U.S. point of view, obviously, the number one issue is the nuclear weapons. But from the point of view of Japan, for example, Japan has a great concern about nuclear weapons in North Korea. But they also have a great concern about missiles in North Korea, and they have a great concern about the fact that during the late '70s/early '80s the North Koreans abducted some of their citizens. So they have some other issues that need to be addressed.

In addition, South Korea, as the other half of Korea, has the feeling that I think all Koreans really feel -- which is the fact that their peninsula was divided not by any fault of Koreans, but rather by something that happened by outsiders, outside the Korean Peninsula. So from the South Korean point of view, they want to see some North/South ties increased, leading to some reduction on the tensions on that peninsula.

So everybody has a kind of different take on this issue. What we need to do is vector all these interests and try to come up with an overall approach which will lead, we hope, to a Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism.

Now, I must say, one of our guides to this has indeed been the formation of ASEAN. ASEAN, as I said earlier, is 30 years old. It's done very well. Obviously there are many people who are impatient with some things in ASEAN. But, frankly, there's been a lot of very positive developments in ASEAN. I think the charter is an especially important element for ASEAN. So I think we can look to ASEAN for some of the inspiration for what we should be trying to do in Northeast Asia.

But if we look closely at ASEAN, we see that ASEAN too is very much challenged by some ongoing issues that I think have been really very difficult for ASEAN to deal with. And yet ASEAN is taking them on, I think, very well. Probably the most important issue that ASEAN has had to deal with is a very difficult circumstance in one of its own member states -- that is, in Burma. Of course we understand that if you were in Asia and you look at Burma, you see what we see in Washington -- which is a very very serious human rights problem: frankly, one of the worst human rights problems you can find in the world.

But if you are here in Asia you not only see a human rights problem, you see a geostrategic issue in Burma. You see a very large country that sits in a very key region in Asia. And if you're an ASEAN member, you realize you want Burma to be part of the ASEAN space and not part of someone else's space. You want Burma to be a good member of ASEAN. So the logic of bringing Burma into ASEAN, I think, was pretty compelling. But of course when Burma was brought into ASEAN, Burma brought its problems into ASEAN. And now ASEAN has to deal with those issues.

We believe the best way ASEAN can deal with those issues is to be stronger. The idea of a charter is one of those elements that will make ASEAN stronger. The ability to develop a common economic space, also makes ASEAN stronger. Being an association that can set standards of human rights and democracy, I think, also can make ASEAN stronger. And this, I think from Burma's point of view, makes living up to ASEAN's standards something that it will ultimately decide it has to do.

Above all, I want to make clear the United States does indeed want a stable and prosperous Burma. We want Burma not only to be a good neighbor in the region, but we also want it to be a very positive, productive member of ASEAN -- that is, a positive, productive member of the neighborhood.

So the U.S. wants to work with our friends in ASEAN to see what we can do to encourage peaceful change in Burma. We want a credible political transition in Burma. We want to see Burma have an inclusive dialogue in going forward with political change -- that they will bring in different ethnic groups, they will bring in different political parties. Above all, and as a first step, we would like to see the release of all political detainees -- including Aung San Suu Kyi. We would like the imprisonment of these political prisoners replaced with a genuine dialogue with them to try to work things through.

Of course it's not easy. I think anyone who knows the history of Burma will understand some of the colonial legacy of Burma, understand the sense that sometimes Burma doesn't really mind enough what other countries, especially far-away countries, think of it. So we understand that there are attitude issues there. But we also believe that ASEAN is really the institution that's best able to set an example and best able to offer space in the neighborhood for Burma.

So for us, we want to see ASEAN succeed. We want to work closely with ASEAN. We want to make sure that when Burma does finally understand, when the leadership in Burma does understand that it needs to take these steps, it will be taking these steps in a way that brings it closer into this neighborhood.

Finally, I want to just say that the U.S. looks forward to working with ASEAN not just on issues such as Burma, but also in continuing to develop the ASEAN economic space. We would like to see what we can do in terms of a free trade agreement with ASEAN.

We want to make sure that as we go forward and as regional integration in Asia goes forward -- and it will go forward -- that people come to understand that the United States is not some distant country, but rather a country that is very much organically linked to this part of the world -- that is, to East Asia and to the Pacific Region.

I think the more Thailand and other ASEAN countries are integrated into a single market with open, transparent and uniform trade and investment rules, the more attractive it will be. I think we very much support its integration and community building through the enhanced partnership that President Bush and the ASEAN leaders announced in Busan, in Korea in 2005. I know Secretary Rice and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers signed a plan of action to implement the enhanced partnership in 2006 at the ASEAN meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

Over the past couple of years the U.S. has worked together with ASEAN on over 100 projects that support integration. Overall, exports are enormous, and they're growing; we've provided an enormous market for ASEAN exports. We've purchased over \$110 billion in ASEAN goods. Our private sector investments in ASEAN exceed \$80 billion. That is more than in China, Japan, or India. In turn, the United States each year exports more than \$60 billion to ASEAN. As you can see, ASEAN is very, very important to us.

So we are interested in furthering our engagement with countries that are committed to a high-standard trade agreement. And that's why our trade representative, Ambassador Susan Schwab, announced earlier this month that the United States will join in a Free Trade Agreement [inaudible]. We are looking for ways that we can continue to integrate economically and also to work with the countries politically and in the security field.

So obviously we have a long way to go. The security issues with ASEAN have moved slowly through the ASEAN Regional Forum. We're committed, however, to make that a stronger organization. We're committed to come up with some practical, concrete outcomes rather than it just being a talk shop. We want to see what more can be done in the ASEAN Regional Forum. Indeed, the United States and the Philippines will co-host an ASEAN Regional Forum disaster relief exercise in 2000 that is designed to bring civilian and military authorities together in a real world scenario.

Finally, I want to emphasize that though over the course of the last few years you heard much talk that somehow the U.S. is drifting away from ASEAN and [inaudible], the U.S. remains committed to an active role in the region. The U.S. welcomes China's role in Southeast Asia. For many decades the world looked for a second engine of development beyond the U.S. consumer market and wondered who that would be. [Inaudible]. More China doesn't mean less of the U.S. I think the China relationship -- which is a relationship that will be complex, that will have its ups and downs -- is nonetheless a relationship that is of fundamental importance to the U.S. And I can assure you [inaudible], and we will make it work in a way that it's not at anyone's expense. [Inaudible]. As we work well with China, it will be helpful to all the countries in the region.

So with those comments perhaps I'd be happy to go to some questions, if anyone is still awake. [Laughter]. We can move to a more interesting [inaudible].

MODERATOR: We're all awake. Very much awake. Thank you, Ambassador Hill. Let's give a hand to Ambassador Hill for his talk. [Applause].

MODERATOR: Ambassador Hill has graciously agreed to field questions and comments over the next 15 minutes or 20 minutes, so please, now is your time for the audience participants. Please state your name and your affiliation, if any. First, let me call on Khun Kavi Chongkittavorn. He's also a senior fellow with ISIS.

QUESTION: [Inaudible]. It sounds very good. The [inaudible] of the [inaudible]. Could you give [inaudible]? And another question is on Thai-U.S. bilateral [inaudible]. [Inaudible]. Could you tell us what areas do you think Thailand needs to improve or needs to have [inaudible]?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'm sorry, I didn't hear the last.

QUESTION: [Inaudible], the so-called [inaudible] alliance.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: On Northeast Asia, at this point we're not really sure how this Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism, what kind of shape it will take. We are trying to draw up some principles, a statement of principles. We have a working group set up to develop some of these principles. And, indeed, the chair of the working group is Russia. The Russian Federation wanted to take this on and see if they could come up with, together with the other members, a set of principles to see what this mechanism can do.

I think, for starters, everything in Northeast Asia goes immediately to a bilateral channel. If there are disputes, it's immediately bilateral -- problems among states. There's no sort of set of principles people can refer to. Instead it goes bilaterally. Often, I think, issues that can be handled in a more multilateral format become issues that can be very tense because they go right to bilateral channels.

So we first want to have a mechanism for sitting and talking about issues. We want to have a set of principles. And eventually maybe we can address dispute mechanisms and do some of the things that the OSCE has been able to do in Europe.

The relationship of this to the ASEAN Regional Forum, I cannot tell you it's really been worked out -- because we have to see what the ASEAN Regional Forum wants to become as well. Now the ASEAN Regional Forum has been around for some time, and that too needs to figure out precisely what it can do.

I must say, three years ago when I started going to ASEAN Regional Forum meetings I was a little disappointed to see that a lot of the activities -- that the closest we got to any sort of actual exercises were tabletop exercises. But there's also some effort to do maritime security.

I thought it was more important to go to maybe a lower-end type of thing -- that is, something that everyone could agree on. Humanitarian operations struck me as something that most countries do agree on. But then go to a higher-end type of format -- that is, in addition to having the tabletop exercises on humanitarian ops, maybe we could actually do something on a beach somewhere. That is, we could have different countries from the ASEAN Regional Forum send some medics and set up, for

example, a scenario where you have a tsunami, and you want to get several countries working together to come in, set up some tents. So you'd have a U.S. tent in the exercise with some doctors, you'd have Chinese, you'd have Thai and various countries in Southeast Asia to see if we could actually do something in the real world and not just on tabletop.

So we're going to try that in 2009, and let's see how successful we are. I suspect that if we're successful the ASEAN Regional Forum could maybe go much further, much faster, as a security organization that deals with humanitarian type problems, with the Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism being more of a sort of political-type dialogue.

So that's one sort of fork in the road -- Northeast Asia, political; ASEAN Regional Forum, much more security. But, quite right, at the end of the day you might have issues of how do you bring all these together.

The videotape business dealt with VHS and Beta for a while until that was finally resolved. So we may have overlap of that sort of format issue.

But if there's a slight bit of competition in this, no problem. I frankly think there should be a little competition, and I think everyone should be wanting to make sure these institutions can do as much as they can do. There was a second question.

MODERATOR: I think the second question has to do with Thai-U.S. relations and non-NATO ally status. Is there anything that Thailand is --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Admiral Keating was here yesterday -- actually left today. We are looking to see what we can do more in terms of military cooperation. We've actually had very good military cooperation in the past, and we would look to accelerate that now in the future. As you know, we had stopped a number of military assistance programs in the past year, and we've since restarted that with the installation of the new government. So let's see what we can do. Let's see if we can get to the point where we can achieve that major non-NATO ally status. *

QUESTION: Larry Jagen, Burma expert. Can I ask, given the relative success of the Six-Party Talks in Northeast Asia, what's the chances of replicating something like that as far as Burma is concerned with ASEAN and China taking a leading role? And, secondly, there's a lot of talk about the UN process, the Gambari process, really being finished. As far as the U.S. is concerned, is the Gambari process dead?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: It's always nice to hear someone ask a question that's premised on the notion of relative success of the Six-Party process. You have no idea how that helps me get through my day. [Laughter].

Look, in diplomacy one size never fits all. So you have to sort of figure out what the basic problem is, and can multilateral diplomacy be a way to go. I think it is very important that ASEAN, the U.S., China, India, European Union, other major players try to harmonize how they're approaching Myanmar and make sure that Myanmar doesn't feel they can go shopping for their best proposal -- that is, every place they go it ends up pretty much with the same proposal.

But I want to stress that Mr. Gambari is an extremely capable diplomat, a very talented man. He comes with the full support, full weight, really, of the United Nations. We want to see him succeed. We're pleased that he will be going back to Burma very soon. But I would think the Burmese Government would also want to see him succeed -- because if he doesn't succeed, it's kind of unclear where people would go with the next diplomatic process.

So, for starters, if I were the Burmese Government I would basically let a good professional like Mr. Gambari come and go as he pleases. He's a guy who will when he goes there, he will obviously see the Government. So they don't need to worry about delaying his visa so that they're all teed up on precisely what his itinerary is going to be. I mean he's a very professional, respectful diplomat. If I were the Burmese Government, I would give him something that I think a lot of visa officers would know as a multi-visit visa. I hope that they will come to see Mr. Gambari as a way for them to get out of a very difficult situation and stop making his job more difficult for him.

So we don't see it dead by any means. He has put together a number of things that he's trying to achieve from the Burmese Government. We support those. Really, there's kind of a Gambari plan out there. And they should start, the Burmese Government should start thinking about how to implement it and should understand that if it's going to have a good future, it's got to be connected with the rest of the world.

QUESTION: I have two questions. First of all, thank you for your entertaining and educational remarks. First is about Thailand, the second is about Burma. You met the Prime Minister this morning and it was reported that -- I wonder who raised this question -- but he reassured you that he is running the country now. So could you elaborate on the leadership of Prime Minister Samak in Thailand? Second question, you mentioned FTA with ASEAN, of which Burma is still a member. So I wonder is there any condition for region-wide FTA which includes Burma. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Ambassador Hill, before you answer that let me just, there will be some questions, I suspect, on Burma. Let's just take a round on Burma. Any other questions at this time on Burma? Maybe we'll take a few more.

QUESTION: Mr. Ambassador, my name is Aung Zaw, Irawaddy Magazine. The U.S. has been very critical of the Burmese military government. The U.S. imposed sanctions, fresh sanctions, and targeted sanctions in Burma. But Burma is near Thailand and India and China continue to trade with the Burmese military government and give diplomatic support to the Burmese military government. How, realistically, do you want to see, how realistically do you want to encourage Thailand in particular, which continues to exploit Burma's natural resources? How do you want to encourage the Thailand's leadership to take a proactive role to bring about a positive change in Burma? Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you. Robert Kaneer, independent citizen of this world. [Laughter].

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Wait a minute. You're a what? [Laughter].

QUESTION: I was quite interested about your remark about the high standard of trade agreement which seems to be your priority. I was just wondering regarding high standard of moral issues, where you stand on this. I've got two points. One actually is about Burma and the other one is about another neighboring country, if I could maybe just add that in at the same time.

Regarding the situation in Burma and Chevron and previously Unocal, this is very reminiscent of the situation in Angola 20-30 years ago when the American Government was supporting UNITA, supplying American dollars to fight NPLA, who were being supplied American dollars by Gulf Oil Company. This was a classic case of American dollars fighting American dollars. This seems to be a very reminiscent situation here in Burma, when the government of America is taking one stance and an independent or a corporate oil company is taking another stance. I wonder where your high-standard moral issue takes you on that one. And if I may, just on the point of high moral standards, introduce the question in Laos, where you recently have refused to sign an agreement on the banning of manufacture and use of cluster bombs, and the high moral issue regarding the ten million unexploded cluster bombs that are still there in Laos killing Lao children. And I wonder how --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You mean the ban on new manufacture of cluster bombs?

QUESTION: No, you donated these to the people of Laos 30 years ago, 35 years ago. [Laughter]. They're now --

MODERATOR: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: I had a recent interview with [inaudible] last week which will be appearing in our next issue out. A great discussion, but a related question with the (inaudible). I'd like to ask you, is it true that United States is planning to spearhead and step up sanctions against Myanmar on a global scale? That's my question. What are your plans on stepping up sanctions against Burma?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Can I start answering some of these? [Laughter].

Let me just say about the Prime Minister's comments about being in charge -- look, I don't even interfere in my own country's internal political affairs, and I'm certainly not going to start interfering in Thailand's. So you'll have to ask him about that. [Laughter].

I will just say that, again, we value our relationship with Thailand. We want to do more. As you know, the Prime Minister had a good discussion on the phone with our President when he took over, when he took office. We look forward to really working with Thailand -- with the understanding that we work with the government here, we also work with educational institutions, we work with economic, with companies commercially. We work really across the board. We want to make sure this relationship with Thailand is very broad and very deep.

Turning to some of the questions on Burma, let me just say Burma has been a very difficult process. I don't think anyone likes to see the imposition of sanctions. I think everyone understands that sanctions can be very targeted, but there can also be sanctions that don't always work. They have a mixed record. I don't think anyone prefers sanctions as a first choice, but there's a point at which you're reluctantly drawn to the use of sanctions -- because through dialogue you haven't been able to achieve much, through diplomatic processes you haven't been able to achieve much. And so, unfortunately, there are moments where you have to go to go sanctions.

Now if you have a situation where some countries are maintaining sanctions and then other countries are not maintaining sanctions, you have an even bigger problem. So what you have to do is get other countries to work with you on sanctions. That's why you try to put sanctions through the UN Security Council, to try to make sure that everybody adheres to the sanctions and nobody experiences more losses than others. Even that is difficult -- because sometimes neighbors, as one of the questioners suggested, neighbors have a lot more to lose than countries that are far away that don't have much trade in the first place.

These are tough issues. But I think what would be very helpful is if the Burmese regime understood that the pressure on that regime will increase and that the future for that regime is very bleak if they don't try to respond.

Now there is a very good political process out there in the field with Mr. Gambari. This is a man who, as I said earlier, is a very fair, very fair minded, very skilled diplomat, and I think it behooves the Burmese government to try to work with him.

We would much prefer a successful political outcome than to impose or continue to impose sanctions. But if we do have to impose sanctions, of course we will want to impose sanctions that work. We don't want sanctions as a symbolic element. We want them to be targeted at the people whose minds, whose behavior we are trying to change. So we will have to do that.

So let's see if the Burmese authorities can understand that we have a lot of options for dealing with Burma, but we do not have the option of turning our back and forgetting about the problem. We have to stay engaged. And with limited tools and sometimes unfortunately blunt instruments, we have to see what can be done to improve the situation.

Finally, to the citizen of the world. First of all, when I referred to FTA's, what I was referring to is the idea that you want an FTA that really encompasses all commodities as much as possible and to try to avoid a situation where you call an FTA a trade agreement where one or two commodities are covered and everything else is uncovered. So that's the idea of high quality FTA. I didn't say high moral FTA, I just said high quality FTA.

But I understand how you were segueing into the notion of the issues of morality and foreign affairs. Has the U.S. always lived up to the same moral standard that we expect others to live up to? Let me just say I'm a career diplomat. I've worked on issues from here to the Balkans. Every issue is different. We make mistakes. Believe me, as someone who worked on the Balkan issues, when I look back to some of the things I was doing, I'd probably do them over again in some different ways. It's not easy. But what I can assure you is that approaching them, I've done it with a sense of respect for the other interlocutor. I've done it with a sense that you've got to hear him out. I've done it with the idea that you shouldn't be talking more than 50 percent of the time; you should be listening more than 50 percent of the time. And I've done it ultimately with a view that if we can calm down a little, if everyone can calm down, maybe we can work our way through some of these problems.

Look, I understand what you're saying about cluster bombs. I don't know the specific issue involved. I also know that Southeast Asia was a site of some of the most terrible parts of American history but also the most terrible parts of Southeast Asian history. We've all tried to come through it. We've all tried to deal with this very difficult past.

I'm going to Vietnam on Sunday night. I tell you, for many Americans the idea of American diplomats routinely going to Hanoi and sitting down and talking about trade agreements is unthinkable. Many Americans just cannot believe that we have the kind of productive relationship we have today with Vietnam. We're very proud of that relationship. I think at a certain point in time you have to move forward, and that's what we're trying to do.

MODERATOR: Ambassador Hill is on a tight schedule. Let me, on behalf of the American Studies Program, the Department of International Relations, the faculty of Political Science, the Institute of Security and International Studies, and Chulalongkorn University, let me bring these proceedings to a close by first assuring you, Ambassador Hill, that you've chosen the right place to deliver your talk. [Laughter and applause]. And then to thank him for his talk. [Applause].

**Note: On December 30, 2003, President Bush designated the Kingdom of Thailand a Major Non-Nato Ally under Section 517 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961

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