

Remarks at Press Availability

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Secretary of State
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SECRETARY CLINTON: Well good afternoon everyone. Today I complete my fifth trip to Asia since becoming Secretary of State. Yesterday, I arrived in Vietnam and I was honored to be here to help celebrate the 15th anniversary of the normalization of our diplomatic relations. The day before, I was in Seoul, my third visit to Korea as Secretary. Together, Secretary Gates and I have sent the strong message that 60 years after the outbreak of the Korean War the U.S.-Korea alliance is strong, helping to underwrite peace and security and create the conditions for economic growth throughout the region. And now I've just completed two days of intensive consultations with my ASEAN colleagues and with the other partners who have come here to pursue a common endeavor: strengthening security, prosperity, and opportunity across Asia.

Yesterday, I participated in the annual U.S.-ASEAN post-ministerial meeting where we discussed my country's deepening engagement with Southeast Asia and the opportunities we see ahead on so many fronts – from expanded trade investment, to greater cooperation on peace and security, to joint efforts to confront transnational challenges, like climate change, human trafficking, nuclear proliferation, and so much else.

And today I've joined the annual meeting of the larger ASEAN regional forum to continue and expand our discussions. As I stated when I attended this forum last summer in Thailand, the Obama Administration is committed to broad, deep, and sustained engagement in Asia. And as I discussed in a speech in Hawaii last fall, we are focused on helping strengthen the institutional architecture of the Asia Pacific.

Over the last 18 months we have signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, announced our intention to open a mission and name an ambassador to ASEAN in Jakarta, and held the first U.S.-ASEAN summit. And we have pursued new sub-regional efforts like our new Mekong Delta partnership.

To build on that progress I conveyed to my colleagues our interest in engaging with the East Asia Summit as it plays an increasing role in the challenges of our time. And I announced that President Obama had asked me to represent the United States in an appropriate capacity at this year's EAS in Hanoi to continue a process of consultations with a view toward full American participation at the presidential level in 2011. Through these consultations we will be working with EAS members to encourage its development into a foundational security and political institution for Asia in this century. The President also looks forward to hosting the second U.S.-ASEAN leaders meeting in the United States this coming autumn.

Today we discussed a number of urgent challenges including North Korea and Burma. I encouraged our partners and allies to continue to implement fully and transparently UN Security Council Resolution 1874, and to press North Korea to live up to its international

obligations. I also urged Burma to put in place the necessary conditions for credible elections including releasing all political prisoners, especially Aung San Suu Kyi, respecting basic human rights, and ceasing attacks against their ethnic minorities. And as I said in our meetings today, it is critical that Burma hear from its neighbors about the need to abide by its commitments, under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, to fulfill its IAEA safeguards obligations and complies with Resolutions 1874 and 1718.

We also discussed a number of other important topics: climate change, trading and economic integration, democracy and human rights. And I took the opportunity along with a number of my ASEAN and ASEAN Regional Forum colleagues to set forth my government's position on an issue that implicates the security and prosperity of the region, the South China Sea.

I'd like to briefly outline our perspective on this issue. The United States, like every nation, has a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia's maritime commons, and respect for international law in the South China Sea. We share these interests not only with ASEAN members or ASEAN Regional Forum participants, but with other maritime nations and the broader international community.

The United States supports a collaborative diplomatic process by all claimants for resolving the various territorial disputes without coercion. We oppose the use or threat of force by any claimant. While the United States does not take sides on the competing territorial disputes over land features in the South China Sea, we believe claimants should pursue their territorial claims and the company and rights to maritime space in accordance with the UN convention on the law of the sea. Consistent with customary international law, legitimate claims to maritime space in the South China Sea should be derived solely from legitimate claims to land features.

The U.S. supports the 2002 ASEAN-China declaration on the conduct of parties in the South China Sea. We encourage the parties to reach agreement on a full code of conduct. The U.S. is prepared to facilitate initiatives and confidence building measures consistent with the declaration. Because it is in the interest of all claimants and the broader international community for unimpeded commerce to proceed under lawful conditions. Respect for the interests of the international community and responsible efforts to address these unresolved claims and help create the conditions for resolution of the disputes and a lowering of regional tensions. Let me add one more point with respect to the Law of the Sea Convention. It has strong bipartisan support in the United States, and one of our diplomatic priorities over the course of the next year is to secure its ratification in the Senate.

So this was a very full agenda with candid and productive discussions of critical issues. The theme of this year's ministerial was: Turning Vision into Action. And I think that's the perfect summary of what we're trying to do through these institutions. We have a shared vision and ambitious goals. But as always, the truest measure of our success will be at how well we turn our vision into action by making concrete consistent progress for our goals for a better future. And so it is now time for us to get to work and for me to take some of your questions.

MODERATOR: We have time for a few questions. The first is from Ms. Ha from VTV.

QUESTION: Thank you, Madam Hillary Clinton. My question is that what is your comments about how the South China Sea or East Sea issue was brought about in the AF this year, and into the – the way how to deal with this issue (inaudible).

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you. I think that 12 participants raised the South China Sea and general maritime navigation and claim issues in our discussion. Because if you look at a map of this region, there are many countries that are increasing their trade, their commercial maritime traffic. There is a lot of activity. This is some of the busiest sea lanes in the world, and there's a concern that we all abide by the international rules in order to determine how to proceed and certainly, the 12 participants including the United States, that raise this issue would want to see the application of the principles agreed to previously by ASEAN, the existing international laws and regulations and the custom of how all these countries in this region can share this common space of the oceans. And I thought it was a very productive conversation.

MODERATOR: The next question is from Mark Landler of the *New York Times*.

QUESTION: Thank you, Madam Secretary. I wonder whether I could ask you to take a step back at the end of this trip. In the past, we – you've been in countries that represent American wars past, present, and one hopes not future. But I'm wondering as you go home, whether there's a common thread or a lesson from Vietnam, South Korea that can be applied to our current and very difficult campaign in Afghanistan.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, I hope that some time in the future, Afghanistan is doing as well as South Korea and Vietnam are. The extraordinary economic progress, the strengthening of institutions that we've seen over the last 60 years in South Korea, and certainly the last 35 years in Vietnam, are encouraging to anyone who hopes for the best for Afghanistan. But I think you also recognize that this is hard work, that it takes a lot of patience and persistence.

The history of democracy and prosperity in South Korea was one that was very hard fought, not only the Korean War, but years and years of trying to overcome the difficulties of establishing democratic institutions that would be strong enough to really get rooted in society, of overcoming all kinds of challenges. And as I said yesterday in a speech that I delivered here in Hanoi, one of the lessons that are very important for all of us is to see how 15 years after the normalization of relations between the United States and Vietnam, 35 years after the end of a war, the partnership and cooperation between the United States and Vietnam is increasing by the day.

I travel all over the world as some of you travel with me now. And one of the biggest challenges I face as Secretary of State are the many places in the world today that cannot overcome their own past, cannot put aside the pain and the anguish of the conflicts and disappointments, the oppression, and despair that they experienced or their grandparents experienced.

So both South Korea and Vietnam are very important models for other countries around the world. And I certainly expressed, in Afghanistan, my hope that Afghanistan will be able to build a stronger government, deliver results for the people, demonstrate that democracy can work, provide an inclusive society with a growing economy, and overcome its legacy of war and conflict as well.

MODERATOR: And our last question from Elise Labott of CNN.

QUESTION: Thank you, Madam Secretary. You talked today a little bit about North Korea's – your concern about North Korea's nuclear program and today the North Korean, threaten, I quote, "physical response" to your planned exercises with South Korea. Are you worried about an escalation? And as you talk about North Korea's nuclear ambitions, you've raised concern today about Burma's nuclear ambitions and it's

trying to seek a nuclear weapon. You have some very protracted negotiations with South Korea over civil nuclear programs. Are you concerned that all of this activity will spark an arms race in Asia where other states feel that they're going to have to develop a nuclear program to keep up? Thank you.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, Elise, the threat of a nuclear arms race is one of the greatest dangers facing the world today. As I said in my participation during the ASEAN Regional Forum, we regret and condemn the actions of North Korea, the belligerence, the provocation, the sinking of the South Korean ship *Cheonan*, the destabilizing effect that that has in Northeast Asia, the proliferation of both conventional arms and nuclear technical knowhow. Because we do consider it to be a very serious problem, not only in Northeast Asia, but unfortunately, consequences throughout the rest of the world. Yet at the same time, and I have said repeatedly and said again today, the door remains open for North Korea. If they are willing to commit themselves as they did five years ago in 2005 to the irreversible denuclearization that would make the entire Korean Peninsula, not just the South, but the North as well free of nuclear weapons, we are willing to meet with them. We're willing to negotiate, to move toward normal relations, economic assistance. We want to help the people of North Korea. We would love for them to have the same opportunities that the people of South Korea have been able to enjoy during the last 60 years.

So it is distressing when North Korea continues its threats and causes so much anxiety among its neighbors and the larger region, but we will demonstrate once again through our military exercises as we did when Bob Gates and I visited in Seoul together two days ago – that the United States stands in firm support of the defense of South Korea and we will continue to do so.

But we of course would welcome the day when there is peace on the Peninsula and when the leaders of North Korea are less concerned about making threats and more concerned about making opportunities for all of the North Korean men, women, and children. I would very much like to see that come to pass and, as I say, we stand ready to do so. But under these circumstances, it appears unlikely that we'll be able to make any progress in the near term.

MODERATOR: Thank you all for coming.

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