

Systemic Neglect? A Reconsideration of US-Southeast Asia Policy¹

ALICE BA

This article examines contemporary US-Southeast Asia relations as the product of both longstanding forces and a transitioning regional system. First, it highlights systemic forces behind some of the more enduring features and challenges of US-Southeast Asia policy and relations during the presidency of George W. Bush. Systemic forces highlighted include not just the structural-power dynamics that preoccupy International Relations students, but also the interplay of domestic politics, geography and history. It discloses that the key differences between Bush and his predecessors were more of degree and diplomacy than of substance. Bilateralism, sentimental idealism, and a general reactiveness characterized Bush policy, much as it did his predecessors, but Bush diplomacy and policy extremes may account for the more negative regional reception to his policies. Second, in describing a regional system in transition, it highlights adaptations and adjustments on both sides that are creating a regional system that is less US-centric practically and conceptually. It argues that these changes may ultimately prove healthy for both a global power with limited attention and more constrained resources as well as its Southeast Asian partners concerned about autonomy and overdependence. Nevertheless, these changes call for a recalibration of US-Southeast Asia policy and approach in recognition of the region's changing politics.

Key words: United States, Southeast Asia, George W. Bush, bilateralism, systemic.

ALICE BA is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations and Director of East Asian Studies at the University of Delaware, Newark, United States.

“I feel this [US-Southeast Asia] partnership ... suffers a considerable problem with expectations which do not match.”

Abdullah Badawi,
Prime Minister of Malaysia (2005)²

The last few years have seen much anxiety expressed about the US position in Southeast Asia on the pages of major US newspapers and in the reports of Washington think-tanks. Some blame China and what they regard as its policies aimed at removing the United States from Southeast Asia. Others blame the policies of former President George W. Bush. Either way, if the commentary is to be believed, the United States is losing Southeast Asia to China. This article takes a different view. The article agrees that the United States has lost important standing in Southeast Asia, but US influence on balance also remains substantial. The article also takes issue with both the projected implications associated with the US loss of standing and the two explanations most often cited. First, in contrast to explanations that over-privilege the politics of the moment (be it Bush policies or Beijing's new diplomacy), this discussion sees recent developments as products of a historical structure and pattern of US-Southeast Asia relations, as well as post-Cold War adaptations ongoing in US-Southeast Asia relations. Second, it concludes that the process is less about the United States “losing” Southeast Asia to China than it is about relationships that are normalizing in ways that can ultimately prove beneficial for all sides. In particular, adaptations have helped soften dependencies and asymmetries that have sometimes contributed to over inflated expectations about what each side expects from the other. Southeast Asian actors have also gained an expanded range for manoeuvre and greater confidence in their own approaches. For the United States, long accustomed to being at the centre, such trends can be disconcerting, but they may also lessen burdens and expectations placed on a stretched global power.

Systemic Challenges?

Much concern was expressed at the foreign policy of President George W. Bush, and in this respect US-Southeast Asia policy was little different. However, on Southeast Asia at least, there is also something very old hat about the concerns raised. Indeed, pick up any annual review of US-Southeast Asian relations written during the last quarter of a century, and one is likely to find (with variations in degree) remarkable similarity in the concerns expressed: that US

involvement in Southeast Asia suffers from “neglect” (benign or otherwise), “episodic attention”, a lack of imagination, “recurrent frictions” and incoherence, in addition to being “off the radar screen”, “on automatic pilot”, “distracted”, “rudderless” and subject to “strategic drift”.³

Other criticisms, especially those from Southeast Asia, focus more on the approach and style of US diplomacy but are no less repetitive: the United States fails to consult, disregards multilateral processes, insufficiently appreciates Southeast Asia, is over-preoccupied with particular (and often wrong) threats, and is “out of alignment” with regional changes/realities.⁴ Failure to adequately consult (sometimes even inform) has been a longstanding complaint of Washington’s Southeast Asian partners who associate that failure with a penchant for unilateralism and general disregard for local preferences and sensitivities. Explicit criticisms about Washington’s failure to support regional frameworks are more recent but likewise speak to longstanding concerns about the subordination of regional perspectives and interests to those of the United States.⁵ In short, the consensus is that Washington gives inadequate attention (in quantity or quality) to Southeast Asia.

The repetitiveness of concerns suggests that the problems of US-Southeast Asia relations are chronic and may be a function less of partisan failures than of systemic ones. In the international relations sense, the term “systemic” speaks to the structural character of relations, the significant power inequalities that define the US-Southeast Asia relationship, and its sensitivities to changing regional and global balances of power. However, “systemic” can also be understood in a social and organizational sense; that is, challenges may also reflect a *system* of US-Southeast Asia relations, involving interacting, interconnected, often mutually reinforcing pieces (international and domestic) that come together to create relational dynamics, patterns and properties. This is not to say that there are not US domestic-partisan or internal differences on policy. Rather, the point is that there are systemic influences that lend to the persistent tendencies identified in US-Southeast Asia policy.

In this sense, some recent commentary defending Bush policies in Southeast Asia are correct: many of the problems of US-Southeast Asia relations are not unique to the Bush administration. However, neither is past practice a good defence or justification of policy. This is especially true at times of change, as has characterized Southeast Asia’s international relations these past twenty to twenty-five years. Especially as the Obama administration completes its first year, it

seems a good time to reflect upon these changes, as well as the systemic challenges, conceptual straitjackets and the path dependency of US-Southeast Asia policy.

Washington's Attention Deficit Disorder

The recurrent complaint that Washington devotes inadequate attention or importance to Southeast Asia stems in large part from the power disparities between the United States and its regional allies. Indeed, one of the most defining features of US-Southeast Asia relations is that it is a comprehensively unequal relationship. This may seem an obvious point but it is one that too often gets overlooked, especially in US-based discussions that focus on US needs and anxieties. Moreover, such inequalities matter in more ways than one. Most obviously, it means Washington has great resources to get what it needs and wants, whereas Southeast Asian governments find themselves more constrained and often vulnerable to changing US policies and attention. Second, as Brantly Womack argues, such inequalities mean that there is an inequality in the importance and attention given to the relationship.⁶ For Southeast Asian states, the economic, security and legitimacy resources Washington controls gives it tremendous ability to benefit and harm Southeast Asian states whether it means to or not. This means that Southeast Asian states ignore the United States to their own detriment. Indeed, the United States is a constant preoccupation and is always on the radar screen.

In contrast, the United States is a world power with a global plate of interests, and as such, tends to worry and think less about Southeast Asia. At a minimum, it means that Southeast Asia is just one of many issues and regions competing for Washington's attention. The resulting relationship is one in which Southeast Asian states are acutely sensitive to every US action, while the United States can be oblivious. This imbalance of attention, as Womack argues, is a defining feature and complication of practically all asymmetric relationships.⁷

Moreover, Washington is not just a preoccupied great power, but it also tends to be great power preoccupied (that is, focused mostly on other great powers). Southeast Asia, as a region of small to middle powers, poses little direct threat to the security and well-being of the United States. To be sure, in an interdependent world, the United States is not completely unaffected by what happens in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the harm is likely to be more akin to a

scrape than a catastrophic injury. True, the United States once fought a major land war in Southeast Asia on the premise that the region was strategically vital; however, Washington's then (over)attention to the region was also a function of perceived threats from larger powers beyond Southeast Asia.

Considering that many regions clamour for US attention, complaints of neglect are hardly unique to Southeast Asia; however, it could be argued that there are several factors that affect the possibility of sustained attention to Southeast Asia. As a relatively stable and prosperous region, Southeast Asia's issues are less pressing in comparison to regions like the Middle East, a perpetual attention grabber and preoccupation of US foreign policy. A significant domestic constituency plus the immediate attraction of petroleum reserves (a commodity whose impact is felt by every American) further hold the American attention.

Southeast Asia also lacks the geographic or cultural proximity that bind the US to Latin America and Western Europe. Geographic proximity tends to make Latin American politics more visible in their impact on the United States. That visibility combines with a growing Latin American population in the US to generate additional domestic pressures on US policy-makers. This is not to say that Southeast Asia has no domestic salience. The Vietnam War still shadows US-Southeast Asia policy and US foreign policy in general. Vietnamese Americans have also played influential roles in shaping US-Vietnam policy.⁸ Nevertheless, their relatively small population and fragmented mobilization efforts make Asian Americans a less significant force in US politics. Similarly, some business groups — for example, the US-ASEAN Business Council — have pushed for closer economic relations with Southeast Asia, but their influence is also constrained by the fact that Southeast Asia does not capture the American imagination or speak to the same domestic interests that some other regions do.

As for Western Europe, cultural, religious and historical ties make it a "natural" partner and concern for Washington, whose orientation has historically been towards the Atlantic. At a minimum, that historic orientation means that there are habits and institutions of consultation, cooperation and attention that make Europe important regardless of what is going on there. Washington's East Coast location and background also add to its Atlantic orientation. Notably, only seven of forty-four US presidents claimed their home states (at time of election) as being west of the Mississippi, and if one discounts the states that immediately border the Mississippi, then the number

drops to only five.⁹ Though an imperfect determinant of interest, geography asserts material and social pressures, affecting political networks, domestic constituents and one's consciousness of certain relations and their perceived immediacy. Put another way, the Pacific is difficult to ignore for those from the US West Coast, while the Pacific is much more distant to those who are not.¹⁰

In short, such factors of power, geography, history and domestic politics interact in ways that challenge sustained attention to Southeast Asia and thus help to explain the persistent reactive character of policy. Indeed, as Mauzy and Job's discussion of Carter to George W. Bush highlights, "Under Democratic and Republican administrations alike, policy towards Southeast Asia was usually limited to reactions to specific and often unanticipated events." Carter's and Reagan's Southeast Asia policies were reactive to Soviet developments. President George H.W. Bush and Clinton's policies were similarly reactive but, in their case, to US economic troubles and subsequent domestic backlash against (East and) Southeast Asian trade partners.¹¹ If Carter's and Reagan's policies illustrated the major power bias of US policy, George H.W. Bush and Clinton era policies and politics (including Congressional efforts to link trade and economics to US security commitments) illustrated Southeast Asia's diminished strategic significance and the relationship's heightened vulnerability to the ups and downs of US economic and electoral cycles in the post-Cold War era. Given the above, US-Southeast Asia policy can seem not just reactive, but also ad hoc, without a clear sense of what US priorities are and should be in the region.

The practical considerations above may also combine with cultural inclinations to make "efficiency" and "expediency" the operative principles of policy, affecting Washington's Southeast Asian approach. For example, relative capabilities and a full plate of global obligations may make it simply quicker and easier to turn to unilateral, less consultative, even coercive approaches that "get the job done quicker". Nor is this preference unique to recent policy. As two historical examples, Washington's brief interest in a Pacific Pact and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) suggests some interest in multilateralism,¹² but complications also quickly led to easier unilateral and bilateral options.¹³ Put another way, multilateralism and regional consultation may be desirable but they also tend to involve more time and attention, at least in the short term — and time and attention, as already noted, are scarce commodities in Washington.

Instead, US policy has generally relied on a set of US-centric, “hub and spoke”, bilateral arrangements that date back to the late 1950s — first, the “San Francisco treaties” with Japan and the Philippines, as well as Australia and New Zealand;¹⁴ then subsequent Cold War treaties made with South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand;¹⁵ and more recently, various bilateral logistical and support arrangements. Indeed, with the possible exception of the creation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, Washington has not been a particular supporter of regional multilateralism in East or Southeast Asia, a noted contrast to its approach to Western Europe. In addition to power disparities, some suggest that an underlying paternalism made Washington less proactive in pursuing multilateralism in Asia.¹⁶ Others highlight the more fragmented geographic and complex political situation that confronted Washington in Southeast Asia.¹⁷ For example, while Washington’s Southeast Asian partners shared its concern about communism, they often diverged on primary threats and/or how to respond to them. Even within ASEAN itself, there was “a spectrum of views” on the United States and its external security role that complicated more multilateral approaches.¹⁸ Nevertheless, whether it was originally by design or the byproduct of particular Cold War needs and political constraints,¹⁹ bilateralism — as the most established framework institutionally and ideologically — has over time become the most “natural” approach for Washington policy-makers.²⁰

The fact that Southeast Asian economies are late developing economies may also combine with a sense of American exceptionalism and mission (what some describe as the “sentimental idealism” of a “righteous America”²¹), contributing to Washington’s predilection for less regional-multilateral approaches and tendency to direct (as opposed to consult) “lesser” powers. From that view, the United States, as the more advanced, moral and proven power, sees itself as having not only greater authority (moral and technological) in most matters but also a responsibility to guide, direct and teach Southeast Asians in the interest of advanced development and enlightened governance. US policies on human rights, democratization, structural adjustment, development, as well as regional organizations (how they should work, what their agendas ought to be), are areas where such views have been especially prominent in US-Southeast Asia relations.

Such have been some persistent features of US-Southeast Asia relations. The policies of the George W. Bush presidency in substance mostly conformed to the same historical script. As discussed below,

there were features distinctive to US-Southeast Asia policy under Bush, but those differences may be ultimately more of degree and diplomacy than of substance or pattern.

The Bush Era: Politics and Relations as Usual?

The War on Terrorism

If there is an aspect of US-Southeast Asia policy particularly distinct to the Bush administration, it may be the “war on terror”, which made Southeast Asia its “second front” and the subject of Washington’s renewed and expanded attention, especially after the terrorist bombings in Bali in 2002 and Jakarta in 2003. While not all of that attention was welcomed in Southeast Asia, the “war on terror” produced what Catherine Dalpino and others characterize as a “modest renaissance in US bilateral [security] relations with Southeast Asia”.²² This included increased US-Southeast Asia intelligence collaboration, new economic and military assistance, as well as expanded bilateral military-to-military ties between the United States and some individual Southeast Asian states. US-Philippine and US-Indonesian military-to-military relations in particular saw rejuvenation and renewal. By one estimate, “U.S. military assistance to the Philippines ... [rose] from virtually zero to become by far the largest account in East Asia and the Pacific” after 9/11: \$40 million of the region’s \$53 million in foreign military financing in FY2007 and an estimated \$30 million of a \$48 million regional total in FY2008. It also became the largest recipient of international military education and training (IMET).²³ As for Indonesia, the Bush administration, overcoming Congressional opposition, lifted military sanctions (imposed since 1999 in response to abuses in East Timor) and resumed full military ties with Jakarta in 2005. The “war on terrorism” also helped rejuvenate US-Malaysia strategic relations after some turbulence during the Clinton administration.²⁴ Meanwhile, on a different front, US-led military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan elevated Thailand and the Philippines to Major Non-NATO Ally status and Singapore to that of Major Security Cooperation Partner. Surveying developments, Satu Limaye, for one, concluded, “On the whole, military to military relations between US and ... Southeast Asia are closer” since Bush took office in 2001.²⁵ Indeed, Bush policies arguably reversed a post-Cold War process of US military retrenchment from Southeast Asia.

On the other hand, though military-to-military relations improved with some Southeast Asian states, the same could not be said about most other areas; and even on security, results were uneven and often short term. Southeast Asian elites charged Washington for being misguided in its militaristic approaches and “one size fits all” approach. Southeast Asian publics — especially those with significant Muslim populations — saw the “war on terror” as a war against Islam and an excuse to project US power into the region. In both these senses, criticisms levelled at the “war on terror” often seemed eerily reminiscent of criticisms made of US wars against communism during the Cold War. As before, US policy was criticized for being too single-minded, too militaristic, insufficiently attentive to local politics and conditions and for mistaking locally sourced threats for global ones.²⁶ Bush officials and some US analysts claim that this criticism is unfair — the US has, for example, made local adaptations.²⁷ Nevertheless, perception matters, and perceptions are also part of local realities and politics. In this sense, when Bush officials dismissed ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan’s concerns that US counterterrorism policies were alienating Southeast Asians from the United States as “three years behind the curve”,²⁸ they may also be proving the point; that is, their dismissal of regional concerns and perceptions as less than real suggests that they, not Surin, may be the ones out of touch (and perhaps even willfully so).

Indeed, as widely discussed, Bush’s wars — in both substance and process — and later abuses revealed at Guantanamo Bay, had a particularly detrimental effect on America’s image in Southeast Asia. Polls, for example, showed that Southeast Asian publics on the whole viewed the United States more negatively as a result of Bush’s policies. While poll results can vary by country, method, and timing, polls were quite consistent in highlighting increased concerns about the United States as a responsible power. As one example, favourable views of the US in Indonesia dropped from 75 per cent the year before Bush took office to 15 per cent during the Iraq War. US aid in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami did improve those numbers but in 2007 still remained less than half of what they had been before Bush took office.²⁹

Views of George W. Bush were even worse. At the time of the Iraq War in 2003, only 8 per cent of Indonesians polled expressed any trust in Bush to “do the right thing”. 2006 saw those numbers increase to 20 per cent (and it is worth noting, as the Pew Global Attitudes Project did, that even at 20 per cent, Indonesia was still the most pro-Bush Muslim population in the world); nevertheless,

significant concern about US power remained among the majority of Southeast Asian publics.³⁰ Bronson Percival adds that the Iraq War has “not only diverted attention and resources from Asia, but has also saddled Washington with a reputation for incompetence among many Asian elites”.³¹ Even Washington’s closer partners like Thailand found deterioration of support for the United States among its “strategic elites”.³²

Most of all, the “war on terror” illustrated the persistent episodic and crisis-driven nature of US attention to the region. For example, the Bush administration was criticized for having even less interest in Southeast Asia pre-9/11 compared to other administrations.³³ While Bush officials did identify early on the desirability of upgrading certain bilateral relationships, attention remained limited until terrorist events drew Washington’s eyes to Southeast Asia. Attention then dissipated with US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, demonstrating once again, Washington’s short attention span *vis-à-vis* Southeast Asia and the precedence accorded to the Middle East.³⁴ Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s decisions to skip the 2005 and 2007 meetings of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), as well as Bush’s decision to cancel a highly anticipated US-ASEAN summit in 2007, were also widely seen as evidence of Southeast Asia’s marginalization by Middle East concerns.³⁵

Indeed, Bush’s above referenced wars on terrorism and in Iraq made the Middle East a challenge for US-Southeast Asia relations in more ways than one. First, it overshadowed Southeast Asian concerns and regional developments. Second, US anti-terrorism policies (especially during Bush’s first term) were criticized for viewing Southeast Asia through a Middle Eastern lens. Third, Washington’s Middle East policies — especially over Palestine and Israel — became particular lightning rods for criticism, especially among (but not exclusively to) Southeast Asia’s large Muslim populations. Such domestic sentiment as above about US power in general and US-Middle East policy in particular at a minimum made it difficult for governments to work with Washington even when they wanted to.³⁶ Moreover, at issue was more than just a difference over policy: at issue was Washington’s reputation as an honest broker.

In short, the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq fragmented US attention, making it even more difficult for it to tend to its relations with Southeast Asia. Also, because 9/11 occurred early in the Bush presidency, there had hardly been time to develop (let alone sustain) a directed and coherent approach — in other words, a strategy — towards Southeast Asia. While US attention tends to

be fragmented during normal times, post-September 11, US policy-makers were especially “stretched”.³⁷

The reactivity of US Southeast Asia policy was on even greater display in trade and economic policy. A frequent concern made by Southeast Asian elites was that Washington had allowed its various wars to sideline more important issues like economics and trade. Singapore’s Ambassador at Large, Tommy Koh, among others, felt compelled to remind Washington of Southeast Asia’s economic importance to the United States, that ASEAN imports twice as much goods from the US as China does, and that “ASEAN is a more important trade and investment partner for the US than Latin America, Russia, the Middle East, and Africa.”³⁸

As noted, one reason that Washington historically may pay less attention to Southeast Asia is that its attention tends to be biased towards major powers and Southeast Asia has none. In addition, Washington has previously felt confident and consequently complacent about its relations with the region — not just because Southeast Asian states are lesser powers, but also because of its confidence in what it sees to be its own image as a benign power, especially relative to other major or rising powers in East Asia.

However, the last two decades has seen Southeast Asia as a region become less distinct due to growing exchanges with China, as well as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. During that same period, China-ASEAN relations also improved in dramatic (and for many in the US, unexpected) ways, while images of the United States suffered, especially after the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis and then Bush’s various wars and Middle East policies. Such trends prompted mainstream US news outlets to report that Beijing was making inroads into Southeast Asia at Washington’s expense — a view also promoted by conservative think-tanks already inclined to view China with a suspicious eye.³⁹ A 2003 *New York Times* headline summed up the general assessment: “China is romping with the neighbors (US is distracted)”.⁴⁰

The result was new attention to Washington’s trade and economic relations with Southeast Asia. Among the more notable initiatives were the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI) proposed in late 2002; a 2005 joint vision statement on the ASEAN-US Enhanced Partnership, which was followed by the 2006 ASEAN-US Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement (TIFA) and a 2006 USAID budget of \$150 million to support Enhanced Partnership activities. Each of these initiatives were welcomed across

Southeast Asia; however, timing and pattern also suggest their link to growing concerns about Chinese gains (and US losses) in Southeast Asia.

Washington's 2007 act to create a new ambassadorial position to represent the United States in Southeast Asia can be seen as similarly reactive. While that action prompted China, Japan and others to follow suit,⁴¹ it too was largely in response to China and concerns about US standing in Southeast Asia, concerns that had grown more vocal during Bush's second term. Indeed, even US aid to Indonesia following the 2004 Tsunami had a China-preoccupied, China-reactive quality. This is not to say that there was no genuine interest in providing humanitarian relief; however, it was also clear that China was an important consideration in the US response.⁴² Especially following the Asian financial crisis, during which the US received much criticism for not doing enough while China was praised, it became imperative that the US not be seen as falling short again. Indeed, US tsunami relief would be frequently cited by Bush defenders as an example not just of US concern for Southeast Asia, but also its greater military and economic capacity to provide and mobilize assistance relative to China.⁴³ Indeed, by some accounts, Washington also used the pretext of its tsunami relief operations — described as the “largest deployment of American military hardware in the region since the Vietnam War”⁴⁴ — to reactivate and develop military cooperation agreements with different states towards positioning itself in Southeast Asia and the Straits of Malacca. Tsunami aid was also widely touted by Bush officials and Bush himself as a way to counter the image of the US as being anti-Islam.

Again, the reactive character of Bush's Southeast Asia policy was not particularly unique to it. Bush's initiatives were also consistent with Washington's post-Cold War concerns (since the late 1980s) that regional relations might develop in ways that exclude the United States, though with one key difference — that difference being Bush's concerns about China, not Japan, leading a more independent East Asia. Indeed, Bush officials entered office harbouring concerns about China as a potential challenger to US interests and preeminence. The fact that China's relations with Southeast Asia grew dramatically over the course of Bush's two terms only fuelled those concerns. Consequently, while China has been a growing preoccupation of US post-Cold War administrations, it was the last that was most publicly vocal about, and reactive to, regional developments associated with a rising China.

Bilateralism not Regional Multilateralism

In addition to its preoccupation with the “war on terror”, a disregard for multilateral processes was the other area most associated with the George W. Bush presidency. Bush officials stood out for their particular disdain for multilateralism and international organizations (directing particular animus at the United Nations), with Bush’s first term considered by many to be a particularly “aggressive phase of US unilateralism”.⁴⁵ On the other hand, its general preference for other approaches over regional multilateralism *vis-à-vis* Southeast Asia was also not especially unique to it.

As an example, contrasts were often made between Bush era unilateralism and Clinton era multilateralism, but while Clinton officials were certainly more committed to multilateralism in rhetoric and principle, it was also quite clear that multilateral efforts played supporting and subordinate roles to established bilateral arrangements in their approach to Southeast Asia and East Asia more generally. The centrality of existing bilateral arrangements to US-Asia strategy was even more prominent in Clinton’s second term following the crises over North Korea.⁴⁶ A 2000 article by John Hanley and Admiral Dennis Blair (who headed the US Pacific Command 1998–2002) serves to illustrate the point. Titled “From Wheels to Webs”, the article suggested an important move away from bilateralism towards more multilateral and integrated frameworks. Its references to the desirability of “security communities” also pointed to the sensitivity of Blair and other Clinton officials to regional, especially Southeast Asian, thinking and discourse on security. At the same time, the centrepiece of that article was notably not regional multilateralism but rather “enriched bilateralism”. Put another way, Clinton officials supported regional processes, but they conceived those processes as playing supporting — “enriching” — roles to existing US bilateral arrangements.⁴⁷ US Secretary of Defense William Cohen underscored the point in 1998: “[W]e ... believe [multilateral mechanisms] will be successful only if built upon the foundation of solid bilateral relations and a continued US forward presence in the region.”⁴⁸

Such bilateral, one-on-one arrangements also have the additional attraction of giving Washington greater leverage as the more powerful partner, and on this point, Bush officials — more than some of their predecessors — tended to be more explicit about their willingness to use that leverage *vis-à-vis* partners and rivals alike.⁴⁹ The hub-and-spoke model moreover had the additional effect of institutionalizing US centrality — indeed, “indispensability” — in

East and Southeast Asian security. For example, as Bruce Cumings details, regional coordination between Washington's Asian partners during the Cold War was mostly achieved *through* their "vertical" relations with the United States as opposed to "horizontal" relations with one another.⁵⁰ The consequences of these arrangements are felt most directly in Northeast Asia, whose divisions play a large part in justifying a continued US security presence in both Northeast and Southeast Asia. At a minimum, the structure of US bilateralism meant that Asian countries have not had the same opportunities (as, say, France and Germany did in Europe) to work with one another directly and to overcome historical issues. Thus, Muthiah Alagappa and others conclude that US arrangements have been "retarding understanding and accommodation among the indigenous Asian powers".⁵¹ And as long as there is intraregional tension, the United States remains an "indispensable" presence.⁵² Put another way, US Cold War bilateral arrangements have tended to reify and institutionalize the importance and indispensability of the United States to East and Southeast Asian security.

Indeed, Washington has not been passive in its preference for US-centric bilateralism over regional multilateralism.⁵³ Despite eventual participation in some, the United States — under George H.W. Bush, Clinton as well as George W. Bush — initially opposed practically every significant regional multilateral effort to come out of East and Southeast Asia in the last twenty years. These include the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the ARF (as well as its precursor proposals like Australia's Conference on Security and Cooperation for Asia), and ASEAN's Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty (SEANWFZ). Clinton and George W. Bush also chose not to sign ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), making the United States the only major or medium power with interests in Southeast Asia not to do so (until 2009 under President Barack Obama).

As widely discussed, Washington has reserved its strongest objections for "East Asian" arrangements that excluded the United States. Most notably, the East Asian Economic Group (EAEG) proposed by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in late 1990 and the Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) proposed at the height of the Asian financial crisis were defeated after Washington exerted heavy pressure on key allies.⁵⁴ Interestingly, however, despite the Bush administration's reputation, its opposition to East Asian arrangements was more muted than either of its two predecessors. For example, unlike the EAEG (blocked by President George H.W.

Bush) and the AMF (blocked by Clinton), the East Asia Summit (EAS) was allowed to emerge without incident and without reports of US efforts to pressure or block the outcome. Washington's muted opposition was likely due to the Bush administration's uncharacteristic acknowledgement that overt pressure and opposition was more likely to increase, not decrease, support for the arrangement. The fact that the EAS also included Australia, a staunch US ally not typically considered "East Asian", also likely muted US opposition.

One arguably under-acknowledged area of multilateralism (or multilateralization) under both Clinton and Bush administrations on matters of regional security have been military exercises like Cobra Gold,⁵⁵ Cooperation Afloat Readiness And Training (CARAT),⁵⁶ Cope Tiger,⁵⁷ and Balikatan,⁵⁸ which also provide regular evidence of US power and commitment to East and Southeast Asian security. For example, the last two decades has seen notable efforts by the US Pacific Command to bring together and coordinate different US partners and commitments towards developing greater interoperability between them and the United States, better cooperation against transnational crime and improved regional search and rescue responses in support of UN actions. Nevertheless, bilateral arrangements also remain distinct and the coordination of exercises clearly hierarchical.

Similarly, APEC, the favoured regional vehicle of both Bush and Clinton presidencies, is also sometimes cited as an exception to Washington's general opposition to regional multilateralism. Both Bush and Clinton pushed to expand APEC's agenda to include more forceful trade liberalization and a more explicit political-security agenda. Bush's commitment to APEC may be especially notable given his administration's anti-multilateral reputation. Indeed, Michael Green of the Bush administration notes that if presidential attendance is a measure of commitment, APEC received more personal attention from Bush than his predecessor.⁵⁹ Similarly, Brendan Taylor highlights that Bush was notably "entrepreneurial" on Asia-Pacific matters — proposing a variety of initiatives, including the Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP).⁶⁰

On the other hand, the above efforts could also be seen as Washington's positioning itself *vis-à-vis* other regional arrangements less to its liking. Washington's interest in APEC, for example, grew following Mahathir's EAEG proposal.⁶¹ Washington's efforts to expand APEC's agenda to security also potentially diminish the importance of the ARF. On the ARF, Washington has taken issue with ASEAN's influence over its agenda, membership and especially its ASEAN-style consensus-driven process, which it finds generally inefficient

and obstructionist when it comes to US interests and preferences. While APEC is also consensus-driven, Washington enjoys greater influence and leverage over APEC's diffuse membership, which also includes Latin American states. Given this backdrop, Rice's previously mentioned absences at the ARF's 2005 and 2007 meetings could also be seen as a rebuke to ASEAN and expression of impatience with ASEAN approaches. Bush administration's efforts to institutionalize the Six-Party Talks were also seen by many as a threat to the ARF and even ASEAN itself.⁶²

While institutional competition can have its benefits,⁶³ the above also illustrates a pattern by which Washington has discouraged more independent, non-US centric arrangements through diversionary and pre-emptive arrangements, not just outright opposition. US support for APEC *vis-à-vis* the EAEG has been noted. Clinton's support of the Manila Framework over the AMF is another example.⁶⁴ Similarly, under George W. Bush, APEC and the Six Party Talks developed as possible rivals to the ARF; the EAI was promoted to rival ACFTA; and the FTAAP served to counter regional interest in an East Asian FTA (in addition to putting pressure on global trade negotiations). The Obama administration's decision to sign TAC, which makes the US theoretically eligible to join the EAS, has similarly increased speculation about the EAS's diversionary effects on exclusive East Asian processes like the ASEAN Plus Three. Each of these measures also provides additional illustrations of the reactivity already discussed.

Bush's EAI offers a particular illustration of above patterns and dynamics. For one, as a reaction to the 2001 China-ASEAN agreement to begin negotiations on a China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (CAFTA), as well as a 2002 Japanese proposal to form a Comprehensive Economic Partnership with ASEAN (CEPEA), the EAI is a particular case of reactivity.⁶⁵ For another, though multilateral on the surface, the EAI in practice was a set of bilateral free trade agreements based on terms unilaterally defined by Washington. EAI conditions were also too steep for ASEAN's weaker economies, thus excluding their participation. In fact, among the ASEAN states, only Singapore has successfully concluded an FTA with the United States. Defending the EAI, Bush officials often cited the "higher quality" of US trade agreements (especially relative to China's); however, "quality" is ultimately in the eye of the beholder. While Bush officials may have appreciated the EAI's "higher quality" detail and legality, they went against the value ASEAN states attach to inclusion and in affirming the ASEAN collective. As Malaysia's then-Prime Minister Abdullah

Badawi put it, the US “seems content to move only in the direction of bilateral FTAs instead of engaging ASEAN as a group”.⁶⁶ Also, in that Washington’s offering shifted regional attention, resources, and expertise to US — and not ASEAN — led arrangements and also generated some intra-ASEAN competition for US attention, the EAI had fragmenting, as well as diversionary effects.⁶⁷ Indeed, Robert Zoellick, then-US Trade Representative, may have inadvertently acknowledged Washington’s “divide and rule” strategy when he explained: “I favor a ‘competition in liberalization’ with the US at the center of the network.”⁶⁸

The above also illustrates the contingent character of Washington’s involvement in “regional” processes. When involved, it tended to be in ways that affirmed or defended US centrality, prompting related criticisms about Washington’s failure to engage regional views seriously. Indeed, Washington was criticized for treating forums like APEC and the ARF as mere platforms for US announcements and proclamations, as opposed to true consultation, highlighting Percival’s point that even when US presidents and officials do attend regional meetings, “the US seems to have a tin ear for Asian concerns.”⁶⁹ In addition, while the Bush administration did display some notable entrepreneurship on Asia-Pacific cooperation, its entrepreneurial initiatives also tended to focus on cooperation among larger powers (Northeast Asia, Australia and even India), not ASEAN or Southeast Asia.⁷⁰

However, in response to the expansion of Sino-ASEAN relations, Washington consequently loosened its usual bilateral approach to trade agreements, offering an ASEAN-US TIFA and Enhanced Partnership. The China-preoccupied reactivity of Bush initiatives and concern for US regional pre-eminence also speak of important differences between the Bush administration and especially his immediate predecessor on multilateral processes, despite their similarities. Certainly, Bush’s first term — where Clinton’s “multilateral style and the globalization-focused agenda ... to a startling extent disappeared from view”⁷¹ — offered a particularly dramatic contrast in rhetoric, principle and tone. But also, the contrast reflected Bush officials’ related skepticism about Clinton’s engagement policies.

For Clinton, the expansion and “multilateralization” of the aforementioned bilateral exercises served not only to improve coordination among Washington’s Asian allies, but also to engage different regional states, including potential “problem” states and rivals. Invitations were consequently sent out region-wide to those who wished to “participate or observe” in the interest of encouraging

transparency and integration, which Clinton officials saw as having moderating effects on state behaviour. They saw such exercises as particular opportunities “to draw the Chinese military into cooperative activities throughout the region”.⁷² The logic of engagement thus gave value to regional-multilateral processes, even if the emphasis remained on US-centric bilateralism.

In contrast, Bush officials put the emphasis on deterrence, not engagement, which affected how they approached the rest of East and Southeast Asia. Not only did they “sharply reduce ... the scope and frequency of such contacts” with China,⁷³ but the extensions of the above bilateral exercises and partnerships came to be more about positioning American military forces and arrangements across the region, especially *vis-à-vis* China.⁷⁴ The result was an even stronger emphasis on US-centric bilateralism. Indeed, absent the logic of engagement, regional multilateralism had very little value to the Bush administration.

Consequently, under Bush, there were no Blair-like or Clinton-like nods to such “soft” talk as “security communities”. Indeed, incoming Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld reportedly passed over Admiral Blair for the position of chairman of the Joint Chiefs largely because of his views on engagement.⁷⁵ Instead, bilateralism was consistently emphasized and intensified in defence of the US regional position. To quote then Secretary of State Colin Powell — Washington’s bilateral alliances should remain “the bedrock” of not just US policy but also of US influence in the region.⁷⁶ The expansion of Cobra Gold and other exercises above thus came to reflect a different strategic calculus; that is, Bush officials tended to see in such exercises underexploited opportunities to cultivate closer strategic ties with key partners *vis-à-vis* China.

For example, in addition to the usual emphasis placed on Washington’s larger “go to” partners, Japan and Australia, Defense Department recommendations also consistently identified opportunities to upgrade bilateral relations with particular Southeast Asian states.⁷⁷ These included historical partners Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore, but also Indonesia and Vietnam.⁷⁸ The latter two are especially notable for the fact that, compared to other Southeast Asian states, Indonesia and Vietnam have tended to be more concerned about China. Vietnam also has the potential to even out US influence, which has historically biased maritime, non-communist Southeast Asia — a bias that is also apparent in economics, with 80 to 90 per cent of US-Southeast Asia trade and investment going to maritime states.⁷⁹ Moreover, in so doing, it potentially challenges

Chinese influence (whose historical bias is the opposite of that of the US — namely, continental Southeast Asia).⁸⁰ While the overt competitive dynamics of Bush policies moderated somewhat with the departure of Donald Rumsfeld and with the need for Chinese cooperation in their various wars on terrorism and in Iraq and Afghanistan, deterrence — not engagement — remained the driving logic behind US military exercises and the Bush administration's general approach to East and Southeast Asian security.

“Freedom is on the March”

The other standout issue in US-Southeast Asia relations under Bush was Myanmar, which is now widely agreed to have been an unproductive distraction in US-ASEAN relations. Rice's absence at the 2005 ARF came to be particularly representative as a case where rebuking Myanmar became more important than talking regional security. Indeed, the challenge that Myanmar had become for US-Southeast Asia relations was acknowledged by the incoming Obama administration, which made Myanmar policy one of the first to be reviewed in its approach to Southeast Asia. At the same time, Myanmar was not the only state under sanctions. At one point in 2003, according to Catherine Dalpino, seven of Southeast Asia's ten states were either under US sanctions or the threat of them for one reason or another.⁸¹ In 2006 Washington (by law) also cut off aid to Thailand following the September ouster of Prime Minister Thaksin by the military.

On the other hand, democratization and human rights were not new challenges for US-Southeast Asia relations. During the Clinton administration, such issues (including Myanmar) were in fact persistent issues of contention in its relations with Southeast Asian states and in key ways set the stage for the US-ASEAN impasse over Myanmar under Bush. A particularly representative moment (certainly for Southeast Asian states) came at the height of the Asian financial crisis. With Asian states facing their largest economic crisis to that date, Vice President Al Gore chose not only to lecture ASEAN governments on the merits of American liberalism but also “seemed to threaten that unless regional governments promoted liberal change, the United States might turn its back on the region's future”.⁸²

As noted earlier, such issues have been areas where Washington's “sentimental idealism” as well as paternalism has been on particular display. Bush's liberal rhetoric and Myanmar policy was again

consistent with past trends. However, Bush officials also overcame Congressional opposition to lifting sanctions placed against Indonesia, allowing for the resumption of US-Indonesia military ties. The Bush administration also took steps to remove restrictions on Cambodia and Laos. Such tensions in policy speak to ongoing debates about the US commitment to human rights and democratization, as well as the utility of sanctions. However, in the end, the challenge for US-Southeast Asia relations may not be human rights and democratization *per se* — most in ASEAN agree that these are good values and ideals. Rather, the challenge may lie instead in Washington's approach. Even if sincerely intentioned, Washington's blunt approach to issues like Myanmar is often highly problematic given Southeast Asian concerns about autonomy and past interventions. Economic growth and new regional confidence have also made Washington's approach much less tolerable than in previous times.

Placing Differences and Consequences in Context

In short, on most issues, US-Southeast Asia policy under Bush tended to reinforce, rather than significantly depart from, some of the more enduring themes of US-Southeast Asia relations. At the same time, the debates and protests of the Bush era also suggest that there was something specific to Bush policies. And indeed, there was. As highlighted above, while Bush policies may have hit familiar themes, they also stood out in both degree and their (lack of) diplomacy. As Lowell Dittmer put it, unilateralism was by no means unique to the Bush administration, but "Bush's renunciations were unusually blunt"⁸³ and its disdain for others' views and concerns often unusually harsh. For example, while disagreements are to be expected, it seems excessive to dismiss ASEAN's positions as mere "platitudes" and ASEAN states' interest in China as "obsequious".⁸⁴ At a minimum, such refusal to give legitimacy and standing to the positions and processes of others does little to encourage an appreciation for Washington's own constraints.

Bush policies thus often seemed extreme versions of old policies and without the diplomatic niceties to soften their impact. Consequently, every thing tended to be accentuated: the reactive and episodic character of US policy, its disregard for regional multilateralism, the problems of US inattention and overattention, as well as the hierarchy of relations. Mark Beeson and Richard Higgott argue that it may be the extremeness of Bush administration

approaches that may be responsible for Southeast Asia's diminished "trust in the USA to use its power responsibly".⁸⁵

At the same time, as should also be clear, Bush policies did not take place in a historical or political vacuum. Past interactions also helped condition the ways that Bush policies were received. Bush policies also had to confront important material and ideational changes associated with Southeast Asian states' efforts to adapt to Washington's own post-Cold War security and economic adjustments. For Southeast Asian states, the issue has to do with longstanding questions about the US as both a strategic and economic partner. As noted above, downturns in the US economy present Southeast Asia multifaceted challenges in the post-Cold War era. For one, the United States buys and invests less, a particular concern for states that rely on export-led growth. For another, in the absence of clear threats, the American public and US interest groups are less willing to support pro-Southeast Asian economic policies and security arrangements, and are more sharply critical of Southeast Asian policies in general.

In both security and economics, post-Cold War developments served to remind states of the structure of relations, generating new regional efforts to moderate vulnerabilities (of both individual states and the US-Southeast Asia relationship) through less US-centric arrangements. These included institutional adaptations like the ARF and APEC. States also began expanding their engagement of other countries, especially China. As a rising economic power, China offered ASEAN states an additional motor of growth. But also, in a context of uncertain US commitments, China as a rising political and military power also created new imperatives for states to engage China; that is, it became important to improve relations and establish security foundations that were less dependent on US guarantees and less vulnerable to changing US policies. As Simon Tay puts it, "many Asians would like to have the option of having an independent policy toward China, rather [than] being reflexively aligned to the US position".⁸⁶

The result has been a Southeast Asia (and East Asia in general) that is a little less US-centric practically and conceptually. For one, new regional arrangements, in providing fresh opportunities for Asian allies and former Asian rivals to get together, have helped stabilize the East Asian system and thus improve Southeast Asian security. Further, the stabilization of relations through regional arrangements has given ASEAN and its members new confidence in their own contributions to regional security. Here it is important to note that

it has not just been Washington that has been constrained by ideas of its indispensability to regional security. Southeast Asian states — though generally more ideologically autonomous than their Northeast Asian counterparts — have also been constrained by similar ideological straitjackets.

Moreover, the last twenty years has seen regional processes, especially the ARF and APEC, become sites for regular confrontations between Washington and ASEAN states over human rights, democratization, structural adjustment, development and now regional organizations. Consequently, a greater sense of difference and divergence also exists between the United States and its Southeast Asian partners today compared to two decades ago. These differences and divergences were also dramatically affirmed during the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis.

Much has been written on the effects of the Asian financial crisis on US-Southeast Asia relations, so suffice it to underscore here the ways that it affirmed (and highlighted the problems associated with) key dynamics of US-Southeast Asia relations above: US power and leverage, its preference for US-centric approaches and its paternalism and righteous belief in the correctness of its views and practices. The only thing it did not seem to illustrate was US reactivity. Faced with the largest economic crisis to that point, Southeast Asian states found Washington unresponsive, save for its efforts to block regional self-help initiatives and lecture ASEAN states for what they had done wrong.

Such changes and developments — in offering powerful evidence in contradiction to Washington’s “consistent and bipartisan” claim that it was both “in and of” the region (Asia)⁸⁷ — have eroded some of the material and ideological adhesives that sustained US-Southeast Asia relations even when interests and perspectives diverged. As noted, the US-Southeast Asia relationship worked because, as Andrew Hurrell puts it, the United States had a number of things going for it: extreme and comprehensive power, the ability to offer persuasive and hard-to-turn-down deals and an important degree of legitimacy in its anti-communist purpose.⁸⁸ Even if states diverged from the United States on specific threats and interests, or objected to Washington’s lack of consultation, broad agreement about their overall strategic purpose still provided a basis for “shared visions, political bargains, and communal bonds”.⁸⁹ In addition, Washington’s relative resources and capability combined with the fledgling status of newly emergent states also assured Washington’s Southeast Asian partners that whatever their differences with the US, they would still

find something to be gained in that association. Put another way, US-centred arrangements satisfied important needs and desires of both the United States and its partners, and their respective (even if not necessarily mutual) interests provided important foundations for relations, including the strategic and economic structure of US commitments.⁹⁰ Relatively speaking, neither US arrangements nor US-Southeast Asia relations enjoy the same degree of mutual satisfaction today.

To be clear, US security and economic commitments are still very much valued in Southeast Asia (as is evidenced from the anxiety states continue to express about relations). However, the erosion of both the material and ideological foundations of the relationship have produced a regional system that is relatively less US-centric practically and conceptually than it was twenty years ago. And it is this transitioning system that Bush policies confronted and initially failed to acknowledge. At a minimum, Southeast Asia's changing relations with China and Japan, as well as greater self-confidence among ASEAN states, expand state choices and autonomy and make the United States "less dominant" than it once was.⁹¹

This is especially true in economics and trade, but it is also true in security. As noted, the previous common assumption was that intraregional suspicions made the United States indispensable to East and Southeast Asian security. However, the general improvement in regional relations and new confidence in regional processes call that assumption into question. In this sense, Bush policies — premised, as they were on both US power and the logic of deterrence — were in some important ways already outdated at the start. Indeed, Montesano and Quek go so far as to argue "nothing better illuminates the obsolescence of America's longstanding posture toward Southeast Asia than its response to China's increased involvement there".⁹² Bush's confrontational policies were, for example, a persistent source of worry in their potential to derail and "frustrate ASEAN efforts to engage China constructively in multilateral confidence-building initiatives".⁹³ Most elites also worried that the zero-sum ways in which Washington viewed ASEAN-China relations could also lead to new pressures and tensions in US-ASEAN relations. In this sense, Bush's various wars — by creating incentives for Washington to tone down its confrontational rhetoric in the interest of gaining Chinese cooperation — may have also had an unexpected benefit for US-Southeast Asia relations.

In sum, such changes call not only for more US regional engagement but also a recalibration of approach and policy. Too often,

recommendations by US-based think-tanks and task forces argue for a “new” policy, when in fact they are just calling for a fulfillment of old policies based on the usual bilateralism, a privileging of Japan and Australia, as well as assumptions about US centrality in East and Southeast Asia.⁹⁴ This does not mean that the old ways and approaches have no place — but they have exclusionary and strategic dynamics that may no longer be as consistent with regional developments and thinking. US stances on China and East Asian regionalism are particular cases in point. While ASEAN states do have mixed feelings about East Asian regionalism, it is also seen as a logical and even necessary evolution in the interest of Southeast Asian security and prosperity.⁹⁵ Similarly, the improvement of China-Southeast Asia relations is considered a good and stabilizing development.

Similarly, while the United States remains a valued partner in Southeast Asia, the changing material and ideational foundations of relations do mean that relations are normalizing in important ways. Relations have become a little less unequal, less exclusive and less special. And this may ultimately be a healthy development for both a global power with limited attention and increasingly constrained resources, and for its Southeast Asian partners concerned about autonomy and ever worried about the dangers of overdependence.

Most of all, the changes above suggest that the United States cannot afford to be complacent or unthoughtful about its relations with Southeast Asia. A thoughtful Southeast Asia policy does not require a total change of course but it does require that Washington adopt a more pluralist approach that moves beyond an old bilateralism in acknowledgement of new actors and changing regional dynamics. It also requires that Washington engage ASEAN and ASEAN states as actors that also have valid viewpoints, interests and constraints. As more than one regional elite and commentator has expressed, what they would like to see most from Washington is “sustained, knowledgeable, and consultative engagement”.⁹⁶ Actions and statements made by the Obama administration — its change in policy towards Myanmar, its promise to attend regional meetings, its inclusion of Indonesia on Hillary Clinton’s first inaugural trip abroad as Secretary of State — suggest some awareness of the changing game in Southeast Asia. However, whether that awareness can overcome the systemic and historical forces that have given US-Southeast Asia policy and US-Southeast Asian relations its more persistent features remains an open question.

NOTES

- ¹ The author thanks two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and critiques.
- ² Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, "Creating a Better Understanding of ASEAN-United States Relations", Speech to the Asia Society, 15 September 2005 <<http://www.asiasociety.org/speeches/badawi05.html>>.
- ³ See, for example, Karl D. Jackson, "Southeast Asia: Off the Radar Screen", *SAISPHERE* 23, 2004 <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/pressroom/publications/saisphere/2004/PDF/SAISPHERE_2004.pdf>; Tommy Koh, "America's Role in Asia: What Does Southeast Asia Want from Washington?", Pacific Forum CSIS, *PacNet* 53, Honolulu, 21 December 2004; Alan D. Romberg and Marshall Bouton, "The US and Asia in 1991", *Asian Survey* 31, no. 12 (December 1992): 1–10; Diane K. Mauzy and Brian L. Job, "US Policy in Southeast Asia: Limited (Re)Emergence After Years of Benign Neglect", *Asian Survey* 47, no. 4 (July/August 2007): 623–24; Stephen Bosworth, "The US and Asia in 1992", *Asian Survey* 33, no. 1 (January 1993): 103–13; Jonathan Pollack, "The United States and Asia in 1995: The Case of the Missing President", *Asian Survey* 36, no. 1 (January 1996): 1–12; Michael J. Montesano and Quek Ser Hwee, "The United States in Southeast Asia: Deepening the Rut?", *Orbis* 48, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 321–34; Richard Cronin, "The United States and Asia in 1993", *Asian Survey* 34, no. 1 (January 1994): 98–109; Lucien Pye, "The United States and Asia in 1997", *Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (January 1998): 99–106; Evelyn Goh, "Renewed American Diplomacy: Keeping Southeast Asia on the US Radar Screen", Pacific Forum CSIS, *PacNet* 22, Honolulu, 26 May 2005; Jonathan Pollack, "The United States in Asia in 2003: All Quiet on the Eastern Front?", *Asian Survey* 44, no. 1 (January 2004): 1–13; Paul Kreisberg, "The US and Asia in 1990", *Asian Survey* 31, no. 1 (January 1991): 1–13; Marvin C. Ott, "Southeast Asia and the United States: Policy without Strategy", Pacific Forum CSIS, *PacNet* 21, Honolulu, 28 May 1999; Brantly Womack, "Southeast Asia and American Strategic Options", in *Obligation of Empire*, edited by James Hentz (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), pp. 175–95; Sheldon Simon, "Is there a US Strategy for East Asia", *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 21, no. 3 (December 1999): 325–43.
- ⁴ Montesano and Quek, "The United States in Southeast Asia", op. cit., pp. 321–34; Tommy Koh, "The United States and Southeast Asia", in *America's Role in Asia: Asian and American Views* (San Francisco, CA: The Asia Foundation, 2008), p. 38.
- ⁵ Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, "Creating a Better Understanding of ASEAN-United States Relations", op. cit.
- ⁶ Brantly Womack, "Asymmetry and Systemic Misperception: China, Vietnam, and Cambodia", *Journal of Strategic Studies* 26, no. 2 (2003): 92–119.
- ⁷ Womack, "Asymmetry and Systemic Misperception", op. cit.
- ⁸ Satu Limaye, "The United States-ASEAN Relations on ASEAN's Fortieth Anniversary: A Glass Half Full", *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29, no. 3 (December 2007): 447–64.
- ⁹ Reagan and Hoover claimed California; Johnson, George H.W Bush and George W. Bush claimed Texas. If birth states, then it is four: Eisenhower, Johnson, Nixon

and Obama. Harold Stanley and Richard Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics 2007–2008* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2008), pp. 253–55.

¹⁰ Some reactions to President Obama’s Hawaii roots suggest that the Pacific (even the American parts) remains not just distant but foreign for many Americans.

¹¹ Mauzy and Brian L. Job, “US Policy in Southeast Asia”, op. cit.

¹² See, for example, Kent Calder, “Securing Security through Prosperity: The San Francisco System in Comparative Perspective”, *Pacific Review* 17, no. 1 (2004): 135–57.

¹³ See, for example, Leszek Buszynski, *Failure of an Alliance Strategy* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983); John Duffield, “Why is there no APTO? Why is there no OSCAP?”, *Contemporary Security Policy* 22, no. 2 (2001): 69–95; Calder, “Securing Security through Prosperity”, op. cit.

¹⁴ Although the formal alliance relationship between Australia, New Zealand and the United States, ANZUS, is now defunct as a trilateral alliance, the US and New Zealand continue to have a robust bilateral security relationship.

¹⁵ Calder, “Securing Security Through Prosperity”, op. cit.; William Tow, “Convergent Security Revisited”, in *Asia Pacific Security Cooperation*, edited by See Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 2004), pp. 19–32.

¹⁶ Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Why is there no NATO in Asia?”, *International Organization* 56, no. 3 (2002): 582; Takashi Inoguchi and Paul Bacon, “Empire, Hierarchy, and Hegemony”, *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 5, no. 2 (2005): 119.

¹⁷ See, for example, Tow, “Convergent Security Revisited”, op. cit.

¹⁸ See Chin Kin Wah and Pang Eng Fong, “Relating the US-Korea and US-Japan Alliances to Emerging Asia Pacific Multilateral Processes: An ASEAN Perspective”, Discussion Paper Series, Asia/Pacific Research Center, Stanford University, March 2000.

¹⁹ Calder, “Securing Security through Prosperity”, op. cit.

²⁰ See also Montesano and Quek, “The United States in Southeast Asia”, op. cit., pp. 321–34; Koh, “The United States and Southeast Asia”, op. cit., pp. 321–34.

²¹ See, for example, James Thomson, Peter Stanley, and John Perry, *Sentimental Imperialists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981). See also discussion in Inoguchi and Bacon, “Empire, Hierarchy, and Hegemony”, op. cit., p. 119.

²² Catherine Dalpino, “Group Think: The Challenge of US-ASEAN Relations”, in *America’s Role in Asia: Asian and American Views* (San Francisco, CA: The Asia Foundation, 2008), p. 231.

²³ “Miscellaneous Facts about the Armed Forces of the Philippines”, *Southeast Asia Bulletin* (CSIS) (March 2009): 5.

²⁴ Ian Storey, “Malaysia and the United States 2004–2005: The Best of Times?”, in *The Asia-Pacific and the United States 2004–2005*, edited by Satu P. Limaye (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, March 2005).

²⁵ Limaye, “The United States-ASEAN Relations on ASEAN’s Fortieth Anniversary”, op. cit. See also Ian Storey, “The United States and ASEAN-China Relations: All Quiet on the Southeast Asian Front”, Strategic Studies Institute, October 2007.

- ²⁶ Marvin Ott, "Building for the Long Term", *Comparative Connections* (Second Quarter, 2002).
- ²⁷ See for example, Bronson Percival, "Countering Terrorism in East Asia", in *America's Role in Asia*, op. cit., pp. 243–44, 247–48.
- ²⁸ Victor Cha is cited in T.J. Pempel, "How Bush Bungled Asia: Militarism, Economic Indifference and Unilateralism Have Weakened the United States Across Asia", *Pacific Review* 21, no. 5 (December 2008): 571.
- ²⁹ See discussion and summary of various public opinion polls in Pempel, "How Bush Bungled Asia", op. cit., p. 570; Han Sung-Joo, Tommy Koh, and C. Raja Mohan, "Asian Views of America's Role in Asia 2008: An Overview", in *America's Role in Asia*, op. cit.; "US Image in Asia Deteriorating", *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 10 September 2006; WorldPublicOpinion.org, "Public Opinion in the Islamic World on Terrorism, al Qaeda, and US Policies", Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, 25 February 2009 <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/feb09/STARTII_Feb09_rpt.pdf>.
- ³⁰ Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Some Positive Signs for US Image", 12 June 2008 <<http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/260.pdf>>.
- ³¹ Percival, "Countering Terrorism in East Asia", in *America's Role in Asia*, op. cit., p. 246.
- ³² Bates Gill, Michael Green, Kyoto Tsuji, and William Watts, *Strategic Views on Asian Regionalism: Survey Results and Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009).
- ³³ Mauzy and Job, "US Policy in Southeast Asia", op. cit.
- ³⁴ David Capie, "Between a Hegemon and a Hard Place", *Pacific Review* 17, no. 2 (2004): 223–48.
- ³⁵ See, for example, Joel Brinkley, "Visiting Tsunami Survivors, Rice Faces Annoyed Asian Leaders", *New York Times*, 12 July 2005; Barry Desker, "Southeast Asia Casts Wide Net for Cooperation", *Yale Global Online*, 30 May 2006.
- ³⁶ Mark Beeson, "ASEAN Plus Three and The Rise of Reactionary Regionalism", *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 25, no. 2 (2003): 251–68. See also, Han, Koh, and Mohan, "Asian Views of America's Role in Asia 2008", in *America's Role in Asia*, op. cit., p. 6; Simon Tay, "East Asian Community and the United States", *Issues and Insights* 5, no. 9 (August 2005): 13–28.
- ³⁷ Percival, "Countering Terrorism in East Asia", in *America's Role in Asia*, op. cit., pp. 243–44.
- ³⁸ Koh, "The United States and Southeast Asia", in *America's Role in Asia*, op. cit., p. 38.
- ³⁹ E.g., the Heritage Foundation, whose representatives also make frequent presentations to Congress. Dana R. Dillon and John J. Tkacik, Jr., "China and ASEAN: Endangered American Primacy in Southeast Asia", Backgrounder #1886, 19 October 2005 <<http://www.heritage.org/research/asiaandthepacific/bg1886.cfm>>.
- ⁴⁰ Jane Perlez, "China is romping with the neighbors (US is distracted)", *New York Times*, 3 December 2003.
- ⁴¹ As of September 2009, a total of twenty-nine countries (including South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India, in addition to US, China and Japan) had also appointed ASEAN ambassadors. <<http://www.aseansec.org/22470.htm>>.

- ⁴² Washington was not the only one whose assistance was moved by more than humanitarian concerns. See Michael Vatikiotis, "The International Politics of Tsunami Aid", *Jakarta Post*, 20 January 2005.
- ⁴³ "Bush says tsunami aid boosts US image", Agence France Press, 13 January 2005; Victor Cha, "Winning Asia", *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 6 (2007): 98–113. See also Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 227.
- ⁴⁴ David Osborne, "America Urged to Devise Marshall Plan for Asia", *The Independent*, 3 January 2005.
- ⁴⁵ John Feffer, "China: What's the Big Mystery?", *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 4 December 2006 <<http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/3752>>.
- ⁴⁶ Jonathan Pollack, "The United States and Asia in 1996", *Asian Survey* 37, no. 1 (January 1997): 95–109.
- ⁴⁷ Dennis C. Blair and John T. Hanley, Jr., "From Wheels to Webs: Reconstructing Asia Pacific Security Arrangements", *Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2000): 7–17.
- ⁴⁸ Chin and Pang, "Relating the US-Korea and US-Japan Alliances", op. cit.
- ⁴⁹ See, for example, discussion in Pempel, "How Bush Bungled Asia", op. cit.
- ⁵⁰ Bruce Cumings, "The History and Practice of Unilateralism in East Asia", in *East Asian Multilateralism*, edited by Kent Calder and Francis Fukuyama (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 2008), pp. 41, 45.
- ⁵¹ Muthiah Alagappa, *Asian Security Order* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press), pp. xi–xii. See also, Amitav Acharya and See Seng Tan, "Betwixt Balance and Community: America, ASEAN, and the Security of Southeast Asia", *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 6, no. 1 (2006): 37–59; Calder and Fukuyama, *East Asian Multilateralism*, op. cit., p. 9.
- ⁵² Colin Powell cited in Montesano and Quek, "The United States in Southeast Asia", op. cit., pp. 321–34; Koh, "The United States and Southeast Asia", op. cit., p. 323.
- ⁵³ See, for example, John Gershman, "Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?", *Foreign Affairs* (July–August 2002): 60.
- ⁵⁴ See, for example, Richard Higgott, "The International Politics of Resentment: Some Longer Term Implications of the Economic Crisis in East Asia", *New Political Economy* 3, no. 3 (1998): 333–56; David Rapkin, "The United States, Japan, and the Power to Block: The APEC and AMF Cases", *Pacific Review* 14, no. 3 (2001): 373–410.
- ⁵⁵ Originally a US-Thai exercise, the 2009 Cobra Gold exercise was participated in by nineteen countries, including Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore. See Sheldon Simon, "US-Southeast Asia Relations: Indonesia as Exemplar of Southeast Asia's Importance", *Comparative Connections* (April 2009).
- ⁵⁶ The US Navy conducts annual CARAT exercises with its counterparts from Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Brunei.
- ⁵⁷ Combined air force exercises conducted by Singapore, Thailand and the United States.
- ⁵⁸ Combined US-Philippine military exercises.
- ⁵⁹ Green, "The United States and Asia After Bush", op. cit.

- ⁶⁰ Brendan Taylor, "The Bush Administration and Asia Pacific Multilateralism: Unrequited Love?", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 62, no. 1 (March 2008): 1–15.
- ⁶¹ John Ravenhill, *APEC*, op. cit.
- ⁶² Tan See Seng, "The US Push for a Northeast Asia Forum", *RSIS Commentary* 47 (16 April 2008); "US Push for New Security Mechanism Irks Southeast Asia", *Agence France Presse*, 13 April 2008.
- ⁶³ See arguments of Tan See Seng and Michael Green in Tan, "The US Push for a Northeast Asia Forum", op. cit.; and "US Push for New Security Mechanism", op. cit.
- ⁶⁴ See Alice Ba, *(Re)Negotiating East and Southeast Asia: Region, Regionalism, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).
- ⁶⁵ The CAFTA was signed in 2002 and the CEPEA was signed in 2003.
- ⁶⁶ Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, "Creating a Better Understanding of ASEAN-United States Relations", op. cit.
- ⁶⁷ See Alice Ba, "Political Implications of an ASEAN-China Free Trade Zone", in *China Under Hu Jintao*, edited by T.J. Cheng, Jacques deLisle, and Deborah Brown (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2005), pp. 311–48.
- ⁶⁸ Zoellick quoted in Bernard Gordon, "A High Risk Trade Strategy", *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2003): 105–18. Zoellick was describing a more general approach towards global versus regional trade arrangements, but the logic is still appropriate here.
- ⁶⁹ Percival, "Countering Terrorism in East Asia", in *America's Role in Asia*, op. cit., pp. 243–44.
- ⁷⁰ See examples discussed in Taylor, "The Bush Administration and Asia Pacific Multilateralism", op. cit.
- ⁷¹ Kenneth Lieberthal, "The United States and Asia in 2001", *Asian Survey* 42, no. 1 (2001): 12–13.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁴ Andrew Murray, "Challenge in the East", *The Guardian*, 30 January 2002.
- ⁷⁵ Mark Mazzetti, "The New Team: Dennis C. Blair", *New York Times*, 22 November 2008.
- ⁷⁶ Chong Guan Kwa and See Seng Tan, "The Keystone of World Order", *Washington Quarterly* (Summer 2001): 95–103.
- ⁷⁷ See, for example, discussions in Bruce Vaughn, *US Strategic and Defense Arrangements in the Asia Pacific* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service Library of Congress Report RL33821, 22 January 2007).
- ⁷⁸ Al Pessin, "Rumsfeld Moves to Expand Military Relations with Vietnam", *Voice of America*, reprinted in *FedNews*, 5 June 2006.
- ⁷⁹ Limaye, "The United States-ASEAN Relations", op. cit.
- ⁸⁰ See also Obama's June 2009 decision to lift sanctions and restrictions on Cambodia and Laos.

- ⁸¹ Catherine Dalpino, "A Sample from the Georgetown Southeast Asia Survey", *Georgetown East* (2004): 4.
- ⁸² Simon, "Is There a US Strategy for East Asia", op. cit., p. 325.
- ⁸³ Lowell Dittmer, "American Asia Policy and the American Election", *Orbis* 52, no. 4 (2008): 670–88.
- ⁸⁴ Michael Green, "America's Quiet Victories in Asia", *Washington Post*, 13 February 2007.
- ⁸⁵ Mark Beeson and Richard Higgott, "Hegemony, Institutionalism, and US Foreign Policy", *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 7 (2005): 1173–88.
- ⁸⁶ Tay, "East Asian Community and the United States", op. cit.
- ⁸⁷ M. Taylor Fravel and Richard J. Samuels, "The United States as an Asian Power: Realism or Conceit?", *Audit of the Conventional Wisdom* 05-2, MIT Center for International Studies, April 2005 <<http://web.mit.edu/cis/acw.html>>.
- ⁸⁸ Andrew Hurrell, "Pax Americana or the Empire of Insecurity", *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 5, no. 2 (2005): 153–76. See also, Donald Crone, "Does Hegemony Matter?", *World Politics* 45 (1993): 501–25.
- ⁸⁹ Inoguchi and Bacon, "Empire, Hierarchy, and Hegemony", op. cit., p. 118.
- ⁹⁰ See Crone, "Does Hegemony Matter?", op. cit.
- ⁹¹ Barry Desker, "Priorities for the Obama Administration", *Pacific Forum CSIS, PacNet* 5, 27 January 2009.
- ⁹² Montesano and Quek, "The United States in Southeast Asia", op. cit., pp. 321–34; Koh, "The United States and Southeast Asia", op. cit., p. 328.
- ⁹³ Chin and Pang, "Relating the US-Korea and US-Japan Alliances", op. cit.
- ⁹⁴ See for example, "The United States and the Asia Pacific Region: Security Strategy for the Obama Administration", summarized in Ralph Cossa and Brad Glosserman, "Needed: A New Asia Pacific Strategy Report", *Pacific Forum CSIS, PacNet* 20, Honolulu, 10 March 2009.
- ⁹⁵ Han, Koh, and Mohan, "Asian Views of America's Role in Asia 2008", in *America's Role in Asia*, op. cit., p. 3.
- ⁹⁶ Tay, "East Asian Community and the United States", op. cit.