

SCUSA 60 THEME:
“MEASURING PROGRESS AND DEFINING NEW CHALLENGES”

SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, & OCEANIA

In the past several years, the United States has repeatedly assumed crucial roles in development and democratization efforts the world over. Around the world, America has sought to promote stable governments and economic systems while at the same time tackling important and challenging security problems, economic downturns, and natural disasters at home and abroad. Moreover, given the pace of change in technology, communication, and transportation systems, it is sometimes difficult to assess to what extent the United States has succeeded in its efforts, and its efforts in South and Southeast Asia and Oceania are no exceptions.

The mélange of different cultures, languages, and ideological trends extant in South and Southeast Asia and Oceania make it impossible to implement the same or similar approaches in the greater region. Given this fact, the U.S. continues to devise new and innovative strategies for promoting the development of more democratic governments and nurturing those that already exist in the region. However, such efforts have met with very halting and inconsistent success. Moreover, the extent to which the United States should intervene in the region’s political affairs remains unclear. For example, the ruling military junta in Burma has been accused of massive atrocities, but should the U.S. intervene either politically or militarily? Is it even the United States’ responsibility to promote a democratic political tradition in the region? How does such an effort directly benefit the United States and its citizens? Such questions remain to be definitively answered.

Security issues remain one of the top U.S. concerns in the region, especially in South and Southeast Asia. The threat of violent extremism remains glaringly evident throughout the region, as evidenced by groups such as Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah. On a more national scale, nuclear competition between Pakistan and India took a new turn, which complicates American interest and involvement in the region. Many nations in this region have played and continue to play pivotal roles in the global war on terror, and to lose their cooperation in this effort would seriously hamper America’s strategic goals.

The region’s future, therefore, is unclear. While Australia and New Zealand have capitalized upon long-standing good relations with the United States, burgeoning democracies such as those in Indonesia and the Philippines continue to struggle with internal strife, corruption, and outside pressures (especially in the economic realm). In addition to these challenges, virtually every nation in South and Southeast Asia struggles with pandemics of disease and periodic large-scale destruction wrought by natural disasters such as Cyclone Nargis in May 2008. Given the patchwork success of democratic governments in the region, the sharp political and economic contrasts between Oceania and South and Southeast Asia, and the implications of the global war on terror, clearly defining future challenges in the region is extremely difficult in and of itself. Measuring past success and settling upon the United States’ exact role in the region’s future, then, remain elusive goals.

South Asia

This section focuses on the volatile South Asian countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. U.S. relations with these three countries are complex and made more challenging by the inter-relationships between these countries, particularly Afghanistan-Pakistan and Pakistan-India relations. The U.S. Department of State also includes the following countries as part of its

Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The State Department's website summarizes the region as a place "...where democracy has both taken root and sometimes proven elusive. It is a region of remarkable social, economic and technological transformations, yet it is the only place in the world where there has been a recent danger that two nuclear-armed countries could go to war. It is also the front line of our Global War on Terrorism."¹ Clearly, the conference themes of uncertainty and change, security, and development and democratization are at the forefront of U.S. policy in South Asia.

Afghanistan deserves lead billing and discussion because 9/11 and the U.S. response served as catalysts for new and increased relations with the South Asia region. Although an oversimplification, what attention the U.S. previously paid to the region was focused on the nuclear capabilities of Pakistan and India and their dispute over the Kashmir region. At that time, the U.S. clearly favored India in terms of diplomatic and financial support. However, in order to conduct the war on terror starting in Afghanistan, the U.S. required support and cooperation from neighboring Pakistan.

American security necessitated intervention in Afghanistan. Devastated by centuries of warfare and strife, including the defeated Soviet occupation in the late 1980s, the poor and failed state of Afghanistan was left behind. Filling the power vacuum, the authoritarian Taliban regime harbored Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda and enabled them to plan the terrorist attacks on the U.S. After initial military success in Afghanistan, the U.S. faces challenges of a resurgent Taliban, reluctance from NATO coalition members, and increased border crossings from Pakistani extremists. There is political support in the U.S. to increase its military footprint in Afghanistan. If needed, how should those military forces be utilized? For what types of military missions will President Karzai approve the use of U.S. forces? Will increased U.S. military presence enable government institutions to take hold or undermine them and further inflame anti-American sentiment and insurgent forces from Pakistan?

U.S. military intervention certainly contributed to Afghanistan's uncertain future. Realizing the risks of ungoverned spaces and in concert with the United Nations, the U.S. led development aid and democratization efforts in Afghanistan. An updated fact sheet about the U.S. strategic partnership with Afghanistan highlights this leadership. Since 2001 the U.S. has provided \$31.9 billion in security, governance, and reconstruction assistance. The U.S. provided security for Afghanistan's democratic 2004 presidential and 2005 parliamentary elections. For the 2009 and 2010 elections, we can expect Afghanistan security forces, trained and supported by U.S.-led coalition forces, to provide similar security. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), manned by U.S. personnel and other NATO partners throughout Afghanistan, have contributed to the building and refurbishment of over 680 schools and 2,700 kilometers of roads.²

Pakistan currently faces a host of challenges. The newly elected President Asif Zardari, husband of slain presidential candidate and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, inherits a complex security problem and a struggling economy. On the security front, Zardari "seems to face an impossible task of assuaging public opinion and overcoming military reluctance while fending off American impatience."³ More specifically, Al-Qaeda and Taliban have sought refuge and gained strength in the ungoverned tribal areas along the Afghanistan border. In

¹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, Regional Issues, available from <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/c7781.htm>; Internet accessed on October 5, 2008.

² U.S. Department of State, Fact Sheet: "United States-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership," September 25, 2008, available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2008/sept/110245.htm>; Internet.

³ "Pakistan: The Widower's Might," *The Economist*, September 13, 2008, p. 47.

addition to launching cross-border attacks, these militants have steadily encroached on more moderate population centers with the support of some Army and intelligence officials. After a suicide-bomb attack on an Islamabad hotel in September, Zardari promised to rid his country of terrorism.⁴ Much of Pakistan's population blames the unpopular U.S. for the increased terrorism. What are the short-term and long-term consequences of Pakistan's increased efforts to eliminate Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in its tribal areas rather than passively allowing U.S. or NATO troops to take the lead? How will Pakistan's choices impact Afghanistan's stability?

Pakistan's future is certainly hazy with a newly elected president in office, but he seems to be taking constructive diplomatic steps. As a signal of potential collaboration, President Karzai attended Zardari's inauguration. Zardari's recent appearance and statement with President Bush at the United Nations is reassuring, but it did not earn him support at home. Like Afghanistan, Zardari recognizes that the U.S. is Pakistan's largest donor, resulting in \$12 billion in military aid since 2001. The U.S. is considering a future aid package for economic and social development totaling \$15 billion over the next ten years.⁵ Such aid would be welcome relief given the state of Pakistan's economy. With the assistance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Zardani hopes to reduce the budget deficit, curb inflation for food and energy, and attract aid or debt forgiveness from other countries.⁶ As for aid to Pakistan, is the U.S. getting its money's worth? What, if any, conditions should the U.S. place on its aid to Pakistan?

U.S. relations with India seem to require a different approach. While there is a counter-terrorism element to the relationship especially due to recent attacks within India, the main security subject remains its nuclear program. But first, let us consider the aftermath of 9/11, which necessitated a U.S. partnership with Pakistan as previously discussed. From India's perspective, this development represented an uncertain security future and potential change of relations with the United States. Fortunately, the U.S. didn't choose Pakistan over India, but rather chose Pakistan and India as partners for different objectives.

In September 2008 India received a waiver to allow imports of uranium, which will upgrade its nuclear energy and weapons programs. The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), a group of 45 countries that limits trade of nuclear materials, approved the waiver. The five other countries that are permitted to engage in nuclear commerce and possess nuclear weapons are Great Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States. A waiver was required because India has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty. The Bush Administration advocated for the waiver and Congress approved it in early October. As a result, this agreement puts distance between India and Pakistan's nuclear programs and delivers a diplomatic victory for Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.⁷ In a recent press release, Secretary Rice stated, "The U.S.-India 123 Agreement reflects the transformation of our relations and a recognition of India's emergence on the global stage...[the] agreement will also enhance our global nonproliferation efforts."⁸ Why should the U.S. support a

⁴ "Terrorism in Pakistan: Friends Like These," *The Economist*, September 27, 2008, p. 58.

⁵ "Pakistan: The Widower's Might," *The Economist*, September 13, 2008, p. 47.

⁶ "Pakistan's Economy: Sweets and Stones," *The Economist*, September 13, 2008, p. 48.

⁷ "India's Nuclear Deal with America: Quantum Politics," *The Economist*, September 13, 2008, p. 48.

⁸ Rice, Condoleezza, U.S. Department of State, Statement: "Congressional Approval of the U.S.-India Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy (123 Agreement)," October 2, 2008, available from <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/10/110554.htm>; Internet.

waiver for a country that doesn't support the related treaties? What are the economic and security risks and benefits of improving India's nuclear capabilities?

Southeast Asia

The region of Southeast Asia includes the nations of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Burma (now referred to as Myanmar by other Southeast Asian countries), East Timor, Laos, the Philippines, and Thailand. Historically, the primary U.S. interest in the region has been political stability and local national security. During and immediately following World War II, the United States achieved a significant degree of influence in the region. U.S. assistance was provided to governments that could maintain order and control local communist groups and other forces presumed to be a threat to the political status quo. Governments in the region tended to be authoritarian, often buttressed by traditional political cultures that were patrimonial or rigidly hierarchical. Mired in a Cold War against the Soviet Union, the United States often sacrificed Western-style principles of democracy and individual freedom for local stability by tolerating or supporting authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia.

A partial shift in American focus occurred during the 1990s that entailed more of an emphasis on economic development than purely national security. Many of the developing states in Southeast Asia became increasingly attractive to American investors, and market economies in the region (Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines) flourished while Stalinist-style economies (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) stalled and lost ground relative to their neighbors. Recently, significant market reforms in communist states, particularly in Vietnam, have improved economic conditions. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was founded in 1967 to achieve economic integration and promote free trade. By 1995, these economies were making remarkable progress, but the financial crisis of 1997 and 1998 revealed significant weaknesses in governmental and private banking capacity in terms of managing rapid growth rates and effectively regulating short-term capital influxes.

At the same time weaknesses in the Southeast Asian economic system were being exposed, the United States appeared to place more emphasis and attention on the development of Northeast Asian nations. The United States' seemingly slow response only served to increase the suspicions of regional leaders about American intentions. The perception that the United States is much more interested in general economic and political stability than in local concerns persists throughout Southeast Asia today. Complicating matters has been a traditional perception that the U.S. is more interested in lending military and economic aid to Northeast Asian nations than in Southeast Asia.

Since 9/11, however, Southeast Asia's importance to the United States has increased due to its strong potential as a refuge for Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaeda "spin-off" organizations. Osama bin Laden's terrorist network spans the globe, with members in both the eastern and western hemispheres. Southeast Asia has a massive (and growing) Muslim population, and that fact combined with economic and political instability makes the region fertile ground for terrorist sympathizers. For example, countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines are currently struggling to deal with violent Islamist extremist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia and Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines. Since 9/11 there have been increasingly costly and dramatic terrorist attacks in the region. In Jakarta and Bali, for example, a major hotel and two dance clubs were bombed and foreign nationals were specifically targeted. Since the start of the global war on terror, terrorist attacks in the region have steadily increased and Westerners (especially Americans) are increasingly at risk as targets. This is a growing regional and international

problem that the United States and its allies will need to thoroughly address in the near future. The question of how and to what extent American involvement in Southeast Asian security affairs remains to be clearly decided.

In order to develop stability and reduce political uncertainty in the region, the United States continues to promote democratization in Southeast Asia. As a result, efforts to establish democratic governments have advanced in Southeast Asia, albeit haltingly. In the past decade, the Philippines and Thailand have struggled with coups and other turbulence in their political transitions, but have found success in consolidating their relatively young democracies. In the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo won a bitter and tainted presidential race against Fernando Poe, the popular actor and politician. Thailand was convulsed in September 2006 by a military coup that ousted the unpopular Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra. However, the new regime quickly took on an aura of uncertainty itself as it appeared to struggle to define the Thailand's direction and return it to democratic rule.. Political unrest, illustrated by a seemingly endless series of prime ministers, continues to plague Thai politics. Indonesia, under authoritarian rule for 30 years, held its first direct presidential contest on September 20th 2004. In Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, the United States has pressed for more open societies through a number of economic, social, and civic programs. However, demands for political change in Burma were crushed. In September 2007, Buddhist monks and ordinary Burmese citizens staged impressive public demonstrations against the continuation of military rule. Despite these and other efforts to resist autocratic military rule in Burma, the military junta there remains in power. Complicating matters are allegations of rape, torture, and murder carried out on a massive scale by the Burmese military. Such allegations hamper the country's aspirations of improving its economy or its position relative to its more democratic neighbors. It remains to be seen how far the United States can and should intervene in Burmese domestic affairs. Complicating matters is the fact that the Burmese military junta often refuses or hinders outside assistance for fear that such aid would make it appear unable to effectively govern its own country. One of the most striking examples of this occurred in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, which devastated the country in early May 2008.

In sum, the halting success with which Southeast Asian nations have established democratic governments has, in some cases, led to a net decrease in regional political stability as various nations vie for political and, especially, economic dominance. The United States' exact role in the region in future years remains to be decided.

Oceania

Two countries stand out as important to U.S. interests in Oceania: Australia and New Zealand. Australia is one of the United States' strongest and most dependable allies, having fought side by side with the United States in every major conflict since World War I. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Australia continues to nurture strong ties with the United States. Although Australia withdrew its combat forces from Iraq in mid-2008, it still supports the American-led effort there with military and civilian specialists who work to train Iraqi security forces; in addition, Australia continues to maintain about 1,000 soldiers in Afghanistan.⁹ While New Zealand barred U.S. nuclear powered ships and submarines from its ports in the 1980s, causing the United States to suspend its Australia–New Zealand–U.S. (ANZUS) security obligations to New Zealand, that country has also supported the United States

⁹ U.S. Department of State, Background Note, Australia, September 2008, available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2698.htm>; Internet.

in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. New Zealand also actively participates in peacekeeping missions around the world, but has focused most of its efforts as a leader in the reconstruction of the Solomon Islands. Recently, New Zealand contributed nearly 10 percent of its entire defense force to peacekeeping operations in nearby East Timor.¹⁰ New Zealand also remains a member of the United Nations Command in the Republic of Korea.

Conclusion: South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania

The United States must maintain good relations with these countries whose cooperation is not only vital to the war on terror but also to regional economic, social, and political development. Hopefully with continued U.S. engagement, these disparate regions will be able to contribute to the larger, global community more fully as they confront terrorism, political and economic instability, and natural disasters.

The delegates to SCUSA should eagerly explore many questions involving U.S. policies toward South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. What direction should American policy take toward this greater region? More specifically, how should the United States prioritize its objectives for these regions and individual countries given the security and democratization challenges that contribute to their uncertain futures? Will domestic political considerations play a key role in U.S. government deliberations? Is there a domestic constituency for U.S. policies that supports greater American involvement in each of these regions? Under what conditions should the U.S. encourage and support multilateral solutions among the countries in the region? How might the U.S. demonstrate cultural sensitivity toward the region and avoid inflaming anti-American sentiment and political extremism? If the U.S. hopes to become an attractive symbol of freedom in these regions, it must craft sensitive and intelligent policies that reflect the cultural and political realities of the very different countries under review.

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¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, Background Note, New Zealand, September 2004, available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35852.htm>; Internet.

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