

Obama Tells ASEAN Leaders U.S. Needs Partnership with Asia

By Stephen Kaufman
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Washington — President Obama met with all 10 leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in New York in the first such meeting held in the United States. He told them the United States needs partnerships with Asian countries to expand its economy and address global challenges such as nuclear weapons proliferation and climate change.

Speaking at the opening of the U.S.-ASEAN leaders meeting September 24, Obama said U.S. trade with ASEAN countries is expanding. One focus area is creating sustainable economic growth.

“American exports to ASEAN countries are growing twice as fast as they are to other regions, so Southeast Asia will be important to reaching my goal of doubling American exports,” he said.

Through the 21-member Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which promotes economic integration in the region, “we’re pursuing trade relationships that benefit all our countries,” Obama said. He said the United States will also “continue to support ASEAN’s goal of creating a more effective and integrated community by 2015, which would advance regional peace and stability.”

The United States also wants to focus on deepening its political and security cooperation with the region, he said.

ASEAN, formed in 1967, is made up of Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. In 2009, Obama became the first U.S. president to attend a meeting with all 10 ASEAN leaders.

The September 24 meeting is the first to take place in the United States, and it “reflects ASEAN’s growing importance and the unprecedented cooperation between ASEAN and the United States,” Obama said.

In November, the president plans to attend the APEC Leaders Meeting in Japan as well as make visits to Indonesia and to South Korea for the Group of 20 (G20) meeting. He said he has accepted ASEAN’s invitation to join the East Asia Summit, which will be held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2011.

“As a Pacific nation, the United States has an enormous stake in the people and the future of Asia. The region is home to some of our largest trading partners and buys many of our exports, supporting millions of American jobs,” Obama said.

Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet, the current ASEAN chair, said through a translator that the organization’s relations with the United States “have been growing well” and play “a very important role to the security, peace and development in the region.”

“Vietnam and ASEAN always support the deepening of the relations between ASEAN and the U.S., bilaterally and multilaterally. And we want to take our relations to the next level to greater comprehensiveness and more sustenance for the peace, stability and development of our region,” Triet said.

White House officials said September 20 (<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2010/September/20100921121848su0.5465814.html>) that Obama’s planned two-hour meeting with the ASEAN leaders was expected to be his longest while he was in New York for the 65th U.N. General Assembly.

That was so the president could explain how important he believes ASEAN and the U.S.-ASEAN relationship is to the future of Asia, Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes told reporters.

Obama places a broad importance on Asia as part of his administration’s economic agenda, Rhodes said.

“We believe very strongly that ... initiatives such as our export initiative and our efforts to promote balanced and sustainable growth through the G20 must hinge in good part on our relations with Asia,” he said.

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