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Sent: Fri Nov 05 12:19:02 2010
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Magic in Kuala Lumpur: Hillary Transforms a Relationship into a Partnership

CSIS Southeast Asia Program | November 5, 2010 at 11:17 AM | Categories: Uncategorized | URL: <http://wp.me/p10Q6P-cM>

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is greeted upon arrival by Malaysian Foreign Minister Dato' Sri Anifah bin Haji Ahmad.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is greeted upon arrival by Malaysian Foreign Minister Dato' Sri Anifah bin Haji Ahmad. U.S. Government photo in the public domain.

By Derek Pham, Research Intern, CSIS Southeast Asia Program

In 1998, President Bill Clinton declined to attend the APEC meeting hosted by Malaysia and had Vice President Al Gore take his place. It was hoped the meeting would provide a welcome opportunity for the administration to elevate ties with Malaysia, but the outcome resulted in embarrassment. Vice President Gore famously gutted the relationship in a dinner speech so awkward that he walked straight out of the room immediately after delivering it.

Twelve years later, America's leading diplomat returned to Malaysia determined to not make the same mistake. The sense of magic that accompanied Hillary Clinton's trip to Malaysia combined with Prime Minister Najib's national vision provided for ideal diplomatic synergy. This helped Clinton achieve a feat which had eluded her husband: transforming US Malaysia ties from a relationship to a partnership. Read more of this post

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