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## ALBRIGHT'S TRIP TO SOUTHEAST ASIA: AN OPPORTUNITY TO CORRECT PAST MISTAKES

When Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visits Malaysia this week to attend a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), she will bring along a U.S. regional policy in disarray. In Cambodia, Indonesia, Burma, and the Philippines, the Clinton Administration made policy mistakes that have seriously diminished the credibility of the United States in a region critical to U.S. economic and strategic interests. A long, expensive effort to promote democracy in Cambodia fell apart after Hun Sen's coup two weeks ago, but if the Administration had stood up to Hun Sen's bullying on previous occasions, this overthrow could have been prevented. The U.S. military relationship with the Philippines is in disrepair, and relations have been downgraded by Indonesia at a time in which U.S. influence is needed to counterbalance the rising power of China.

The United States cannot afford further political mistakes in Southeast Asia, or the damage to its credibility that has accompanied such mistakes. Recent errors of leadership by the Clinton Administration—and steps that Secretary Albright can take to correct them—include:

**Mistake #1: Allowing the coup in Cambodia.** The July coup, led by Second Prime Minister Hun Sen against First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh, is a serious failure of leadership for the Clinton Administration in Southeast Asia. Past failures by the United States to stand up to Hun Sen's bullying, corruption, and drug trafficking only emboldened him to reverse the results of 1993's United Nations-sponsored election that he had lost to Ranariddh. That election resulted from a three-year, \$3 billion effort—25 percent of which was paid for by U.S. taxpayers. Had the Administration stood up to Hun Sen when he forced his way into the new government and instead supported Cambodia's democratic leaders, like Sam Rainsy, the coup could have been prevented. Under Hun Sen and a resurgent Khmer Rouge, Cambodia could become another battleground, or another Burma—a narco-state falling increasingly under Chinese influence.

**Correction:** Secretary Albright should declare Hun Sen's actions a "coup," which the Department of State has yet to do. She should praise ASEAN's decision to delay Cambodia's admittance to its ranks. She should urge ASEAN, Japan, and Australia to continue denying recognition to Hun Sen's government. More important, she should ask the foreign ministers from ASEAN, Japan, and Australia to join the United States in suspending all economic aid to Cambodia until Hun Sen commits to holding free and fair elections. Albright's July 17 appointment of former U.S. Representative Stephen Solarz (D-NY) as special envoy to Cambodia was a positive step in helping recover from past Administration mistakes.

**Mistake #2: Mismanagement leading Indonesia to reduce its military relations with the United States.** On June 7, Indonesia suspended its participation in the International Military Education and

Training (IMET) program with the United States as well as consideration of buying used U.S. F-16 fighters. Jakarta acted to head off attempts by Congress to deny Indonesia both programs because of alleged human rights abuses. Jakarta was frustrated that the Administration was unwilling to defend its participation in these programs because of scandals concerning Indonesian political donations to President Bill Clinton. IMET would expose Indonesia's military officers to a U.S. military that exemplifies civilian rule; the Indonesian military will play a critical role in the government that succeeds President Suharto. The acquisition of more F-16s, in addition to the 11 Indonesia already owns, would increase equipment compatibility with U.S. forces, which is useful for conducting joint military exercises and strengthening deterrence in Southeast Asia. Instead, Jakarta now is shopping for Russian fighters.

**Correction:** Secretary Albright should stress that reducing military cooperation with the United States will stem criticism from neither the Administration nor Congress on Indonesia's human rights abuses. She should assure Jakarta that the possible legal problems for President Clinton stemming from political donations from his Indonesian friends do not diminish Washington's desire to improve U.S.-Indonesian strategic cooperation. She should stress that the United States places great value on IMET training and arms compatibility and ask Indonesia to reconsider its decisions.

**Mistake #3: Placing an ineffective economic embargo on Burma.** In May 1996, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Ken Wiedemann noted that "unilateral sanctions would have limited economic impact on the [Burma] regime." But on April 22, 1997, the Clinton Administration unilaterally banned new U.S. investment in Burma as a protest against its record of human rights abuses. This action followed a 1996 law calling for such an embargo if repression of democracy activists (like Aung San Suu Kyi) continued. Wiedemann's admonition will hold true: The new investment restriction is a unilateral move that is not likely to affect Burma's military regime. In the meantime, China is building its influence in Burma by becoming the regime's chief strategic partner.

**Correction:** The Clinton Administration should reconsider its decision to impose this embargo if it cannot get Japan, China, and ASEAN to join the sanction. If this embargo is ineffective in achieving human rights concessions, the United States should encourage multilateral adoption of an investment code that requires investors to give employees in Burma opportunities to work abroad and learn more about democratic societies. Such a program could strengthen support for democratic movements over the longer term.

**Mistake #4: Allowing the military alliance with the Philippines to languish.** The Clinton Administration has failed to rebuild strategic cooperation with Manila under the aegis of the 1952 U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty. This alliance has languished following the departure of U.S. military forces from their bases in the Philippines in 1992. Manila lacks a navy or air force to defend its territory. Increased U.S.-Philippine military cooperation is important in deterring China from militarily enforcing its claims in the South China Sea, and also may lead to more base access options for U.S. forces in times of crisis. The Clinton Administration's weak response to China's 1995 occupation of a reef near the Philippines undermined confidence in U.S. leadership in that region. It did not counter the nationalists in Manila who oppose a revived cooperation and who thus far have prevented the completion of a Status of Forces Agreement. This agreement is needed to settle the legal status and protections conferred to U.S. forces operating in the Philippines.

**Correction:** Secretary Albright should convey to her Philippine counterpart the desire of the United States to complete a Status of Forces Agreement quickly and to rebuild a mutually beneficial military cooperative relationship. To rally support in Manila, the United States should help the Philippines' military modernization program by offering low-cost terms to purchase used U.S. frigates and F-18 or F-16 fighter aircraft.

During the ASEAN ministerial meeting in Malaysia, Secretary Albright has an opportunity to correct recent U.S. policy mistakes in Southeast Asia. It is critical that U.S. credibility is enhanced because it will be needed to promote democracy, especially in Cambodia. The credibility of the United States in Southeast Asia flows from the strength of its regional military relationships, and these relationships need urgent repair in both Indonesia and the Philippines.

Richard D. Fisher, Jr.  
Senior Policy Analyst