

Situation in Gaza | Daily Press Briefing | What's New

SEARCH GO

Subject Index

Ghana: Election of John Atta Mills

Deputy Secretary Negropono to Trav

Home

Issues & Press

Travel & Business

Countries

Youth & Education

Careers

About State



[Foreign Press Centers](#) > [Briefings](#) > [-- By Date](#) > [2008 Foreign Press Center Briefings](#) > [July](#)

Preview of the ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN-U.S. Ministerial Meeting

Scot Marciel, U.S. Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs & Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, East Asian & Pacific Affairs

Foreign Press Center Briefing
Washington, DC
July 17, 2008

3:00 P.M. EDT

[View Video](#)

MODERATOR: Good afternoon and welcome to the Washington Foreign Press Center. Today's briefing is a preview of the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN-United States ministerial meetings next week in Singapore.

Before we start, I just have two requests for the audience. First, that you make sure your cell phones are on silent. And second, that before asking a question, you please state your name, organization, and country.

Now it's my pleasure to introduce our briefer today, Scot Marciel, who is the United States Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs and Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian & Pacific Affairs with the Department of State.

Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Thank you. Good afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you today. If I could, I'd like to just read a brief statement, but really want to focus on your questions today.



Secretary Rice will travel to Singapore next week to attend the ASEAN post-ministerial conference and the ASEAN Regional Forum ministerial. She'll meet with ASEAN ministers on July 23 to discuss U.S.-ASEAN cooperation and regional issues, such as food and energy security and Burma as well as other matters.

The next day - that's July 24 - she'll join the foreign ministers of the other 26 member countries of the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ARF, to discuss security issues facing the region, such as North Korea, Burma, disaster relief, and nonproliferation. We expect ministers - the foreign ministers - to endorse a range of proposals to enhance security cooperation, including an ARF disaster relief exercise. We also expect the Secretary will hold some bilateral meetings.

The Secretary's participation in these meetings is based on our long history of cooperation with the region and our current program of extensive cooperation with ASEAN in the political, economic, and cultural spheres. The importance of our cooperation with this region reflects the extensive ties between our governments, businesses, private organizations, educational institutions, families and individuals.

With that, I'd like to thank you and look forward to your questions.

MODERATOR: And if I can just remind you to state your name, organization, and country when you ask your question. First to Bhagya -- we'll start here in the front row.

QUESTION: Bhagya from *The Straits Times*, Singapore. I just wanted to know if there are any particular security threats that are on the radar as the ARF meets?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Well, we'll have to see. I mean, I think the way the ARF works, at least in my experience, is there's opportunities for our members to raise issues. So if a new issue emerges or something not on the agenda, there's plenty of opportunities. I'm not aware of anything specific, other than what we've been planning to talk about, things that, sort of more non-traditional security issues, disaster relief, nonproliferation, terrorism, et cetera. But certainly, one or more members could raise other security concerns if they wanted.

MODERATOR: Let me go to the back row and then we'll come up to the front.

QUESTION: My name is Yoshinari Kurose from the Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun*, and I have two questions. One is that -- is there a six-party foreign ministerial meeting scheduled at this point during Madame Secretary's visit in Singapore? And the second is about the meeting itself. I mean, ARF meeting itself regarding the maritime security issue. Will there be -- do you expect any kind of agreement or like a new framework will be come about at the meeting? Thank you very much.

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Thank you. In answer to your first question, there has been no announcement of a six-party ministerial yet. On the second question, I don't think we're anticipating an agreement per se on maritime security. It is an issue that ARF has dealt with regularly, and I'm sure it will be discussed. I wouldn't rule out some kind of agreement, but I'm not aware that one's expected.

MODERATOR: We're moving up to Salmy in the front row.

QUESTION: Thank you. Ambassador --

MODERATOR: Salmy, can you just state your name and organization?

QUESTION: Oh. I'm sorry.

MODERATOR: Thanks.

QUESTION: My name is Salmi from Bernama, Malaysia. I wonder how does the U.S view the recent arrest of the opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who is also the former DPM, and whether that affects the democracy process in Malaysia and would that affect the security operation in the region?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Well, I think we've said, at least on one occasion, that we think that the arrest of Anwar Ibrahim does raise serious questions and concerns. We're following the situation closely. And we hope that Malaysian authorities will resolve the case in a way that enhances confidence in impartial rule of law in Malaysia.

QUESTION: Can I follow up? Would the U.S. - would this be mentioned, do you think, at the upcoming meetings?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: I can't say for sure. It certainly could come up, but I can't say. I mean, we have a good relationship with Malaysia. Malaysia's a good partner. We work together very well. This is sort of an issue of concern, certainly for us, and we think for many others. So it's possible it could come up, but I can't say for sure.

MODERATOR: We'll go right to the middle and then we will go to Yonhap News.

QUESTION: Tomohiro Deguchi with Kyodo News, Japanese wire. Could you flesh out some of the ideas of the -- what's going to be on discussion about North Korea and Burma at the ASEAN Regional Forum? I think it was 2006 when the Secretary last visited the ASEAN Regional Forum, that was right after the ballistic missile test so the statement was rather harsh for the North Koreans. And today we see some of the developments in the nuclear deal, so how is the discussion going to be like? Are you going to welcome that development or put more pressure on -- for them to move forward on the verification regime and so on?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Right. Well, as you know, I'm not the North Korea guy. So I don't want to try to predict how that discussion's going to go. I think - I wouldn't be able to be all that helpful on that. It did come up - the issue of North Korea came up at our senior officials' meetings in May, where I led our delegation, and it was mostly a discussion and an update. Again, I expect it will be discussed at ARF, but I don't want to try to predict what form that discussion will take.

On Burma, I think there's two aspects that will come up, I would expect. One is the response to the Cyclone Nargis and the disaster response. And there'll probably be some discussion, I would expect, about how relief efforts are going and what more the Burmese authorities might do to facilitate international assistance. And I would expect there would also be some discussion about the broader political issues that underlie the fundamental problems of Burma. Again, I don't want to try to predict how the conversation will go because it is unpredictable.

MODERATOR: Okay. So we'll come over here. Thank you.

QUESTION: Yonhap News Agency, South Korea and my name is Hwang. And do you expect the ministers will adopt any resolution or declaration on North Korea's nuclear weapons and program?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: I honestly don't know the answer to that.

QUESTION: And how about North Korea's - North Korean soldiers killing of a South Korean woman tourist in North Korea resort mountain and do you have any plan to discuss that?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Again, I don't want to sort of try to predict what specific issues will be discussed because there are 27 member countries. Each of them can and will raise issues. We will raise some issues and others will raise issues. So it's really hard for me to say ahead of time, in all honesty, what issues may be raised. There's usually quite a wide variety. But it's not just what the U.S. raises. As I said, there's 27 members.

QUESTION: Actually, just one more.

MODERATOR: Go ahead.

QUESTION: Reports said Secretary Rice will meet with North Korean Foreign Minister bilaterally. Do you have any idea of that?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: I don't know anything about that. There has been no such bilateral meeting announced that I'm aware of.

MODERATOR: Other questions? Go -- Bhagya again, and then we'll go to the very back row.

QUESTION: In a sense this - Bhagya from *The Straits Times*. In a sense this is your debut appearance at this ARF meeting, a major ASEAN forum meeting. I want to know what is your sense of the region, given that there's so many internal challenges at the moment in Malaysia and Thailand and Burma, of course?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Right. Well, thank you. This will be the first time for me at the ministerial levels. I mentioned I led the U.S. delegation to the U.S.-ASEAN senior dialogue and to the ARF senior officials' meeting in May. But I'm looking forward to the ministerial. You know, when we look at Southeast Asia - when I look at Southeast Asia - you can look, and you can look at any country, any country in the world and find some problems. But overall, what we see in the region is a region that's very dynamic, that's overall moving ahead in a very positive way. There's - you know, there's certainly economic issues, energy, food security, old-fashioned security issues - if I can put it that way - domestic politics in every country. But if you look at the region as a whole, you see countries moving ahead, good economic growth - it's not as fast as it was certainly. But still, by global standards, I think pretty good. You see increased cooperation in the region. You see ASEAN having adopted a charter and is moving toward ratification, which I think is a huge step, and a very positive step that we welcome. You see increased willingness to cooperate, whether it's on environmental issues, energy or trade, and certainly on disaster relief. And we're hoping that this ministerial, the ARF ministerial, will agree to move ahead with an ARF disaster relief exercise, a civilian military disaster relief exercise, which would be a big step.

So overall, we're aware of the problems. We deal with them every day. But we see a dynamic region moving overall in the right direction.

MODERATOR: In the back row -- corner.

QUESTION: Jihun Sohn, Voice of America, South Korea. I know you're not the North Korea guy - (laughter) - but I have a question again - also on North Korea. Do you have any comments on North Korea getting ready to sign a non-aggression pact with ASEAN?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: We've seen those reports, and I don't think we do have any comment on it.

MODERATOR: More questions? We have Foster, and then come up here.

QUESTION: Foster Klug. I work for the AP World Service. I was hoping you might comment about Burma and ASEAN's dealing with Burma. There's been criticism in the past about the way that they confronted Burma. I was hoping to see what your take on recent developments was.

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Sure. Burma's a tough challenge. It's a tough challenge for the world, for the region, for ASEAN. I think in the past ASEAN has, you know, tried a strategy of engaging Burma, try and move Burma in a positive direction to engagement. I think that they have seen that that hasn't been that successful. And I

don't say that critically. I mean, a lot of other approaches haven't been successful either.

What we see is that, certainly last year, when the Burmese regime cracked down on peaceful protesters, ASEAN came out quite forcefully, I think, with an unprecedented statement expressing revulsion at the crackdown and urging the regime to begin to engage with the opposition, release political prisoners and move toward a political transition.

ASEAN's been continuing to work - I mean, of course, ASEAN consist of 10 countries, one of which is Burma, and it's a consensus organization. So for ASEAN as an institution, to make decisions or issue statements, requires a consensus, including by Burma. So that, to some extent, limits what ASEAN as an institution can do. But I think working - different ASEAN members have been working, I think fairly actively, trying to encourage the Burmese regime to open up.

Certainly, most recently, Secretary General Surin has, I think, led ASEAN efforts to encourage the regime to open up to international assistance. I think they've achieved some success and we welcome their efforts. I think it's been important. We certainly hope that they will continue to encourage the Burmese to open up and to begin to grapple with their broader political issues. Because it's the broader political issues that are keeping the country down.

And so we have good discussions with ASEAN. We don't always agree on every tactic, but that's okay. And overall, I think they're - we want them to remain active.

MODERATOR: Salmly and then we'll go over to Rick.

QUESTION: Ambassador, I'm just wondering if you can make, you know, your job (inaudible) a bit more clearer to us. Because what is it that you can do that the ambassadors over there aren't already doing? I mean, if there are issues of concern - let's say like the Anwar case or in Burma --

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Right.

QUESTION: -- would you be, like on top of it right away or - I mean, how different is it going to be with you as ambassador?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: I'm tempted to say, of course, I'm on top of it.

QUESTION: (Laughter.)

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: But I won't.

We have, of course, ambassadors to all of the ASEAN countries. Well, actually, we have a chief of mission, a chargé, in Burma. But we have embassies and chiefs of mission who are responsible for the bilateral relations. In my role, I'm kind of dual-hatted. I have - I'm Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asia, which means I sort of coordinate with all of those embassies and ambassadors from the Washington angle on our bilateral relations. But then as Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs, we're trying to broaden our engagement with the region by building on the bilateral relations and by our existing good relationship with ASEAN, focusing more on engaging with ASEAN as an entity.

So a lot of what I'm doing is working with ASEAN, the ASEAN secretariat with our regional assistance AID office in Bangkok that works closely with the ASEAN secretariat, and also working within the U.S. Administration in Washington to have - make sure that we have a coherent approach to ASEAN as a whole, in addition to our bilateral approaches.

Does that help --

QUESTION: Yes.

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: -- a little bit?

MODERATOR: (Laughter.) We'll go here next.

QUESTION: Richard Finney with Radio Free Asia. Are there any meetings coming up related to Vietnam? Any particular topics for discussion there?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Nothing - I mean, we -- of course, we meet regularly with the Vietnamese in Hanoi and here. But in terms of high level, not that I'm aware of. Of course, Prime Minister Dung was just here - I guess it was just three weeks ago, if I remember right - and had extensive meetings with the President and his delegation and with many others.

So we have pretty extensive engagement with the Vietnamese that will continue. I'm not aware, off the top of my head, of any cabinet level back-and-forth between here and Hanoi in the next couple of months.

QUESTION: OK, so no specific issues or questions coming up --

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: No, I mean, there's lots of things we're working on, including follow-up from the Prime Minister's visit, moving ahead on our high-level dialogue on education, talking about some environmental issues. We're talking about trade, bilateral investment treaty negotiations that we want to get started. We talk regularly about human rights. So those conversations are going on on a regular basis, but nothing very specific, high profile, I would say.

MODERATOR: Another question? Sir.

QUESTION: Mr. Ambassador, my name is Xo To. I'm a reporter of Vietnam News Agency. I have only one question. What are the U.S. priority in meeting and how you think about the roles of Vietnam in ASEAN? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Okay, good question. The role of Vietnam in ASEAN. I think, first of all, if I can do a little bit of history here. I think the fact that Vietnam, as well as Laos and Cambodia, are in ASEAN and playing very active roles is a wonderful thing, when you think about where ASEAN was 15 years ago, 20 years ago. My impression and from the meetings I've been in is that Vietnam is an active member of ASEAN. We're very careful when we talk about individual ASEAN members in the ASEAN context, not to say "this one's doing better than that one." We - you know, but we see that Vietnam is certainly very active. We think playing a constructive role, which we welcome.

And I'm sorry, the first question was about overall objectives for the meeting?

QUESTION: What are the U.S. priority in the meeting?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Okay. Well, for the meeting with the ASEAN foreign ministers, the first meeting on July 23rd with Secretary Rice in the post-ministerial meeting, it's called. I think, one would be to go over the cooperation and discuss the cooperation that we have. We have a very extensive program of cooperation between the United States and ASEAN, some of it is U.S. assistance to support ASEAN's economic integration. We have educational cooperation, environmental, health, you name it. So it's useful, once a year, for the ministers to talk at their level, at a high level and see if they're comfortable with what we're doing, if they're pleased with what we're doing, if there's a need for any adjustments in sort of the cooperative program. So that would be one part.

The second part would be to talk about issues in the region. It'll be a fairly, I think, open discussion. I would expect that there'll be a discussion about Burma and about how we can work together to try to promote progress there, certainly is one. Other issues will come up -- I would expect, I can't predict for sure -- food security, energy security, the economy, trade. Those issues almost inevitably come up. And it's mostly an opportunity to have a good exchange on those issues.

At the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting the next day, there'll be some overlap on issues. Of course, it's a broader group of 27 ministers. There will be, I think, discussion about how - in trying to streamline and reform - or maybe strengthen is a better word - the ASEAN Regional Forum itself, trying to get it to be a little bit more operational so that, in addition to the useful discussions that take place in ARF, there can be more operational things, such as a disaster relief exercise. There'll be discussion about working together on counterterrorism. Throughout the year, there's meetings all the time where people produce papers with ideas and proposals, so the ministers can talk through those and make some policy decisions on where they would like to focus, where they would like to go.

MODERATOR: Any other questions? Foster.

QUESTION: Sorry, I just wanted to take advantage to ask you, do you have any comment on the recent tension between Thailand and Cambodia over the temple on their border?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Yeah. We've seen, certainly, reports. We've seen reports of possible troop movements in the region. We - we don't have all the facts, so I don't want to say too much. Obviously, it goes without saying that we have, you know, a very good relationship with Cambodia, a very good relationship with treaty ally Thailand. We value both - both of those relationships, and we'd certainly hope that they would be able to talk through their differences. And we certainly wouldn't want to see any increase in tension.

MODERATOR: Hwang.

QUESTION: How about Korea? Do you see any escalation of tension on the Korean Peninsula after North Korean soldiers killing of a South Korean woman tourist?

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Again, I'm afraid I don't really want to comment on Korea because I don't follow Korea. And I wouldn't be able to give you an authoritative comment on that. I just have to check with my colleague here to make sure I'm giving the right answer.

MODERATOR: All right. Well, thank you very much for coming. We appreciate your time.

AMBASSADOR MARCIEL: Thank you.

###



[Updates](#) | [Frequent Questions](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Email this Page](#) | [Subject Index](#) | [Search](#)

The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

[FOIA](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Copyright Information](#) | [Other U.S. Government Information](#)