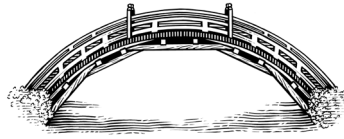


ROUNDTABLE

Southeast Asia, the Great Powers, and Regional Security
from the Cold War to the Present

In Honor of Sheldon W. Simon



See Seng Tan

William T. Tow

Kai He

Kevin Cooney

Chris Lundry

Ralf Emmers

Siew-Mun Tang

Maria Ortuoste

Huiyun Feng

Donald K. Emmerson

≈ with a conclusion by ≈

Sheldon W. Simon

Preface

Sheldon (Shell) Simon, professor emeritus at Arizona State University, burst onto the NBR research agenda in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse by serving as the principal investigator for a project to advise the secretary of defense on post-Cold War security architecture in Southeast Asia. That study led Shell to play a pivotal role at NBR, where he eventually headed our Southeast Asia Program. His many contributions to NBR's research resulted in books, reports, national and international conferences, and policy briefings for U.S. intelligence, defense, and diplomatic agencies, as well as for the White House and Congress.

The first joint publication on which Shell and I worked was coediting *Southeast Asian Security in the New Millennium*, published in 1996, which was one of the first examinations of the unprecedented growth and development taking place in Southeast Asia during the 1990s. The shifts in politics, economics, and regional integration that occurred during this time were fundamental to the region as we know it today.

One of our next major publications, *The Many Faces of Asian Security*, was first conceived at a brainstorming session in Phoenix during two sweltering July days in 1999. Ensnored poolside at a local resort with our notepads, we came up with the idea of a cosponsored research conference that would examine the new security agenda in the Asia-Pacific as the millennium began. The book that emerged from this international conference, edited by Shell, was a timely examination of both enduring and new security concerns that had arisen in post-Cold War Asia.

Shell was centrally involved in several other NBR projects during this period, including leading assessments for U.S. Pacific Command on its theater security cooperation programs and advising several important initiatives on Islamist terrorism in Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks. At the same time, from 2000 onward, Shell played a foundational role in our Strategic Asia Program, contributing the Southeast Asia chapters to the first five books in the series. In each volume, his chapter masterfully laid out the strategic developments in the region and their impact on the United States, providing the reader with a comprehensive regional understanding and the tools to look out at Southeast Asia's future.

In 2005, we undertook another conference and book initiative that examined the importance and growing complexity of Southeast Asia's relations with China. By then, the region's security and continued growth depended on a careful balancing of the markets and influence of China

and the United States. To address the new circumstances, Shell co-led a conference in Singapore, convened by NBR and Singapore's Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (now part of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies), in August 2005 with Southeast Asian and U.S. specialists on China's economic, political, and military relations with the region. Admiral Thomas Fargo, who had recently retired as commander of U.S. Pacific Command, joined us in Singapore and gave remarks. The resulting book, *China, the United States, and Southeast Asia: Contending Perspectives on Politics, Security, and Economics*, edited by Shell and Evelyn Goh, identified areas of convergence and divergence in U.S. and Southeast Asian assessments of China's rise and factors that could alter the trajectory of Chinese–Southeast Asian relations.

The following roundtable discussion features the contributions of some of Shell's close colleagues and former students who have since become experts in their own right. This series of essays, building on Shell's legacy, amply describes the importance of Asia, and Southeast Asia in particular, for U.S. foreign policy and highlights so many of the issues on which he focused during his long and successful career as one of the United States' premier Asia scholars. Although Shell has now formally retired from research and teaching at Arizona State University, I am delighted that he remains on the editorial board of *Asia Policy* and that we have been able to recognize his contributions in this roundtable. Shell is an extraordinary and wonderful friend, and that rare combination of scholar, steady professional, inspirational colleague, policy adviser, and patriot.

Richard J. Ellings
President
The National Bureau of Asian Research

**Asia Watcher:
Introduction to a Festschrift in Honor of Sheldon W. Simon**

See Seng Tan

Among the titans who bestride the analytical world of Asian security studies, few have been as consummate a student of the region as emeritus professor Sheldon Simon, who recently retired from academia after 48 years at Arizona State University. In an illustrious career spanning over five decades, Professor Simon—“Shell” to his friends and colleagues—has assiduously observed and analyzed developments in Asia and its subregions from the Cold War to the present. In honor of this Asia watcher extraordinaire, this *Asia Policy* roundtable features a collection of short essays on the themes and issues, both enduring and emerging, that have occupied his attention as an analyst and a scholar. The ten authors assembled for this festschrift include former students, collaborators past and present, and long-time friends and admirers. In addition to their voices, Simon has furnished his personal retrospective reflection on the region.

William Tow leads off the roundtable with an analysis of the continuities and contradictions of the Trump administration’s Asia policy. He worries over what the hollowing out of Asia expertise within the U.S. leadership might mean for the stability and security of the region. Kai He follows by examining the growing strategic interdependence between China, as the Gulliver of Asia, and the Southeast Asian countries, as the region’s Lilliputians. His essay ends with the cautiously optimistic suggestion that the way interdependent ties are being institutionalized possibly implies a regional outcome more peaceful than many analysts have allowed. Kevin Cooney contends that Japan’s policy toward Asia has been “purpose driven” rather than ad hoc, as evidenced by Tokyo’s astonishing adaptability in a rapidly evolving regional security environment. Chris Lundry examines the persistent gap between Indonesia’s grand aspirations, on the one hand, and its limited capabilities and capacity to realize those aspirations, on the other. He concludes that Indonesia is unlikely to forgo its hitherto strong commitment to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), despite the Joko Widodo administration’s purported preference for bilateralism.

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Beyond single-country case studies, my essay in the roundtable addresses the complex ramifications that ongoing strategic interactions among the great powers could have on Asia, particularly in light of growing worries over the region's possible ensnarement in what some have termed the "Thucydides trap." I make a plea for the return to enlightened agency among great powers and regional actors alike, without which the region could well enter into conflict and war. Ralf Emmers examines the contributions of middle powers, particularly Australia and Indonesia, to Asia's "inclusive multilateralism" and quest for a rules-based order, but he also rues the inability of these middle powers to mitigate against great-power rivalry. Siew-Mun Tang argues that ASEAN has provided leadership in promoting and facilitating regional cooperation. Yet it faces existential challenges today in maintaining a balanced approach to the great powers as well as responding to growing demands by external parties for ASEAN to share leadership of the region. Maria Ortuoste discusses the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). She argues that the ARF has been and remains a useful vehicle for its members to advance their separate interests but warns that such a self-serving utility stymies the forum and puts it at risk of backsliding. Huiyun Feng highlights the positive contributions to regional security by Track 2 institutions such as the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), while acknowledging the manifold constraints facing these networks today. Last but surely not least, Donald Emmerson offers a critical dissection—through the help of an idea introduced by Simon in 1985, namely, "Beijing's policy...is that China must play a primary role in determining regional order"—of China's words and deeds vis-à-vis the South China Sea. Emmerson argues that a joint declaration by interested parties stating that no single country should exercise sole, exclusionary control over the South China Sea could prove invaluable in facilitating regional progress over those troubled waters.

This introduction would not be complete without a few words on Simon and his seminal contributions to Asian security studies. Much can be said here, but I have chosen to focus specifically on his ruminations regarding ASEAN, the regional organization to which he returned time and again in his analytical labors.

Origins

A native of Minnesota, Sheldon Simon was educated at the University of Minnesota where he obtained his bachelor's degree in 1958 and his

doctorate in 1964. In between, he obtained a master's degree from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs in 1960. As Simon highlights in his contribution to this roundtable, it was during his undergraduate years that his lifelong fascination with Asia began. His career, which included a brief stint with the U.S. government, took him from Minnesota to George Washington University (1965–66); the University of Kentucky (1966–75), where he served a year as acting director of the Patterson School of Diplomacy; and finally to Arizona State University (1975–2018), where he served as chair of the Political Science Department from 1975 to 1979. Along the way, he held visiting appointments at a number of universities and regularly consulted for various U.S. government agencies as well as for the private sector.

Simon came of age as a scholar of Asia at a time when intellectual suspicion against formal social science theory as a political weapon of the Cold War ran high.¹ Like most U.S.-based Asia specialists of his generation, Simon's scholarship has been predominantly empiricist in orientation, partly because of the shared perception among his peers that Asian data rarely meets the assumptions and expectations of Western-centric international relations theory.² That said, he has not been loath to engage in theoretically driven work on occasion.³ Simon's oeuvre is prodigious and impressive. Notwithstanding an early concentration on Communist China and its foreign policy toward its Asian neighbors,⁴ Simon's main claim to fame has been as a thoughtful sage on Asian, and specifically ASEAN, affairs.⁵ Indeed, it was exposure to

¹ See, for example, Michael E. Latham, "Ideology, Social Science, and Destiny: Modernization and the Kennedy-Era Alliance for Progress," *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 2 (1998): 199–229; and Kimber Charles Pearce, "Narrative Reason and Cold War Economic Diplomacy in W.W. Rostow's 'Stages of Economic Growth,'" *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2, no. 3 (1999): 395–414.

² Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, "Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7, no. 3 (2007): 287–312.

³ See, for example, Sheldon W. Simon, *War and Politics in Cambodia: A Communications Analysis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1974); and Sheldon W. Simon, "Realism and Neoliberalism: International Relations Theory and Southeast Asian Security," *Pacific Review* 8, no. 1 (1995): 5–24.

⁴ See, *inter alia*, Sheldon W. Simon, *The Broken Triangle: Peking, Djakarta, and the PKI* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); Sheldon W. Simon, "Peking and Indochina: The Perplexity of Victory," *Asian Survey* 16, no. 5 (1976): 401–10; Sheldon W. Simon, "Some Aspects of China's Asian Policy in the Cultural Revolution and Its Aftermath," *Pacific Affairs* 44, no. 1 (1971): 18–38; and Sheldon W. Simon, "The Two Southeast Asias and China: Security Perspectives," *Asian Survey* 24, no. 5 (1984): 519–33.

⁵ See Sheldon W. Simon, *The ASEAN States and Regional Security* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1982); Sheldon W. Simon, "The Regionalization of Defense in Southeast Asia," *Pacific Review* 5, no. 1 (1992): 112–24; Richard J. Ellings and Sheldon W. Simon, eds., *Southeast Asian Security in the New Millennium* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1996); Sheldon W. Simon, "Alternative Visions of Security in the Asia-Pacific," *Pacific Affairs* 68, no. 3 (1996): 381–96; Sheldon W. Simon, "Security Prospects in Southeast Asia: Collaborative Efforts and the ASEAN Regional Forum," *Pacific Review* 11, no. 2 (1998): 195–212; Sheldon W. Simon, "The Multiple Facets of Asian Security," *International Politics* 36, no. 4 (1999): 571–81; and Sheldon W. Simon, "ASEAN and Multilateralism: The Long, Bumpy Road to Community," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30, no. 2 (2008): 264–92.

Simon's work on ASEAN regionalism during my undergraduate years that led this acolyte to Arizona State University to study with Simon. Simon's work has focused mostly on U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia, although he has also written on Northeast Asia and U.S. defense, intelligence, and foreign affairs more widely. Simon has played a crucial dual role in explaining the complexities of Asia to U.S. academic and policy audiences, on the one hand, while enlightening Asian audiences about the security perspectives, policies, and planning of U.S. administrations, on the other.

ASEAN Regionalism: Where Global and Local Meet

If there is a common thread that runs through all of Simon's writings, it is his concern over the interactions, conflictual as well as collaborative, between the global and the local in Asia. In one of his early essays, he provided what in a key sense has been his principal concern all along—the seemingly unbridgeable gaps in perception and interest between great powers and small countries that require careful management through collective action:

In a world in which territorial aggrandizement and the collection of client states still serve as symbols of power and status, suspicion persists in great power–small power relations. The differing strategic outlooks of these two types of international actors account for much of the volatility in their interactions. Great powers (those with the capability of projecting politico-military and/or economic power globally) are concerned primarily with enhancing their worldwide positions and limiting those of global adversaries, and therefore assess third world states in terms of the contributions they make to local balances against hostile major opponents. By contrast, small states (those with politico/military/economic capacities confined primarily to their regional locations and whose relationship to the global system is subordinate) are concerned with establishing or maintaining territorial integrity and creating viable polities.⁶

In riposte to this enduring challenge (or puzzle), Simon has written extensively on the efforts by Southeast Asian countries to construct a regionalism through ASEAN, built to facilitate not only intraregional reconciliation among the member states themselves but also engagement with the great powers and other extraregional countries and international actors. In an early nod toward what scholars such as Peter Katzenstein

⁶ Sheldon W. Simon, "Davids and Goliaths: Small Power–Great Power Security Relations in Southeast Asia," *Asian Survey* 23, no. 3 (1983): 302.

would later christen “analytical eclecticism,” Simon saw Southeast Asian regional institutional life as a mix of liberal and realist features:

Another way of phrasing this is that ASEAN is building a structure based on the components of neoliberalism, an inclusive edifice for all to discuss their hopes and fears. If this structure is sound, it should be able to accommodate the varying security concerns of its components. Nevertheless, if the structure is threatened, there is an insurance policy consisting of two components: (a) self-insurance through the build-up of indigenous forces; and (b) continued reliance on an external guarantor—the United States. Over time the latter’s commitment may decline, while the former’s capability improves. Together, ASEAN believes, the combination of neoliberalism and realism will secure the peaceful environment needed to sustain Southeast Asia’s impressive development pattern.⁷

Notwithstanding his occasional engagements with international theory, it is important to recognize that Simon has remained unwedded to a particular theoretical or ideological persuasion.⁸ Empirical accuracy was what he sought in his scholarship, as evidenced in the following comment on ASEAN written on the 50th anniversary of that organization:

ASEAN is regarded by many observers as a success not so much for its achievements but rather because since its inception 50 years ago, its theretofore fractious members have mostly avoided warfare against one another and have adopted a “live and let live” attitude toward fellow members. Yet, ASEAN has no constitution (only a charter), parliament, or dispute settlement mechanism. Its headquarters in Jakarta operates on a modest annual budget of \$20 million in 2017. With decision making obtained only through consensus by its 10 members, ASEAN is a confederation of the willing.⁹

⁷ Simon, “Realism and Neoliberalism,” 21. For further discussion of analytical eclecticism, see Rudra Sil and Peter J. Katzenstein, *Beyond Paradigms: Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁸ That said, it is possible to detect, I suggest, a tacit liberal mien in some of his observations on regionalism in Asia. For example, regarding the region’s ostensible preference for regulation rather than legislation, he once wrote, “No real *community* consisting of common values, interlocking histories, and the free movement of peoples and firms across national boundaries exists yet in the region. Hence the reticence about creating political institutions that would entail policymaking based on legal procedures. Successful institutions require common views of objectives as well as cost and benefit sharing.” See Sheldon W. Simon, “Security, Economic Liberalism, and Democracy: Asian Elite Perceptions of Post–Cold War Foreign Policy Values,” National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), NBR Analysis, Summer 1996, 5–32 (italics in original).


⁹ Sheldon Simon, “Regional Skepticism,” *Comparative Connections* 19, no. 2 (2017): 48.

Looking Ahead

In the present day, it is safe to say that Simon has been deeply concerned with what he sees as the Trump administration's apparent "abandonment" of the traditional leadership role in global affairs undertaken by virtually every U.S. administration since the end of World War II.¹⁰ Calling attention to the potential ramifications that such abandonment is likely to have on U.S.-ASEAN ties, he has underscored the stakes involved and the steps he believes that the United States must take:


ASEAN is troubled that the Trump administration has said very little about the Association; the 10 Southeast Asian countries constitute more than 600 million people with the potential to be an important player in economic and strategic affairs. ASEAN has created a number of multilateral mechanisms for the Asia-Pacific....In conjunction with ASEAN, the U.S. can influence the agendas of these gatherings and reinforce the already established U.S. role as a guardian of rules-based institutions and regional order.¹¹

On the other hand, any attempt by the United States to reclaim its leadership role could encounter pushback from China, which, according to some, has sought to fill the void created when the United States recused itself.¹²

In a fundamentally different respect, a great void of another kind has been created as a consequence of the official (and well-earned) retirement of a great power, one defined not by military might but by unparalleled intellectual heft and academic leadership. As William Tow aptly states in his essay, Simon serves as a role model for us all because his "record of seeking truth from the facts on the ground as they have emerged in Asia, and offering sound judgments about what they mean and how to respond to them, is unsurpassed." Would-be aspirants seeking to follow in the footsteps of the incomparable Sheldon Simon would do well to take note. 

¹⁰ Sheldon Simon, "Abandoning Leadership," *Comparative Connections* 19, no. 3 (2018): 41–52.

¹¹ Sheldon Simon, "U.S.–Southeast Asia Relations: Mixed Messages," *Comparative Connections* 19, no. 1 (2017): 45.

¹² David E. Sanger and Jane Perlez, "Trump Hands the Chinese a Gift: The Chance for Global Leadership," *New York Times*, June 1, 2017  <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/us/politics/climate-accord-trump-china-global-leadership.html>.

Sea Change or More of the Same? Trump's Security Policies in Asia

William T. Tow

After decades of relative stability and predictability for U.S. strategy in Asia, President Donald Trump has quickly and substantially transformed his country's policy behavior in the region. More than any of his recent predecessors—and notwithstanding efforts by some of his own advisers to constrain his actions—this U.S. president has proved to be a highly transactional figure who is undaunted by those from the U.S. policy establishment who question the validity and effectiveness of his instincts and negotiating style. His foreign affairs agenda is driven by the pursuit of those domestic economic and political objectives he views as critical for “making America great again.” This largely insular approach has been labeled as a form of Jacksonian foreign policy.¹ It has resulted in more open negotiations with autocrats, confrontations with traditional allies and partners on a wide array of previously stable issues, and a radical adjustment to the United States' geopolitics to better fit with his own views of the world.

Policy Continuities and Contradictions

Writing at the end of 2017, renowned Asian affairs expert Sheldon Simon observed that President Trump has been dismantling the U.S.-led, postwar rules-based international order without any tangible strategy for what would replace it or how long it would take for any such alternative to materialize. Trump, Simon insisted, “has rejected past synergies between U.S. vital interests and the responsibilities of global leadership.” Instead, he views international relations as an unmitigated zero-sum process and rejects the security alliances and institutions created by his predecessors “because they required U.S. financial expenditures and supposedly yielded few benefits.”² Past assumptions that U.S. international engagement and leadership yield constructive reciprocity for all involved have taken a back

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¹ Walter Russell Mead, “The Jacksonian Revolt: American Populism and the Liberal Order,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 1, 2017, 2-7.

² Sheldon Simon, “Abandoning Leadership,” *Comparative Connections* 19, no. 3 (2018) ~ <http://cc.csis.org/2018/01/abandoning-leadership>.

seat to what Trump views as the need to rectify a long-standing exploitation of U.S. interests and resources by the country's allies and competitors. Venerable analysts of U.S. policy in Asia such as Simon, however, have always understood that the realities of geopolitics are far more complex than the assumptions underwriting this U.S. president's "America first" posture. Most fundamentally, if managed judiciously, multilateral and bilateral policy approaches can complement each other rather than undercut the pursuit of sound statecraft and strategy.

In some ways, the pace of change in U.S. foreign policy in Asia during the Trump administration has been startling. So, too, have that policy's manifest contradictions. Three days after his inauguration, Trump signed an executive order withdrawing the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—the main economic pillar of Barack Obama's "rebalancing" strategy that was designed to enmesh U.S. trading interests with key Asia-Pacific economies. During a regional tour in November 2017, Trump subsequently proclaimed that the United States was pursuing a "free and open Indo-Pacific" doctrine.³ Although the current U.S. administration would deny such is the case, this posture actually incorporates several key aspects of the rebalancing strategy. These include containing a nuclear North Korea, strengthening U.S. alliances with traditional Indo-Pacific security partners (while emphasizing allied defense spending and burden-sharing more than Obama did), and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight in Pacific waters (and thus balancing growing Chinese offshore military power).⁴

However, clear differences have emerged between Trump's and Obama's regional policy approaches to Asia. Trump has modulated the promotion of common values and norms as underlying U.S. trade and security relations. He has clearly disdained the efficacy of multilateralism as a means of negotiating future regional order-building, preferring to focus on bilateral negotiations and agreements. He has cultivated closer personal ties with regional autocrats such as North Korea's Kim Jong-un, China's Xi Jinping, and the Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte. He has done so with the expectation that stronger bilateral relations with their regimes would immediately

³ Donald J. Trump, "Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit/Da Nang, Vietnam," White House, November 10, 2017 ~ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>.

⁴ Patrick M. Cronin, "Trump's Post-Pivot Strategy," *Diplomat*, November 11, 2017 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/trumps-post-pivot-strategy>.

generate more favorable outcomes for U.S. trade, investment, and regional security policy.

Any credibility gained by Trump reaching out to Asian autocrats has been compromised by his tendency to impose greater sanctions and other forms of punishment on such regimes when they are viewed as compromising U.S. regional interests. Hence, Trump orchestrated a brinkmanship strategy, threatening “fire and fury” in the event of a North Korean military strike against U.S. territory or forces deployed in the region.⁵ This was done to force Kim to negotiate with him at a June 2018 summit in Singapore, which to date has produced no visible progress on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. After hosting Xi at his Florida Mar-a-Lago estate in early April 2017, and characterizing the leader as a newfound friend he could trust, Trump proceeded to launch what appeared to be a major trade war with China a little more than a year later in July 2018. He initially levied \$34 billion in tariffs against Chinese products to neutralize what the White House described as “a [Chinese] pattern of unfair trade practices and theft of American intellectual property.”⁶ China quickly retaliated by imposing tariffs on U.S. products, and by late September 2018 the Trump administration had imposed an additional \$200 billion, while the Chinese had levied another \$60 billion.⁷ This intensifying Sino-U.S. trade dispute has heightened the risk of another global economic recession and prompted the European Union to sign a comprehensive bilateral trade agreement with Japan as a hedge against growing U.S. trade protectionism.

From Trust to Suspicion

The credibility of the postwar U.S.-led security network in the Asia-Pacific has been underwritten by the United States sustaining trust in its commitment to defend its allies against future attacks and deter external threats to their national security. By doing so, the United States has facilitated Asia’s own remarkable economic growth. However, key allies and partners in Asia are now gradually concluding that President Trump’s approach to geopolitics is disturbingly erratic and renders Washington as an unreliable collective defense partner.

⁵ Peter Baker and Choe Sang-Hun, “Trump Threatens ‘Fire and Fury’ against North Korea if It Endangers U.S.,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2017.

⁶ Ana Swanson, “Trump’s Trade War with China Is Officially Underway,” *New York Times*, July 5, 2018.

⁷ “China Accuses U.S. of Trade Bullying as New Tariffs Imposed,” BBC, September 24, 2018.

Trump's announcement, after meeting Kim, that he would suspend joint military maneuvers with South Korea for as long as denuclearization talks with North Korea were ongoing surprised both the U.S. Department of Defense and South Korea's government—neither of which received advance notice of the president's decision.⁸ Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe had been a strong supporter of Trump's previous "maximum pressure" campaign (including the imposition of tough UN sanctions) against North Korea and was arguably the international leader most repeatedly consulting the White House on international relations developments. This, however, did little to exempt Japan from being targeted (along with South Korea) by the Trump administration in March 2018 with a 25% tariff on imported steel and 10% on aluminum.⁹ Neither could Japanese policymakers, having watched recent North Korean ballistic missile tests fly over Japanese territory, gain much solace from the lack of explicit information emanating from the Trump-Kim summit regarding which North Korean missile systems would be part of any denuclearization process or how the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of the North's nuclear weapons and delivery systems would be realized. The Trump administration previously had claimed that the latter issue was nonnegotiable.¹⁰

In a speech delivered at London's Chatham House in mid-July 2018, then Australian foreign minister Julie Bishop ruminated on the unpredictability of the long-standing U.S.-Australia alliance and observed that Washington now seemed less committed to preserving the international rules-based order that it had been so integral in establishing and leading.¹¹ This has the practical consequence of making it difficult for Australia to extend unqualified support for Trump's quest to strengthen ties with Russia, which Canberra views as a continual violator of international norms. However, it remains an open question to what extent Australia can actually reconcile its declared support of a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific as underscored by its November 2017 foreign policy

⁸ Robert Burns and Foster Klug, "Trump Contradicts U.S. Military Stance on Korea War Games," Associated Press, June 12, 2018.

⁹ Michael Heath and Enda Curran, "With Friends Like These: Trump's Tariff's Hurt Asian Allies," Bloomberg, March 5, 2018 ~ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-03-05/with-friends-like-these-trump-s-tariffs-hurt-asian-allies>.

¹⁰ Daniel Hurst, "The Trump-Kim Summit: The View from Japan," *Diplomat*, June 12, 2018 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/the-trump-kim-summit-the-view-from-japan>.

¹¹ Nick Miller, "Less Predictable and Less Committed': Bishop's Pointed Speech on 'Disruptive' U.S.," *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 19, 2018.

white paper while remaining a steadfast U.S. ally in all instances. Any Australian initiative to conduct joint freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea with the U.S. Navy, for example, would run afoul of China, which is by far Australia's largest trading partner.¹² Australian policymakers must now ask themselves if U.S. support would be forthcoming if China were in some manner to punish their country for siding with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) territorial claimants in a future South China Sea crisis.

As Simon has sagely observed, most of the Trump administration's interactions with Southeast Asia during his first year in office were dominated by efforts to persuade members to support UN sanctions against nuclear-bound North Korea.¹³ It would be understandable for ASEAN states to conclude that, unlike his predecessor, Trump has little affinity for understanding or responding directly to Southeast Asia's subregional aspirations and problems nor any intent to support ASEAN centrality as a legitimate pillar for order-building in the region. ASEAN states have been skeptical of Trump's promise made at the U.S.-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in November 2017, following the United States' withdrawal from the TPP, that Washington would "remain committed to ASEAN's central role as a regional forum."¹⁴ They are well aware that Trump relies on protectionist-oriented advisors such as Peter Navarro. Only in the domain of security relations (including military exercises, assistance, and arms sales) does Southeast Asia continue to interact with the United States on a level that matches or, in some cases, even exceeds that of previous U.S. administrations. Overall, as Simon has concluded, "Southeast Asian governments view Trump's Washington with anxiety and suspicion."¹⁵

Conclusion

Writing soon after President Trump assumed office, this author speculated that his foreign policy style would reflect his background in

¹² Australian Government, "Chapter 3: A Stable and More Prosperous Indo-Pacific," in *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (Canberra, 2017), 47 ~ <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/foreign-policy-white-paper/chapter-three-stable-and-prosperous-indo-pacific/safeguarding-maritime>.

¹³ Simon, "Abandoning Leadership."

¹⁴ Donald J. Trump, "Remarks by President Trump at the 5th US-ASEAN Summit," U.S. Mission to ASEAN, November 14, 2017 ~ <https://asean.usmission.gov/remarks-president-trump-5th-u-s-asean-summit/>.

¹⁵ Simon, "Abandoning Leadership."

the business world—“hard but fluid bargaining to derive optimal results for interest-based objectives.” Whether such an approach has been successfully implemented, however, remains questionable at a time when the imperative of responding quickly and coherently to an Asia that is reshaping along both multipolar and multilateral lines at “breakneck speed” is greater than ever.¹⁶

With the benefit of hindsight, the president has assumed high-risk strategies during his first eighteen months in office but has to date been largely unsuccessful in realizing concrete gains as a result. His initial choice to withdraw the United States from the TPP has not resulted in the series of bilateral trade agreements that he deems to be more favorable. His subsequent decision to launch a trade war against many of the United States’ European allies and Northeast Asia’s industrial powers (including China as well as U.S. security allies Japan and South Korea) threatens to tear apart the global economy in ways that would dwarf the previous decade’s global financial crisis. Trump’s snap decision to meet with Kim Jong-un has thus far yielded little in the way of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, despite his hyperbolic pronouncement following that summit that Americans could “sleep well tonight!”¹⁷ Both the Philippines and Thailand—U.S. security treaty allies—continue to explore forging closer political-economic and defense relations with U.S. great-power rivals: Thailand with China, and the Philippines with both China and Russia. The so-called Quadrilateral Security Dialogue binding Australia, India, Japan, and the United States closer together as strategic collaborators has yet to materialize as a substantive defense arrangement, and the initiative would be strongly opposed by China and at least some key ASEAN states if it did so. In many ways, the aggressive businessman from Queens who unexpectedly ascended to the United States’ highest office has been put largely on the defensive relative to more adept great-power geopoliticians.

At this juncture, projecting what the future holds is difficult. It is not encouraging that experienced “Asia hands” in the U.S. State Department and U.S. policy community at large have either resigned or been marginalized by the Trump administration’s central policymakers and a manifestly conservative U.S. Congress. In any assessment of who should provide policy

¹⁶ William Tow, “Trump and Strategic Change in Asia,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Strategist, January 20, 2017 [~ https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/trump-strategic-change-asia](https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/trump-strategic-change-asia).

¹⁷ “Trump Claims N. Korea No Longer Nuclear Threat, Tells Americans to ‘Sleep Well,’” CBS News, June 13, 2018 [~ https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-claims-end-to-nuclear-threat-from-n-korea-tells-u-s-to-sleep-well](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-claims-end-to-nuclear-threat-from-n-korea-tells-u-s-to-sleep-well).

advice to an administration that must clearly upgrade its performance in Asia, Simon would be especially prominent. His record of seeking truth from the facts on the ground as they have emerged in Asia, and offering sound judgments about what the facts mean and how to respond to them, is unsurpassed. His work and insights serve as a model for all of us who remain concerned about U.S. relations with Asia and beyond. ◆

China and Southeast Asia: Strategic Interdependence in the Making?

Kai He

If we had to choose one word to describe the relationship between China and the Southeast Asian states, it would be “asymmetric.” China’s population is 2.2 times the combined population of the ten countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).¹ Its GDP is 4.3 times these countries’ combined GDP,² while its 2017 military expenditure was almost 6 times the amount they spent collectively.³ Some scholars like to use the metaphor of Gulliver and the Lilliputians to compare China and the ASEAN states in world politics.⁴ The hope is that the Lilliputians can somehow tie up Gulliver if they work together.

In the post–Cold War era, the ASEAN states successfully constrained China’s behavior through multilateral institutions, especially the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). After the 2008 global financial crisis, China’s assertive diplomacy in the South China Sea indeed caused some worries and suspicions in the region. However, the overall relationship between China and the ASEAN states has not fundamentally changed. Since 2013, China has continued its “charm offensive” to woo the ASEAN states with the proposal of the Maritime Silk Road—a massive infrastructure investment project that is part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). On the one hand, Chinese investments, especially in the infrastructure sector, are largely welcomed in Southeast Asia despite some ups and downs, such as Malaysia’s

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¹ World Bank, World Development Indicators Databank ~ <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/source/world-development-indicators>. There are ten countries in ASEAN. Although East Timor, the newest state in Southeast Asia, is still in the process of applying for membership, in this essay I use the ASEAN states and Southeast Asia interchangeably.

² Ibid.

³ For military expenditure data, see the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), SIPRI Military Expenditure Database ~ <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

⁴ Hoo Tiang Boon and Charles Ardy, “China and Lilliputians: Small States in a Big Power’s Evolving Foreign Policy,” *Asian Security* 13, no. 2 (2017): 116–31.

cancelation of two BRI-funded projects. The ASEAN states have, on the other hand, kept a nuanced and balanced attitude toward U.S. competition with China.

I argue that a relationship of strategic interdependence has taken shape between China and the ASEAN states. Each side views the other as an indispensable actor in pursuing its strategic interests. Although the power asymmetry between China and the ASEAN states makes the latter more vulnerable than the former, the U.S. factor increases the sensitivity of China's strategic dependence on ASEAN. Multilateral institutions have played a vital role in shaping Chinese-ASEAN relations. The more institutionalized relationship will empower both parties to reduce vulnerability and sensitivity levels in their nascent strategic interdependence in the future.

Economies, Institutions, and Norms

The asymmetric relationship between China and the ASEAN states poses some interesting puzzles to international relations theory. According to the logic of either balance-of-power or balance-of-threat theories, the ASEAN states, as the weaker party, should collectively seek to balance against a stronger China, especially when facing its assertive diplomacy in the South China Sea.⁵ No ASEAN state has militarily challenged China, though some have chosen to strengthen their security cooperation with the United States. China's policy toward its neighbors in Southeast Asia mainly features economically driven attractions rather than security-oriented coercion. Although China's assertiveness in the South China Sea became a focal point in the early 2010s, some scholars suggest that it might be "triggered by proactive efforts by other claimants to legalize their claims through declaration and actions relating to the UNCLOS."⁶ In other words, China's assertiveness in the South China Sea is an anomaly in its diplomacy toward Southeast Asia. It seems unusual for China to restrain its behavior

⁵ For a discussion of balance-of-power and balance-of-threat theories in the international relations discipline, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); and Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). For a discussion of China's assertive behavior in the South China Sea, see Michael D. Swaine and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Assertive Behavior—Part Two: The Maritime Periphery," Hoover Institution, China Leadership Monitor, no. 35, September 2011. On U.S.-China competition in the South China Sea, see Huiyun Feng and Kai He, eds., *U.S.-China Competition and the South China Sea Disputes* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁶ Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?" *International Security* 37, no. 4 (2013): 46.

toward the ASEAN states in a Thucydidean world where “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”⁷

Economic liberals argue that the deepening economic interdependence between China and Southeast Asia contributes to their good relationship.⁸ Institutional liberals suggest that multilateral institutions, such as the ARF and the East Asia Summit (EAS), facilitate cooperation between China and the ASEAN states.⁹ Constructivists argue that China has been enmeshed and socialized by ASEAN norms, especially the principle of nonaggression.¹⁰

Although these existing arguments reveal some aspects of the truth, there are a few analytical problems. First, many studies have proved that the causal linkage between economic interdependence and peace is unconvincing at best and misleading at worst.¹¹ A relatively high level of economic interdependence among European states in terms of trade and investment did not prevent the outbreak of World War I. In a similar vein, it would be dangerous to overstate the economic linkage between China and the ASEAN states in maintaining regional peace. Second, multilateral institutions can indeed reduce transaction costs and identify focal points for cooperation. However, the ASEAN-driven institutions seem to be only “making process, not progress,” because they are ineffective in constraining state behavior.¹² Third, although constructivists are right to argue that China has been socialized by some multilateral norms, the power of norms and culture seems weak when states encounter material competition, as seen in the South China Sea.¹³

Strategic Interdependence in the Making

I propose a new “strategic interdependence” argument to shed some light on the unusually good relationship between China and the ASEAN states. I suggest that the two sides need one another in the pursuit of

⁷ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (London: J.M. Dent, 1910).

⁸ John Wong and Sarah Chan, “China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement: Shaping Future Economic Relations,” *Asian Survey* 43, no. 3 (2003): 507–26.

⁹ Sheldon W. Simon, “Realism and Neoliberalism: International Relations Theory and Southeast Asian Security,” *Pacific Review* 8, no. 1 (1995): 5–24.

¹⁰ See Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹¹ Dale C. Copeland, “Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations,” *International Security* 20, no. 4 (1996): 5–41.

¹² David Martin Jones and Michael L.R. Smith. “Making Process, Not Progress: ASEAN and the Evolving East Asian Regional Order,” *International Security* 32, no. 1 (2007): 148–84.

¹³ Ralf Emmers, “The Changing Power Distribution in the South China Sea: Implications for Conflict Management and Avoidance,” *Political Science* 62, no. 2 (2010): 118–31.

their respective strategic interests. On the one hand, China's national rejuvenation requires a peaceful external environment, and ASEAN is the key to achieving this goal. On the other hand, the ASEAN states need China's help in stimulating economic growth and maintaining national autonomy in world politics.

China's strategic goal is simple: national rejuvenation. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China aims to become a leading global power by 2050.¹⁴ To achieve this ambition, it needs to cultivate a peaceful environment. Yan Xuetong, a prominent Chinese scholar, proposes that China should put its diplomatic focus on its periphery.¹⁵ Keeping healthy relationships with the ASEAN states is key to maintaining a peaceful external environment that is conducive to China's economic development in the short term and to national rejuvenation in the long run. The South China Sea disputes between China and four ASEAN states are regional security flashpoints. The U.S. freedom of navigation operations challenging China's extensive maritime claims further fuel the tensions in the South China Sea. A potential military conflict would definitely disturb China's economic development. Whether China can rise peacefully largely depends on how it treats neighboring states, especially in Southeast Asia.¹⁶

Will China eventually change its charm offensive toward ASEAN? The answer to this question is uncertain. Given that all leaders need followers, the support of the ASEAN states is still indispensable for China to establish its leadership in the region as well as in the world. Therefore, Xi's dream of national rejuvenation will become sweeter if the ASEAN states are on its side. On the other hand, it will turn into a nightmare if they cause trouble, especially with the external involvement of the United States and other regional actors.

The strategic interests of ASEAN states are also straightforward: economic development and national autonomy. China can facilitate the fulfillment of these two strategic goals. First, it is the largest trading partner of the ASEAN states. China's huge market and massive investments, especially in

¹⁴ Li Laifang and Zhang Zhengfu, "How the Chinese Path Can Lead to National Rejuvenation," *China Daily*, October 11, 2017 ~ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-10/11/content_33115291.htm; and Ting Shi, "Xi Plans to Turn China into a Leading Global Power by 2050," *Bloomberg*, October 18, 2017 ~ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-17/xi-to-put-his-stamp-on-chinese-history-at-congress-party-opening>.

¹⁵ Yan Xuetong, "Zhengti zhoubian bi Meiguo zhongyao" [Holistic Periphery Is More Important Than the United States], *Huanqiu Shibao*, January 13, 2015 ~ <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/1152/2015-01/5392162.html>.

¹⁶ Lim Kheng Swee, Ju Hailong, and Li Mingjiang, "China's Revisionist Aspirations in Southeast Asia and the Curse of the South China Sea Disputes," *China: An International Journal* 15, no. 1 (2017): 187–213.

the infrastructure sector through BRI, are vital for these states to modernize their economies and accelerate growth. More importantly, in sharp contrast with the West, Chinese investments and aid come without political strings attached. Second, China insists on the principle of noninterference in other countries' internal affairs, which is also cherished by the ASEAN states.¹⁷ As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has always stood firmly with them on human rights issues. Therefore, in the eyes of these states, China is a critical supporter in their pursuit of the strategic goals of development and political autonomy in the region.

Vulnerability and Sensitivity Problems

There are two main characteristics of any interdependent relationship: vulnerability and sensitivity. Vulnerability is defined as one party's liability to suffer costs and damages imposed by the other in their relationship. Sensitivity involves the degree of responsiveness that one party faces when dealing with outside influences.¹⁸

Although China and ASEAN need each other to support their strategic goals, they have different vulnerabilities and sensitivities. Vulnerability is mainly dependent on material power, because power is the major means for one party to impose costs on and cause damage to others in international politics. As mentioned before, the huge power disparity between China and the ASEAN states determines that the latter are more vulnerable than the former. For example, China successfully blocked the ASEAN states from issuing a joint statement at the 2012 ASEAN summit by applying diplomatic pressure on Cambodia—the host country.

In terms of sensitivity, the story becomes more complicated because of the involvement of outside actors, especially the United States, in the region. Due to their power disparity, the ASEAN states should be more sensitive than China in coping with external influences. However, they have become pivotal actors in shaping the future power balance between China and the United States, with each country attempting to attract and pull the ASEAN states to its side. This strategic desirability increases their political leverage and makes China the more sensitive party in its relations with ASEAN.

¹⁷ Alice D. Ba, "China and ASEAN: Renavigating Relations for a 21st-Century Asia," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 4 (2003): 622–47.

¹⁸ These definitions are derived from Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Power and Interdependence*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989), 12–15.

Interestingly, both the ASEAN states and China have relied on multilateralism to cope with vulnerability and sensitivity problems. Because the ASEAN states are strategically more vulnerable than China, it is rational for China to use a divide-and-rule strategy to deal with them. Due to the huge power gap, it is quite difficult for any ASEAN state to challenge China individually. ASEAN-oriented multilateral institutions, such as the ARF and the EAS, have provided a useful platform for ASEAN states to pool their limited power and collectively stand up to China or other outside parties. For example, ASEAN issued a joint statement after its 2015 summit in Malaysia to voice concerns about land-reclamation activities in the South China Sea.¹⁹ At the 2016 special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Kunming, the ASEAN states were unitedly absent from the planned joint press conference as a silent protest against China's position on the South China Sea.²⁰ It is clear that collectively the voice of the ASEAN states is growing louder and becoming more influential in the region.


For China, multilateralism is also useful to overcome its strategic sensitivity, especially when facing pressure from the United States. China has supported ASEAN's centrality in regional multilateral security and economic architectures since the end of the Cold War. By supporting ASEAN's leading role in multilateralism, China can prevent other major powers, such as Japan and the United States, from hijacking the agendas of regional multilateral institutions. This, in turn, prevents more pressure from being imposed on China. When the United States challenges China, these ASEAN-oriented multilateral institutions become an institutional balancing tool to countervail against outside pressures.²¹ For example, when facing U.S. pressure from the Trans-Pacific Partnership during the Obama administration, China successfully aligned with the ASEAN states to promote the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership as a counterbalance. One unintended consequence of this policy, however, is to bind China's interests with those of the ASEAN states.

¹⁹ "Our People, Our Community, Our Vision" (chairman's statement of the 26th ASEAN summit, Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi, April 27, 2015) ~ http://www.miti.gov.my/miti/resources/Chairman_Statement_26th_ASEAN_Summit.pdf?mid=413.

²⁰ Bhubhindar Singh, Shawn Ho, and Tseng Zhizhao Henrick, "ASEAN Unity in the Face of China's Unilateral 'Consensus,'" S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), RSIS Commentary, no. 151, June 20, 2016.

²¹ Kai He, "Institutional Balancing and International Relations Theory: Economic Interdependence and Balance of Power Strategies in Southeast Asia," *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 3 (2008): 489–518; and Kai He, *Institutional Balancing in the Asia-Pacific: Economic Interdependence and China's Rise* (London: Routledge, 2009).

Conclusion

As Sheldon Simon suggested ten years ago, it will be a “long and bumpy road” for ASEAN to achieve a truly multilateral community.²² ASEAN alone will not be able to ensure peace and stability in Southeast Asia. The deepening strategic interdependence between China and regional states will play an important role in shaping the potential transformation of the order in the Asia-Pacific. Coping with its relationship to the ASEAN states, especially in the South China Sea disputes, will be a litmus test of China’s peaceful rise strategy. Learning how to socialize China and other great powers, especially the United States, into ASEAN-focused multilateral institutions will be key for ASEAN to maintain its leadership role in the future regional order. Institutionalized strategic interdependence between regional states and China might lead to a more peaceful transition than has been predicted. 

²² Sheldon Simon, “ASEAN and Multilateralism: The Long, Bumpy Road to Community,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 30, no. 2 (2008): 264–92.

No More Passing: Japan's Foreign Policy in Interesting Times

Kevin Cooney

In my interviews with Japanese foreign policy decision-makers in the late 1990s and again in the mid-2000s, I found an almost single-minded focus on the purpose of Japanese foreign policy. Officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) were particularly noteworthy in this regard. Of the officials interviewed, who ranged from some of the most senior to fairly junior, they almost unanimously answered that the goals of Japanese foreign policy were “the safety and prosperity of the nation.” When probed for specifics, these officials had difficulty giving any and tended to repeat the same mantra, “the safety and prosperity of the nation.” This national goal seemed to be drilled into career MOFA bureaucrats as the *raison d'être* of their jobs.

For the Japanese foreign policy community, this goal has kept Japan on track in a changing world and has permitted it to focus on purpose-driven outcomes. When rapid changes occur, tangible policy goals can be changed quickly because they no longer serve the nation. For example, the safety and prosperity of the nation at one time may have been served by the pursuit of a permanent UN Security Council seat—a tangible goal that Japan has long had but is no longer pursuing as actively as it once did because this goal no longer seems as necessary. There are other paths to the safety and prosperity of the nation, given current global circumstances, like through a closer relationship with U.S. leadership. The overall result is that Japanese foreign policy is becoming more adept at adapting to sudden changes in the global foreign and security policy environment.

This essay examines Japan's ability to adapt quickly to radical changes in global leadership and traditional foreign policy norms that have left other nations adrift and confused. It concludes that a purpose-driven foreign policy is more likely to aid and guide the nation in a strange and interesting policy environment than one driven by tangible goals.

Adapting to Change

In the late 1980s, Japan was on top of the world. Its economy was second globally, only behind that of the United States, and was rising. Scholars such

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as Paul Kennedy predicted that Japan would overtake the United States as the next global hegemon.¹ Then came the sudden and unexpected end to the Cold War in 1989, followed by the bursting of Japan's economic bubble in 1991 and over two decades of recession, deflation, and economic stagnation. In the late 1990s, Japanese foreign policy experts argued that Japan was experiencing a phenomenon that they called "Japan passing," in which the country was being passed over as no longer relevant.² However, the 2000s brought a new special relationship between the United States and Japan, thanks to the personal connection between President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. This highly personal approach to foreign policy has continued under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Donald Trump.

Key to Japan's success has been the ability to recognize change and quickly adapt to it, plus the luck of circumstances. In 2001, Koizumi came to power in Japan a few months after Bush entered office. Whereas Bush's predecessor, Bill Clinton, saw eight Japanese prime ministers during his eight years in office, Koizumi served almost concurrently with Bush. The relationship between these two heads of state was aided by the fact that when the September 11 attacks occurred, the Japanese national security team was meeting in a late-night session to deal with a typhoon that was about to hit Japan. Koizumi thus was able to be the first world leader to pick up the phone and offer the United States sympathy and assistance. The Koizumi-Bush relationship, cemented by this phone call, transformed the bilateral relationship overnight. As one MOFA official told me in the summer of 2005 when asked about the status of the relationship, "It is the best ever!"³

Fast-forward to November 9, 2016, when Japan woke up to the surprise victory of Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton in the U.S. presidential election. For Japan, a Clinton victory would have meant a stable continuation of U.S. foreign policy along the lines of the Obama administration. However, a nationalist and protectionist Trump presidency meant that radical change was in the wind. Japan's reaction to Trump's victory demonstrated its foreign policy nimbleness. While other world leaders privately and publicly wailed and gnashed their teeth at the prospect of a Trump administration,

¹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

² For more on the concept of "Japan passing," see Kevin Cooney, *Japan's Foreign Policy Since 1945* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), chap. 6.

³ Author's interview with a senior MOFA official, Tokyo, summer 2005.

Japan reacted to the wild “Trump card” it had been dealt. Prime Minister Abe, in his congratulatory call to President-elect Trump, scheduled a meeting at Trump Tower in New York City one week after the election, thus becoming the first world leader to meet personally with the president-elect. This was followed by official visits to the White House and Mar-a-Lago in February 2017. The relationship was further cemented when North Korea tested missiles during the Trump-Abe summit. In a joint press conference, Abe was able to eloquently describe the security threat to the region and earned Trump’s statement of full support for Japan.⁴

The personal outreach by Abe to Trump solidified a working relationship that continues to this day. The dividends of this approach are paying off for Japan principally in the area of Trump’s rhetoric. Candidate Trump was very critical of Japan, echoing much of the 1980s protectionist rhetoric in the United States. By establishing a working relationship, the two leaders have been able to advance the foreign policy goals of their respective nations and maintain mutual respect, with few echoes of the adversarial rhetoric that was heard during the 2016 campaign. One key element of this special relationship has been Abe’s ability to “educate” Trump on East Asian security issues from a Japanese perspective. Abe sees his role in this relationship as that of an adviser, educator, and sounding board for Trump on his Asia policies.

This adaptation to the realities of the Trump administration reflects loosely on role theory but more specifically on foreign policy decision-making. Japan is asking itself what its role in East Asia is during the Trump administration. At this time, the Abe administration sees itself as a stabilizing force for the status quo, which few countries in the region desire outside of the United States, Japan, and South Korea.

Japan’s Foreign Policy Priorities

East Asia is a tinderbox of potential conflict. At the center of this conflict is China, its hegemonic aspirations, and its claims to various islands in the South and East China Seas that are also claimed by multiple other nations in the region. The principal territories under dispute include the Spratly Islands, the Paracel Islands, Scarborough Shoal, Pratas Island, Macclesfield Bank, and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Escalating these tensions has been

⁴ “Joint Statement from President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,” White House, February 10, 2017 ~ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-prime-minister-shinzo-abe>.

China's provocative building of artificial islands on three disputed reefs in the South China Sea. These newly created islands include runways that have the capacity to handle large military aircraft. In February 2016, China began stationing surface-to-air missiles on these islands.

Japan's territorial dispute with China is over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The question is how Japan can deal with its belligerent neighbor in a way that minimizes conflict while protecting Japanese interests. By contrast, the Philippines' disputes with China involve many islands and reefs over thousands of square miles of ocean in which China can assert control virtually at will, given its greater military and naval power. The Philippines is a small power dealing with a much larger one, while Japan is a medium power dealing with a growing great power.

Japan belongs to an East Asian security complex with eight principal members: China, Taiwan, Japan, North and South Korea, Russia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the United States as the global hegemonic power with substantial interests in the region—including forward-deployed troops in South Korea and Japan.⁵ The three most important members of this complex are Japan, China, and the United States. While the U.S.-Japan relationship, as discussed above, has been strengthening as a result of the Trump-Abe rapprochement, the Sino-U.S. relationship has been in decline for many years, and this trend has been accelerating under Trump. It is important to note that Sino-Japanese relations are at their worst since the end of World War II. China's quasi-official media campaign over the past few years has demonized Japan, with the unintended consequence of strengthening nationalism in Japan under Abe. Yet if the region is to be peaceful, then these two major powers must work out their differences. The problem is thus how do Japan and its principal ally, the United States, deal with the challenge of China to their foreign and security policies?

Security and foreign policy go hand in hand. To paraphrase Carl von Clausewitz, diplomacy is war by other means. In essence, Clausewitz meant that when the shooting stops, the conflict does not end; it simply moves to the negotiating table. The inverse is also true: when diplomacy fails, the shooting starts. Hans J. Morgenthau argued in *Politics Among Nations* that the quality of a nation's diplomacy is an element of its national power and

⁵ Taiwan is included as a quasi-independent state and ASEAN as a region in which all members of the complex have substantial political and economic interests.

thus is linked to its security.⁶ For Japan, like any other nation, foreign policy revolves around and emanates from its security needs. Both the United States and Japan share a security predicament in East Asia—China. For Japan, there are several regional security outcomes that it seeks.

The first is to keep the North Korean nuclear threat in check. In this case, Japan and the United States under Trump largely see eye to eye. Japan is exceptionally vulnerable to North Korean missiles, and given the history between Korea and Japan in the last century, along with the fact that Japan hosts multiple U.S. military bases, Japan is a legitimate target in the view of the North Korean leadership.

The second major foreign policy goal is to keep China's ambitions in check in East Asia. This includes preserving Japan's territorial claims to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. One of Prime Minister Abe's early successes in this regard was to gain U.S. backing for the inclusion of "Japanese territory" to be covered by the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, which the United States has so far been unwilling to do for the Philippines in its dispute with China over joint claims in the South China Sea. With Trump in the United States and Duterte in the Philippines shaking up policy in the South China Sea, Abe is seen as the veteran stabilizing political influence. The newfound Philippines-Japan strategic partnership in the context of the partnership that each nation shares with the United States raises questions as to what would happen in a South China Sea conflict. For Japan, the most serious issue in maintaining the realist status quo is Beijing's dissatisfaction and desire to change it in China's favor. To protect its own interests, Japan will require a clear understanding of the interests on all sides and must perform a delicate balancing act.

A third goal is Pacific economic integration. Japan would have preferred that the United States remain part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). With the Trump administration's withdrawal of the United States from the agreement, Japan, along with Australia, has taken on the leading role in organizing the remaining members around the goals of the TPP. With its leadership of the drive to sign the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which replaced the TPP, Tokyo continues to focus on its priority foreign policy outcomes as best it can.⁷ These include free trade with more open markets among all the Pacific


⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 6th ed., revised by Kenneth W. Thompson (New York: Knopf, 1985), 158–62.

⁷ For more on the U.S. abandonment of the TPP and the creation of the CPTPP, see Sheldon Simon, "Abandoning Leadership," *Comparative Connections* 19, no. 3 (2017): 41–52.

nations with the end goal of achieving greater integration to the point where no one nation has the power or leverage to dictate to another. The trouble for Japan is that this is directly counter to Trump's America-first policy. The result for the Trump-Abe rapprochement may end up being, at best, that they will agree to disagree.

Asia Policy Outcomes in the Era of Trump

Japan, like Britain after its global empire ended, has learned to both lead and follow. It adapts its policies to best ensure the safety and prosperity of the nation. It has learned to play the cards that it has been dealt rather than to demand change. The Koizumi-Bush "best relationship possible" has evolved into a partnership of sometimes leading—such as on the CPTPP—and sometimes following, such as with Trump's engagement with North Korea. Japan does not listen to media hype but rather to the needs of the nation.

Abe was among the first world leaders to recognize the power of a personal relationship with Trump. Japan and Asia need the United States more than ever. China is acting the part of aggressor in a similar manner to Germany ahead of World War II, pursuing *lebensraum* (living space) at the expense of other nations and the status quo. Its actions require balancing. In Trump, Japan sees a U.S. leader who will stand up to China. The political philosopher Machiavelli said to "keep your friends close and your enemies closer." Trump is neither enemy nor friend, but he is the card that has been dealt the world, and thus Japan, by the American people. For Japan, he must be worked with for the safety and prosperity of the nation. 

Assessing Indonesia's Foreign Policy under Jokowi

Chris Lundry

As Indonesia prepares for its 2019 presidential election, the race appears to be between the frontrunners of the 2014 election, Joko Widodo (also known as “Jokowi”) and Prabowo Subianto. Jokowi’s electoral victory in 2014 was notable given his humble background, quick rise, and populist undertones, although he moved quickly to establish his own priorities with regard to Indonesia’s international relations and role in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

After taking office, Jokowi declared the end of the “thousand friends, zero enemies” foreign policy approach of his predecessor Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, which emphasized greater participation in international forums. Instead, he argued for a transactional approach that would more clearly benefit Indonesia. Jokowi made maritime security a top priority, including bolstering naval capabilities and implementing tough policies aimed at curtailing illegal fishing, piracy, smuggling, and drug trafficking. He increased executions in his first year as president, reflecting a tough approach to drugs in the archipelago—which was soon to be eclipsed by that of Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte.¹ Indonesia also experienced a resurgence of terrorist attacks in 2018, and new tactics and international connections have raised questions for relations with its neighbors, specifically the Philippines and Australia.

Yet despite initial signs that Jokowi may be steering away from the foreign policy path forged by his predecessor, this essay argues that he has for the most part stayed the course. Concerns that he may take a more isolationist approach are mostly unfounded, and his actions show a willingness to back away from early rhetoric—and actions—that may have signaled a more independent course for Indonesia.

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¹ Jokowi has expressed admiration for Duterte’s policies, going so far as to say that drug dealers who resist should be shot without mercy. The first six months of 2017 saw a dramatic rise in police shootings of suspected drug dealers in Indonesia. Human Rights Watch, “Indonesia: Events of 2017,” in *World Report 2018* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2018) ≈ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/indonesia>.

Emphasis on Maritime Security

Under Jokowi, Indonesia has taken an aggressive stance toward illegal fishing in its territorial waters. He couched his new policies of capturing and sometimes destroying foreign fishing vessels illegally operating in Indonesian waters in terms of sovereignty, a right that all Indonesian presidents have fiercely promoted in some form or another. After claiming that up to five thousand vessels operate illegally in Indonesian waters, Jokowi set his policy in place in the hopes of deterring future poachers. The results so far have been mixed. Although production in fisheries is up, it has prompted bellicose actions by China, which views most of the South China Sea as its own waters.

The policy provoked consternation among other ASEAN states, as most of the fishing ships sunk by Indonesia are from fellow members such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia. Members also worry about an increasingly assertive Indonesia.² However, one could also argue that greater attention to naval capabilities is long overdue for the archipelagic nation of over seventeen thousand islands. Indonesia's armed forces were predominantly land-based during the Suharto era and in the years directly following it, reflecting unease with both perceived and real internal challenges to Indonesian sovereignty. U.S. secretary of defense James Mattis has expressed U.S. support for Indonesia's emphasis on maritime security.³ The two countries have conducted joint exercises in the Strait of Malacca as well as around the Natuna Islands, an area that extends Indonesia's exclusive economic zone into China's nine-dash line claim to the South China Sea. Jokowi wants to nearly double defense expenditures from 0.8% to 1.5% of GDP over five years, and the defense department received the highest share of the 2018 budget (107.7 trillion rupiah).⁴ In June 2016, Jokowi announced a plan to build an airstrip in the Natuna Islands and to move ships to the area to bolster Indonesia's claim to the islands and counter any presence from China.⁵

² Prashanth Parameswaran, "The Trouble with Indonesia's Foreign Policy Priorities under Jokowi," *Diplomat*, January 9, 2015 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2015/01/the-trouble-with-indonesias-foreign-policy-priorities-under-jokowi>.

³ Francis Chan, "U.S. to Work with Indonesia on Maritime Security, Counter-terrorism," *Straits Times*, January 23, 2018 ~ <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/us-to-work-with-indonesia-on-maritime-security-counter-terrorism>.

⁴ Sheldon Simon, "Diplomatic Gambits," *Comparative Connections* 16, no. 3 (2015) ~ <http://cc.csis.org/2015/01/diplomatic-gambits>; and "Defense Ministry Gets Top Allocation in 2018 State Budget," *Jakarta Post*, October 26, 2017 ~ <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/10/26/defense-ministry-gets-top-allocation-in-2018-state-budget.html>.

⁵ Sheldon Simon, "Augmented Presence," *Comparative Connections* 18, no. 2 (2016) ~ <http://cc.csis.org/2016/09/augmented-presence>.

Yet Indonesia is still far from being able to assert control over its maritime boundaries. The new policy is for now mainly symbolic, and questions remain as to Indonesia's commitment to a policy that rankles its neighbors. Furthermore, perhaps reflecting a desire to avoid inflaming China's ire, especially given its past aggressive reactions to Indonesia's seizure of its fishing vessels, Indonesia has ceased pursuing Chinese ships.⁶

Executions Spur International Condemnation

After taking office, one of Jokowi's policy shifts was to increase the use of capital punishment for those accused of smuggling drugs, even though this had implications for Indonesia's relations with its neighbors and had been put on hold by Yudhoyono.⁷ In his first year as president, Jokowi executed fourteen people, the most in any year in Indonesian history, and all for drug trafficking. The executions were a way for Jokowi to bolster his credibility as being tough on crime since he does not have a military background like his predecessor.⁸

Yet although the executions may have bolstered his credentials in Indonesia, where around 85% of the population favors the death penalty, they harmed Indonesia's international relations because most of those executed were foreigners. In 2015, Brazil, the Netherlands, and Australia—all countries that have abolished the death penalty—protested the executions of their citizens by firing squad.⁹ The following year, the number of executions for drug smuggling dropped to four: three Nigerians (one a dual Senegalese citizen) and an Indonesian. In 2017, no executions were carried out.

Did international—or domestic—pressure force a reckoning? Jokowi has stated that he would consider a moratorium on the death penalty, but that one seemed unlikely given popular support for capital punishment.¹⁰ Australian protests over the conviction of Schapelle Corby in 2005 are

⁶ In March 2016, a Chinese coast guard ship rammed a Chinese fishing boat that had been captured by Indonesian authorities to force its release. See Joe Cochrane, "Chinese Coast Guard Rams Fishing Boat to Free It from Indonesian Authorities," *New York Times*, March 21, 2016 ~ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/22/world/asia/indonesia-south-china-sea-fishing-boat.html>.

⁷ Yudhoyono declared a moratorium on executions for four years but executed six people in the last year of his presidency.

⁸ John McBeth, "Indonesia, Politics and the Death Penalty," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Strategist, April 30, 2015 ~ <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/indonesia-politics-and-the-death-penalty>.

⁹ Brazil technically has the death penalty on its books but only in the time of war. It has not executed a criminal since 1876.

¹⁰ "Jokowi Would 'Suspend Death Penalty If Indonesia Wants It,'" *Today* (Jakarta), March 28, 2017 ~ <https://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/jokowi-would-suspend-death-penalty-if-indonesia-wants-it>.

thought to have influenced Indonesian judges to give her a harsher sentence in retaliation for what they perceived as meddling in their judicial affairs. But the international reaction in 2015 likely caused some handwringing. Those executed in 2016 were all from countries that have the death penalty.

Regardless of whether a moratorium will be implemented, Indonesia is still sentencing people to death, including terrorist Aman Abdurrahman, who was convicted in June 2018. Meanwhile, Indonesia continues to advocate for its own citizens who face the death penalty elsewhere, many of whom are domestic servants in the Middle East. This may play a role in efforts to abolish or reduce the use of capital punishment in Indonesia.¹¹

The Changing Face of Terrorism

In June 2018, terrorism reared its ugly head again in Indonesia with multiple attacks in Surabaya. Three groups of people from the same family, including the father, mother, and children, targeted three different churches with suicide bombs. As Sidney Jones, director of the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict in Jakarta wrote in the *New York Times*, the Surabaya attacks show an evolution in tactics for domestic terrorists, including the use of women and children as attackers, which is something not seen before in Indonesia. Jones also noted that of those who support the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and are willing to commit acts of terrorism, not all are members of the largest terrorist network in Indonesia, Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD). Some ISIS support groups in Indonesia are more loosely organized, making them harder to track and eliminate.¹² One regional terrorist organization, Jemaah Islamiyah, had stopped promoting attacks in the aftermath of the Bali bombing in 2002, although a splinter group led by Noordin Top remained active until his death in 2009. JAD, which is affiliated with ISIS, has no such qualms about using violence. The group was outlawed by a Jakarta court, and its leader Aman Abdurrahman, as noted above, was sentenced to death for his role in coordinating prior terrorist attacks.

Terrorism is, however, one aspect of Indonesia's foreign relations that continues to spur cooperation with other members of ASEAN as well as other states in the broader region. Following the 2017 siege of Marawi in

¹¹ David McCrae, "Indonesian Capital Punishment in Comparative Perspective," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 173, no. 1 (2017): 1–22.

¹² Sidney Jones, "How ISIS Has Changed Terrorism in Indonesia," *New York Times*, May 22, 2018 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/opinion/isis-terrorism-indonesia-women.html>>.

the Philippines—led by Philippines-based Abu Sayyaf and Maute jihadist groups but supported by ISIS militants, illustrating the transboundary nature of the problem—Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines increased patrols in their border areas, and Indonesia bolstered its land troops in the islands near the border. In January 2018, the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting produced a joint statement pledging enhanced cooperation on antiterrorism efforts. In March 2018, ASEAN signed a memorandum of understanding with Australia to enhance their mutual efforts based on the Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism from 2016. Indonesian defense minister Ryamizard Ryacudu emphasized the importance of joint counterterrorism efforts at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018. Indonesia also continues to pursue bilateral cooperation on counterterrorism with Australia, reflecting Jokowi’s preference for bilateralism in an attempt to increase benefits for Indonesia.¹³

ASEAN

Other ASEAN states were initially wary of Jokowi’s pronouncements and actions asserting Indonesian sovereignty and his criticism of Yudhoyono’s policies, which he deemed elitist and internationalist. These partners were afraid that Indonesia would turn inward to fulfill Jokowi’s promises to put the Indonesian people first, in combination with the potential for Jakarta to take a more muscular approach to maritime security. Have these fears been borne out?

The simple answer is no. Despite Jokowi’s emphasis on bilateralism and his administration’s early statements on ASEAN, Indonesia appears to continue to put its faith in the organization, albeit with greater acknowledgment of some of its perceived shortcomings.

For example, in acknowledging internal disputes between ASEAN claimants in the South China Sea, Jokowi has argued for these to be settled internally so that the organization can present a united front to China. He has also expressed a desire for ASEAN to play a role in the ongoing Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, although given its inability to intercede in the internal affairs of member states, this would have to be at the invitation of Myanmar, which is not likely. Jokowi has also pledged to neighboring


¹³ Avery Poole, “Is Jokowi Turning His Back on ASEAN?” *Diplomat*, September 7, 2015 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2015/09/is-jokowi-turning-his-back-on-asean>. Jokowi has also promoted the idea of Australia joining ASEAN.

countries that Indonesia will maintain its efforts to reduce transboundary haze from forest fires.

Rather than turning away from ASEAN, Jokowi has pointed out its limitations. This is not the same as expressing a desire to weaken or withdraw from the organization, as some early critics feared. Jokowi's initial statements seem to have been intended to garner support among his domestic constituents. In assessing the administration's relationship with ASEAN, it appears as though Indonesia will continue to support the organization and play a role in its leadership. Moreover, Jokowi's criticisms of ASEAN could lead the organization to look more realistically at its limitations and change its strategies for facing an assertive China.

Conclusion

The 2019 presidential election may serve as a barometer for Indonesian sentiment toward the Jokowi administration, with the electorate choosing continuity or expressing the desire to replace him with Prabowo and his more populist and nationalist style. It will not be, however, a referendum on a radical new path forged by Jokowi because, as this essay shows, he has not departed greatly from his predecessor's policies, despite initial indications that he may. Although Indonesian presidential candidates try to separate themselves from their competition and may make statements about policy shifts, the ship of state stays the course in practice.

External events such as China's increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea and the continued threat of transboundary cooperation between terrorist networks will necessitate both a proactive and reactive foreign policy for Indonesia, but continued cooperation with its neighbors should be expected. Jokowi's ratcheting down of the number of foreigners executed also shows that his administration cares about relations with neighboring countries (after demonstrating his initial "toughness"). Additionally, his continued support for Indonesia's role in ASEAN shows that he recognizes the value of multilateralism in the region. Prabowo's campaign rhetoric may once again pull candidate Jokowi toward populism and an "Indonesia first" position. But if he remains on top when the dust settles, Indonesian policy will not likely stray significantly from its current path. 

Asia's "Tragic" Return to Great-Power Politics?

See Seng Tan

In 2001, John Mearsheimer published *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, which compared great-power dynamics to a Greek tragedy wherein the protagonists fall prey to some fatal error or misjudgment of their own doing.¹ For Mearsheimer, great powers behave aggressively in their endless pursuit of power, all too often with tragic consequences. One does not have to buy into Mearsheimer's determinism and pessimism to appreciate his insights on great-power rivalry. Where the global and the regional intersect, such rivalries tend to draw in smaller regional states, compelling them to take sides in those power struggles, despite their natural inclination to hedge.² As Sheldon Simon, writing on the impact of great-power games on Southeast Asia, observed over three decades ago, great powers seek to enhance their global positions relative to those of their peer competitors, which leads them to view small states as potential partners in local balances against rival great powers.³

For much of the post-Cold War period, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has acted both as a buffer between the great powers and as a bridge linking them through a region-wide security architecture centered on ASEAN. In recent years, however, growing tensions between the great powers have driven a wedge between these Southeast Asian countries and rendered it difficult for ASEAN to hold the ring. All of this suggests that Asia could be heading toward a challenging time of insecurity and possibly even conflict. That said, this essay argues that the projected tragedy of the

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¹ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

² See Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States' Alignment Behavior towards China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 100 (2016): 500–514; and Bilahari Kausikan, "Dodging and Hedging in Southeast Asia," *American Interest*, January 12, 2017 ≈ <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/01/12/dodging-and-hedging-in-southeast-asia>.

³ Sheldon W. Simon, "Davids and Goliaths: Small Power–Great Power Security Relations in Southeast Asia," *Asian Survey* 23, no. 3 (1983): 302.

great powers that the notion of the Thucydides trap seems to suggest need not be Asia's future.⁴

Great Powers and Regional Architecture

Shortly after the Cold War ended, a spate of scholars speculated on the likely prospect of Asia, home to a number of rising powers and potential challengers to the United States—including China, Japan, India, and possibly even Russia—becoming a “cockpit of great power conflict” in the words of one observer.⁵ They warned of the region's imminent slide toward unbridled competitive quests for power, especially in the absence of robust multilateral institutions that could mitigate the adverse effects of great-power rivalry in the region by restraining and regulating the conduct of states.⁶ Although not lacking in flashpoints—tensions over the Taiwan Strait, the Korean Peninsula, and subsequently the East and South China Seas—Asia did not plunge into the dark chaos of interstate war as forewarned by the realpolitik prophets of doom and gloom. For their part, regional experts highlighted instead the manifold “pathways” and “pillars” of security, which not only reflect the region's complexity but presumably mitigate tendencies for conflict.⁷ Others insisted that an assertive China did not automatically denote an expansionist China, or at least not as long as its military capabilities remained underdeveloped.⁸

Contrary to the traditional expectations regarding great powers and their purported primacy and preponderance in regional affairs, post-Cold War Asia instead became host to an emerging security architecture that defied the conventional wisdom on regional order, power, and influence. Rather than the United States or its putative strategic competitors—or, for that matter, a concert of the strong and the powerful—reordering and managing Asia, ASEAN ended up calling more than its fair share of the shots in defining

⁴ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Mariner, 2018).

⁵ Aaron L. Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia,” *International Security* 18, no. 3 (1993–94): 7.

⁶ See Richard K. Betts, “Wealth, Power, and Instability: East Asia and the United States after the Cold War,” *International Security* 18, no. 3 (1993–94): 34–77; and Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, “Rethinking East Asian Security,” *Survival* 36, no. 2 (1994): 3–21.

⁷ See Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); and Victor D. Cha, “Complex Patchworks: U.S. Alliances as Part of Asia's Regional Architecture,” *Asia Policy*, no. 11 (2011): 27–50.

⁸ Richard A. Bitzinger and Barry Desker, “Why East Asian War Is Unlikely,” *Survival* 50, no. 6 (2008): 105–28.

the contents and contours of contemporary Asian regionalism.⁹ So unusual was this development in the annals of international affairs that some refer to it as a “structural flaw.”¹⁰ The idea that the world’s most powerful nations would volitionally defer to a grouping of developing nations in the shaping of the region’s diplomatic-security agenda and convention flew in the face of traditional wisdom.¹¹

It soon became evident that this anomaly would endure only if the great powers and extraregional stakeholders of the ASEAN-led architecture were prepared to maintain the “grand bargain” they struck to regulate their conduct and defer regional leadership to ASEAN.¹² Cracks in this edifice began to show late in the first decade of the 2000s. In 2008, Australian leader Kevin Rudd proposed a new architecture to replace the seemingly moribund ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), one presumably predicated on a concert of powers with neither a place nor a role reserved for ASEAN. The following year the then Japanese leader Yukio Hatoyama advanced an exclusive regionalism without ASEAN and the United States, or so it appeared.¹³ While such alternatives proffered by middle-power stakeholders failed to garner support from either China or the United States, institutional balancing between the two major powers, which took place in earnest with the onset of the Obama administration’s “rebalance” to Asia, threatened at times to turn ASEAN’s multilateral arrangements into arenas of contestation.

Is Asia Channeling Thucydides?

The strategic picture in Asia today is arguably what one might reasonably expect of a region where great powers stride and reside: complex and laden with tensions both manifest and latent. With China increasingly

⁹ Richard Stubbs, “ASEAN’s Leadership in East Asian Region-Building: Strength in Weakness,” *Pacific Review* 27, no. 4 (2014): 523–41.

¹⁰ See Seng Tan, *Multilateral Asian Security Architecture: Non-ASEAN Stakeholders* (London: Routledge, 2015), 18.

¹¹ See Seng Tan, “Spectres of Leifer: Insights on Regional Order and Security for Southeast Asia Today,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 34, no. 3 (2012): 316.

¹² Evelyn Goh, “Institutions and the Great Power Bargain in East Asia: ASEAN’s Limited ‘Brokerage’ Role,” in *ASEAN and the Institutionalization of East Asia*, ed. Ralf Emmers (London: Routledge, 2012), 105–21.

¹³ See Tommy Koh, “Rudd’s Reckless Regional Rush,” *Australian*, December 18, 2009 ≈ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/rudds-reckless-regional-rush/news-story/69b186cd01b73769b0ab32f8f82b299>; Sandy Gordon, “The Quest for a Concert of Powers in Asia,” *Security Challenges* 8, no. 4 (2012): 35–55; Amitav Acharya, “Asia-Pacific Security: Community, Concert or What?” *Pacific Forum CSIS, PacNet*, no. 11, March 12, 2010; and Kevin Brown, “Japanese PM Pushes for East Asian Union,” *Financial Times*, October 24, 2009 ≈ <https://www.ft.com/content/a9509ca4-c09c-11de-8f4a-00144feab49a>.

flexing its military muscles, a debate has broken out among analysts over whether security conditions in contemporary Asia resemble a “Thucydides trap”—a term coined by Graham Allison in reference to the fear felt by established powers as a consequence of perceived threats posed by emerging powers and the possibility of that dynamic escalating into war—and if so, how best to eschew or escape from it.¹⁴ But while Allison made it abundantly clear that the main protagonists of his modern Thucydidean tale are the United States as the status quo power and China as the revisionist power,¹⁵ the fact remains that China’s conduct has also troubled its Asian neighbors vis-à-vis its strategic intentions. India has viewed with alarm China’s expansion into the Indian Ocean, its engagement with South Asia (through the Belt and Road Initiative, among other policies), and its support for Pakistan.¹⁶ Likewise, Japan is increasingly concerned about China’s growing military might, provocations over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, and potential to achieve strategic stability with the United States.¹⁷

Is China the New Gulliver?

From China’s perspective, the United States, together with its allies and security partners, has in recent times been doing its utmost to contain China’s rising power and influence, including through multilateral means. The attempts at containment have ranged from the Obama administration’s rebalance to the Trump administration’s revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad), which also includes Australia, India, and Japan. The latest incarnation of the Quad broadly coalesces around the

¹⁴ See Graham Allison, “The Thucydides Trap,” *Foreign Policy*, June 9, 2017 [~ https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/09/the-thucydides-trap](https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/09/the-thucydides-trap); Parag Khanna, “Thucydides Trap or Tug-of-War?” Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, August 22, 2017 [~ https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/gia/article/thucydides-trap-or-tug-of-war](https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/gia/article/thucydides-trap-or-tug-of-war); and Arthur Waldron, “There Is No Thucydides Trap,” *Straits Times*, June 18, 2017 [~ https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/there-is-no-thucydides-trap](https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/there-is-no-thucydides-trap).

¹⁵ Allison, *Destined for War*.

¹⁶ See Christian Wagner, “The Role of India and China in South Asia,” *Strategic Analysis* 40, no. 4 (2016): 307–20; David Brewster, “China’s New Network of Indian Ocean Bases,” *Lowy Institute, Interpreter*, January 30, 2018 [~ https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/chinas-new-network-indian-ocean-bases](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/chinas-new-network-indian-ocean-bases); and Hash V. Pant, “China’s Clout Grows in South Asia, but Can India Raise Its Game?” *South China Morning Post*, January 19, 2018 [~ https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2129480/chinas-clout-grows-south-asia-can-india-raise-its-game](https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2129480/chinas-clout-grows-south-asia-can-india-raise-its-game).

¹⁷ See Christopher W. Hughes, “Japan’s ‘Resentful Realism’ and Balancing China’s Rise,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9, no. 2 (2016): 109–50; “Editorial: Right to Be Wary of Chinese Military Expansion,” *Sankei Shimbun*, March 12, 2018 [~ https://japan-forward.com/editorial-right-to-be-wary-of-chinese-military-expansion](https://japan-forward.com/editorial-right-to-be-wary-of-chinese-military-expansion); and J. Berkshire Miller, “Japan’s China Deals Are Pure Pragmatism,” *Foreign Policy*, July 3, 2018 [~ https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/03/japans-china-deals-are-pure-pragmatism](https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/03/japans-china-deals-are-pure-pragmatism).

theme of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” and the ostensible aim of preserving the rules-based international order.¹⁸ It has been suggested in some quarters that the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific—with its emphasis on rules and linkage to India and Japan’s Asia-Africa Growth Corridor—could be the Quad’s comprehensive riposte to China’s massive outreach to Asia, Africa, and beyond through the Belt and Road Initiative.¹⁹

Certainly, Chinese leaders appear convinced that the free and open Indo-Pacific is all about the containment of China but are as yet largely unperturbed by it because of its inchoateness.²⁰ In a manner of speaking, China may be forgiven for seeing ghosts in every multilateral initiative promoted by others. It has not quite forgotten how its regional neighbors sought to diffuse its influence in the ASEAN +3 (China, Japan, and South Korea) and in East Asian regionalism more broadly by creating the East Asia Summit and including Australia, India, and New Zealand as members. In much the same way, Beijing appears to have taken a page from the institutional balancing playbook by innovating multilateral initiatives such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and more recently the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. It has also reinvigorated existing institutions like the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) to counterbalance the efforts of its rivals within the ASEAN-led architecture.²¹

Conclusion: Whither Regional Leadership?

Under mercurial president Donald Trump, the United States seems disinclined to continue the role and responsibility it has held for over seven decades as leader and strategic guarantor of the free world. The president’s penchant for unpredictable and highly transactional foreign policy has been


¹⁸ See Michael J. Green, “The Legacy of Obama’s ‘Pivot’ to Asia,” *Foreign Policy*, September 3, 2016 ~ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/03/the-legacy-of-obamas-pivot-to-asia>; and Ankit Panda, “U.S., Japan, India, and Australia Hold Senior Official-Level Quadrilateral Meeting in Singapore,” *Diplomat*, June 8, 2018 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/us-japan-india-and-australia-hold-senior-official-level-quadrilateral-meeting-in-singapore>.

¹⁹ Jagannath P. Panda, “Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC): An India-Japan Arch in the Making?” Institute for Security and Development Policy, Focus Asia, no. 21, August 2017 ~ <http://isdp.eu/content/uploads/2017/08/2017-focus-asia-jagannath-panda.pdf>.

²⁰ Dingding Chen, “What China Thinks of the Indo-Pacific Strategy,” *Diplomat*, April 27, 2018 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/what-china-thinks-of-the-indo-pacific-strategy>.

²¹ On institutional balancing, see Kai He, “Institutional Balancing and International Relations Theory: Economic Interdependence and Balance of Power Strategies in Southeast Asia,” *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 3 (2008): 489–518; and Kai He, “Contested Multilateralism 2.0 and Regional Order Transition: Causes and Implications,” *Pacific Review*, published online April 30, 2018, 10.1080/09512748.2018.1465455.

on full display over the past few months. Trump held a summit with North Korea in June 2018 while igniting a trade war with China. In doing so, he threatened to turn the so-called Asian paradox—the notion that Asia is the world’s most vibrant and prosperous region in economic terms but possibly its most dangerous in security terms—on its head.²² Trump memorably withdrew the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) during his first week in office. However, sixteen months later, he tweeted that he might reconsider joining the TPP if the deal were substantially better than the one offered to his predecessor—an indication perhaps that the administration is aware that it cannot take on China alone in a showdown over trade, at least not when a multilateral rules-based TPP could conceivably get to the root causes of the differences between China and the United States.²³ Yet rejoining the TPP could prove a tall order in light of the president’s loudly expressed disdain for multilateralism. As Sheldon Simon has wryly observed, Trump’s Indo-Pacific strategy speech, delivered at the 2017 APEC meeting in Da Nang, was surreal given his incessant excoriation of multilateral collaboration and institutional inclusivism—the very components of the open regionalism that has characterized Asia.²⁴

Nonetheless, it is patently unfair to only blame Trump for Asia’s instability given that many of the region’s current woes predate his presidency. In fact, his very unpredictability—as he proved at his summit with Kim Jong-un—also implies the element of choice that is often missing from the self-fulfilling determinism and pessimism in Thucydidean logic. As Singapore’s Bilahari Kausikan once argued, “to recognize that there may be a trap is to go a long way towards avoiding it.”²⁵ Whether from the United States, China, or ASEAN—or by collective action—regional leadership is sorely needed to coax Asia away from an inexorable march toward a tragic end. 

²² Michael Ivanovitch, “The Asian Paradox: Brisk Business despite Hostilities,” CNBC, June 8, 2015 ~ <https://www.cnbc.com/2015/06/08/the-asian-paradox-brisk-business-despite-hostilities.html>.

²³ Martha C. White, “Why Trump Is Reconsidering Joining the TPP Trade Agreement He Slammed,” NBC News, April 14, 2018 ~ <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/why-trump-reconsidering-joining-tpp-trade-agreement-he-slammed-n865821>.

²⁴ Sheldon Simon, “Abandoning Leadership,” *Comparative Connections* 19, no. 3 (2018): 42.

²⁵ Andrew Yeo, “IPS-Nathan Lectures: Bilahari Kausikan on ‘U.S.-China Relations: Groping towards a New Modus Vivendi,’” Institute of Policy Studies, 2016, 2.

The Role of Middle Powers in Asian Multilateralism

Ralf Emmers

Without referring directly to middle-power scholarship, Sheldon Simon has often written on the statecraft of middle powers and the role they play in Asian security. This is especially the case with reference to Indonesia and Australia and their impact on regional institutions, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and their respective relations with the United States and other great powers.¹ Unlike most realists who focus on the great powers, Simon has highlighted in his research the importance of the middle-power security nexus and the way middle powers can engage and influence strategic relations in Asia.

Middle powers have received too little attention within the literature on Asian security and the security architecture of the region. While much of the focus has been on the great powers, regional security is also important to address from the perspective of the middle-power states. These countries are perceived as less threatening to the international order yet still have the “weight to influence what happens around them” and to be of use to great powers.² Middle powers have employed different strategies to protect their interests at the regional and global levels. These strategies can be classified into two distinct types: functional strategies, which advocate that middle powers utilize their resources to address specific issues; and normative strategies, which suggest that middle powers actively promote behavioral norms and rules through

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NOTE ~ This essay draws on Ralf Emmers and Sarah Teo, *Security Strategies of Middle Powers in the Asia Pacific* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2018).

¹ See, for example, Sheldon W. Simon, “The United States, Japan, and Australia: Security Linkages to Southeast Asia,” in *The U.S.-Japan Security Alliance: Regional Multilateralism*, ed. Takashi Inoguchi, John Ikenberry, and Yoichiro Sato (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 233–52; Sheldon Simon, “Indonesia as Exemplar of Southeast Asia’s Importance,” *Comparative Connections* 11, no. 1 (2009): 53–62; and Sheldon W. Simon, “The ASEAN Regional Forum,” in *The Routledge Handbook on Asian Security Studies*, ed. Sumit Ganguly, Andrew Scobell, and Joseph Chinyong Liow (New York: Routledge, 2010), 300–310.

² Hugh White, “Power Shift: Australia’s Future between Washington and Beijing,” *Quarterly Essay* 39 (2010): 67.

multilateral institutions.³ It is this second type of strategy that is discussed in this essay in the context of Asian multilateralism.

A Normative Security Strategy

Middle powers preserve their national interests by encouraging the adoption of norms and standards of good international behavior. Their objective is to shape a rules-based order and establish good governance in international affairs through multilateralism. The experience of middle powers and their reliance on a normative security strategy is best illustrated by their active involvement with the United Nations and other global institutions. Middle powers use multilateral platforms to level the playing field among the great and non-great powers.

In addition to a global perspective, a similar normative strategy has been adopted by Asia-Pacific middle powers to manage the negative impact of great-power competition in the region. Middle powers have sought to institutionalize great-power relations through the ASEAN-led forums to create incentives for the great powers to commit to a rules-based regional order. This diplomatic process has focused on persuasive efforts and confidence-building measures without restricting national sovereignty or relying on any form of sanctions. The proffered norms have included nonuse of force, noninterference in the internal affairs of other states, quiet diplomacy, and mutual respect. These norms constitute the core of the ASEAN approach to cooperation in the region.⁴ In short, the aim of a normative security strategy has been to ensure that regional stability is maintained through behavioral patterns that help develop confidence and mutual trust.

This discussion raises the issue of whether the middle powers have succeeded in influencing the Asian security environment. In other words, have their normative security strategies strengthened Asian multilateralism and promoted a rules-based regional order? To answer this question, this essay focuses specifically on the cases of Australia and Indonesia.

³ For an in-depth study of such strategies, see Ralf Emmers and Sarah Teo, *Security Strategies of Middle Powers in the Asia Pacific* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2018).

⁴ See, for instance, Jürgen Haacke, *ASEAN's Diplomatic and Security Culture: Origins, Development and Prospects* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

Indonesia as a Middle Power

Indonesia's middle-power identity emerged in the first decade of the 2000s and could initially be associated with the two presidential terms of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. In more recent years, the middle-power status of Indonesia has been acknowledged through its rising influence in global and regional multilateral institutions. The country has sought to act as a normative middle power. Its engagement with the United Nations in recent years has included co-chairing the UN High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, serving as a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council on three occasions, and successfully winning a fourth term from 2019 to 2020. In addition, Indonesia has been the only Southeast Asian member of the G-20 since the group's inception in 2009.

Irrespective of its global ambitions, Indonesia has kept ASEAN and its region-wide institutions at the core of Indonesian foreign policy. Its attempts to exercise normative influence have been mostly illustrated in the context of the regional body. Indonesia has always refused to join a military alliance. Instead, diplomacy and the preservation of Southeast Asian autonomy from great-power competition have been central to the country's regional strategy. Its leadership in ASEAN has been reflected in terms of institution-building as well as an emphasis on consensual decision-making processes and inclusive multilateralism. That said, Indonesia's role has been limited to the political and security spheres.⁵ One of its key objectives has been to preserve ASEAN's driving role in the East Asia Summit (EAS) in an attempt to institutionalize great-power relations. Shafiah Muhibat explains that Jakarta "understands that the centrality of ASEAN is crucial in order to maintain a balance of power between the U.S., China, India and Russia within the EAS."⁶

In short, Indonesia has exercised at least nominal leadership in ASEAN and promoted regional institution-building more widely. The current administration of President Joko Widodo, however, is more focused on a set of bilateral relations with middle and great powers, possibly at the expense of its commitment to multilateral institutions. Widodo's early remark that "he would not invest much time in diplomatic relationships that were

⁵ See Ralf Emmers, "Indonesia's Role in ASEAN: A Case of Incomplete and Sectorial Leadership," *Pacific Review* 27, no. 4 (2014): 543–62.

⁶ Shafiah F. Muhibat, "Indonesia and the Concept of Regional Power," *Indonesian Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2013): 120.

not beneficial” for the country was indicative of a shift in Indonesian foreign policy and a sign that Jakarta may act increasingly in its own interests when they do not align with those of ASEAN.⁷

Australia as a Middle Power

Australia’s self-perception as a middle power emerged in the 1940s and has over the decades contributed to organizing its international role and ambitions. Thomas Wilkins notes that Australia has been committed to acting as a middle power “ever since the then minister for external affairs, H.V. Evatt, advocated it in the UN at the end of the Second World War.”⁸ Most Australian governments since then have adopted the middle-power conception in the formulation and implementation of their foreign policy initiatives.

Michael Wesley asserts that multilateralism has become “the band-aid of Australian diplomacy.”⁹ At the global level, Australia has given priority to the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the G-20, and other multilateral institutions. Beyond its global perspective, Australia started to pay close attention to Asia in the 1990s in light of the global economic shift toward the region. It also played a key role in the formation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989, and to a lesser extent the ARF in 1994. More than a decade later, Australia was a founding member of the EAS. Former foreign minister Gareth Evans has remarked that “Australia has worked very hard, and rightly so, over the last couple of decades to put in place regional economic and security mechanisms—from APEC and the ASEAN Regional Forum to the new East Asia Summit—that actually work.”¹⁰

Canberra’s activism has been driven by the long-standing fear of being excluded from Asia and by the desire to ensure that the United States continues to play a central role in the region. In contrast to Indonesia and its

⁷ Prashanth Parameswaran, “Indonesia’s Jokowi to Skip APEC in the Philippines,” *Diplomat*, November 13, 2015 ~ <https://thediplomat.com/2015/11/indonesias-jokowi-to-skip-apec-in-the-philippines/>; and Erlina Widyarningsih and Christopher B. Roberts, “Indonesia in ASEAN: Mediation, Leadership, and Extra-Mural Diplomacy,” Australian National University, National Security College, Issue Brief, no. 13, May 2014, 112.

⁸ Thomas S. Wilkins, “Australia: A Traditional Middle Power Faces the Asian Century,” in *Middle Powers and the Rise of China*, ed. Bruce Gilley and Andrew O’Neil (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 149.

⁹ Michael Wesley, *There Goes the Neighbourhood: Australia and the Rise of Asia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011), 168–69.

¹⁰ As cited in Wilkins, “Australia,” 159.

nonaligned position, Australia has been a close military ally of the United States since 1951, and its ties with Washington have provided it with the additional material means to act as a middle power. Yet the alliance has also affected Australia's image as an independent middle power seeking to influence regional events. Bilateral ties with the United States have caused lingering feelings of suspicion over Australia's regional motives, especially in China, and they have at times raised questions over its ambition to act as the "deputy sheriff" of the United States in Southeast Asia.


Finally, some of Australia's multilateral initiatives have met with little enthusiasm or even been rejected. Perhaps best remembered in this category is Kevin Rudd's vision for an "Asia-Pacific community." The absence of Australian consultation with ASEAN prior to the announcement of the initiative in June 2008 resulted in diplomatic resistance from some Southeast Asian countries, especially Singapore.

But Have These Normative Security Strategies Worked?

Australia and Indonesia have long recognized the need to rely on multilateral mechanisms to maintain their own diplomatic influence and avoid being excluded from a strategic landscape dictated solely by the great powers. Despite its shortcomings, Australia and Indonesia regard inclusive multilateralism as a means to lock in the United States, China, India, and Japan, as well as engage a series of middle and small powers in the regional security architecture. By bringing all the key players to the table, Asian multilateralism can help guarantee the sovereign rights of all of its members. In that sense, the normative strategies adopted by Australia and Indonesia have worked and met their immediate interests.

Yet it is more questionable whether the middle powers have succeeded in influencing the Asian security environment by institutionalizing great-power relations. Indeed, the prospect that a normative strategy may currently enhance regional peace and stability is significantly undermined as the great powers compete for regional predominance. Relations between the United States, Japan, and China have become more competitive in recent years, yet the multilateral security architecture remains poorly equipped to address rising geopolitical concerns. The cooperative process has remained under-institutionalized, with limited tangible outcomes beyond rhetorical statements and an inability to shape regional events.

Hence, it is clear at this point that the existing multilateral structures cannot stabilize great-power relations amid shifts in the regional

distribution of power. This lofty goal has been directly affected by Chinese assertiveness since 2011, especially in the context of the territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas, and by the fact that the United States under President Donald Trump has so far shown little interest in Asian multilateralism. As noted by Satu Limaye, the Trump administration is skeptical of multilateral groupings and has adopted a “dealmaking” approach to foreign policy.¹¹ Such circumstances make it much harder for middle powers to influence the regional security environment through the promotion of a rules-based order. 

¹¹ Satu Limaye, “Signs Are Taken for Wonders. ‘We Would See a Sign’: The Trump Administration and Southeast Asia,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 39, no. 1 (2017): 18–19.

ASEAN's Tough Balancing Act

Siew-Mun Tang

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) today occupies an integral role in the Asia-Pacific regional architecture—a fortunate happenstance that its founders neither planned for nor envisioned. In fact, the signatories of the 1967 Bangkok Declaration—Indonesia's Adam Malik, Malaysia's Tun Abdul Razak, the Philippines' Narciso Ramos, Singapore's S. Rajaratnam, and Thailand's Thanat Khoman—would have been surprised with ASEAN's success at enlarging the regional organization's footprint beyond Southeast Asia.

The primary motivation for establishing ASEAN was to maintain the independence and preserve the sovereignty of its founding member states by building a strategic wall that would stem the rising Communist threat and keep the major powers from interfering in their domestic affairs. The latter point was reinforced by the adoption of the Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in 1971, which sought to keep Southeast Asia “free from any form or manner of interference by outside Powers.”¹ In hindsight, ZOPFAN was a novel idea that was all but impractical to operationalize, considering the member states' high dependence on the U.S. security umbrella (and, to a lesser extent, on the Five Power Defence Arrangements). Gradually, ASEAN evolved from an inward-looking group to an outward-oriented one as it shed its inhibitions toward external parties. Accordingly, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, the peace treaty among the original ASEAN states, was amended on December 15, 1987, to allow for the accession of states from outside Southeast Asia.

This essay discusses the rationale, dynamics, and challenges facing ASEAN as it strives to balance the goals of maintaining its centrality and widening its arc of cooperation and engagement beyond Southeast Asian states.

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¹ “1971 Zone Of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration” (adopted by the foreign ministers at the Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, November 27, 1971), available at <http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Transnational/zone.pdf>.

Moving Beyond Southeast Asia?

ASEAN can be criticized for many shortcomings, but having lofty ambitions is certainly not one of them. The institution did not aspire to be in the driver's seat of the regional architecture, nor did it have any illusions of regional leadership. On the contrary, the two significant milestones of its 50-plus years were driven by external circumstances. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which marks its 25th anniversary this year, was born of the intention to bring an element of strategic stability during the uncertain times of the post-Cold War period. The ARF was also a response to calls for a regional mechanism to discuss wider security concerns and issues. Similarly, the idea for the ASEAN Economic Community came out of the long-term concern of ASEAN being sandwiched between Asia's economic and political powerhouses, China and India.

Other institutions that have come to define ASEAN's extensive reach in the regional architecture have been driven by the same impetus. The objectives of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) were instructive in their exclusive focus on Southeast Asia as the primary geographic area of cooperation and for embedding ASEAN's dialogue partners in a web of confidence-building initiatives. Similarly, the establishment of the East Asia Summit (EAS) was driven by the need to ensure that the major powers were invested in Southeast Asia's security. ASEAN-led processes such as the ARF, ADMM-Plus, and EAS ostensibly gave the impression of ASEAN's success in expanding its strategic presence beyond Southeast Asia when these initiatives were in reality focused not on extending ASEAN but rather on bringing external parties into Southeast Asia.

Indonesia's attempt to elevate ASEAN onto the global stage did not gain traction. By using "ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations" as the theme of its chairmanship in 2011, Indonesia tried to galvanize a common and united regional response to global issues. The failure to issue a joint communiqué at the 45th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting the following year under Cambodia's chairmanship was a wake-up call against taking ASEAN unity for granted. The organization has not returned to the high-water mark set during the Cambodian conflict in the 1980s and 1990s, when it took a leading role in sponsoring numerous resolutions at the United Nations and spoke at other international forums. Except for rare instances, ASEAN's focus has mostly remained on Southeast Asia.

Whither Centrality?

In the ASEAN context, “centrality” is an amorphous word. At one end of the spectrum, centrality is equated with being literally in the center. This perspective, similar to that of the equally fuzzy concept of “Indo-Pacific,” defines ASEAN centrality merely in terms of the region’s location between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. At the other end of the spectrum, ASEAN is seen as the driving force for East Asian regionalism. Somewhere in between these two positions is the view that ASEAN is the foundation on which the wider regional architecture is built. All three perspectives share a common belief in ASEAN as the provider of a regional public good, whether as a connector between the contiguous maritime boundaries of the two oceans, as a leader for the promotion of regional cooperation, or as a builder of platforms to facilitate regional cooperation.

In essence, ASEAN’s claims to centrality are contingent on the continuing support of and acceptance by external parties, especially the major powers. This support, in turn, is dependent on ASEAN playing the role of facilitator for the major powers so that all can derive benefits through their participation in ASEAN-led processes. It is imperative for the organization to continue playing its part as an honest broker and providing a neutral ground where all parties are given equal and fair opportunities to further their interests in the region. It is this role that puts ASEAN ahead of possible alternatives such as the China-led Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) or the nascent U.S.-led Indo-Pacific concept, both of which do not fully subscribe to the tenets of inclusivity and neutrality.

Critics who pan ASEAN centrality as hollow have erroneously used the wrong yardstick in judging ASEAN. The EAS, for example, was conceptualized as a leaders-led strategic forum to discuss and exchange views on regional security. It was not meant to be a mechanism to provide regional security. The value of ASEAN centrality—and by extension, the institution’s role in underpinning regional security discussions and cooperation—is often underrated. The diminishing of this norm by way of nonparticipation or the withdrawal of key states will translate into the collapse of ASEAN-led processes, potentially rendering the multi-stakeholder dialogue meaningless. Similarly, a major power’s withdrawal from or perfunctory participation in the ARF or the EAS would dilute the stature and quality of discussion at these meetings. Nonparticipation would also deny the opportunity for the same party to defend its position and engage in a dialogue with a wider group of regional states. In this respect, centrality is

not an exclusive benefit for ASEAN but rather serves the interests of outside parties in equal measure.

The Trump administration's apparent dislike for multilateralism, coupled with the United States' history of impatience with ASEAN's penchant for giving equal importance to processes and outcomes, has reignited concerns that the United States will downgrade or ignore altogether the ASEAN circuit. Thus far, these concerns have proved to be unfounded, with President Donald Trump attending his first ASEAN-U.S. summit and part of the EAS proceedings in Manila in 2017. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also spoke at the ARF retreat in August 2018. In the absence of a clear Asia policy, the totality of ASEAN-led processes is an effective and low-cost platform for the United States to signal its presence in the region. ASEAN also improves U.S. visibility in Southeast Asia, but it remains to be seen to what extent the United States' participation in ASEAN multilateralism will be sustained beyond 2018.

Challenges Ahead

Looking ahead, ASEAN-led processes faces two existential challenges. The first is maintaining a balanced approach toward China, on the one hand, and the United States and its allies, on the other. ASEAN has been increasingly pressured by these two strategic adversaries to take sides by voicing concerns or issuing statements that either favor one party or criticize the other. A case in point is the South China Sea disputes. The United States and its allies often lament ASEAN's fecklessness in not adopting tougher language toward China's land reclamation and militarization of the disputed features. In equal measure, China pins the blame on external parties as the cause of the erosion of trust in East Asia. The same dynamics are evident with respect to China's Belt and Road Initiative and Japan's Quality Infrastructure Investment program. ASEAN's default position for maintaining a balanced approach is to avoid taking sides, which more often than not translates into muted responses or no response at all. ASEAN's persistent mistake has been to equate not taking sides with not taking positions. Not taking sides does not necessarily entail ASEAN forfeiting its right to engage its external relations impartially.

The second challenge concerns maintaining a balance between ASEAN taking charge of the process and calls by outside states for joint leadership. By default, the chair takes the lead in almost all ASEAN-led processes, including managing the flow of discussions at meetings and setting the

agenda. Proponents of the joint leadership model, such as Australia, have called for a sharing of such responsibilities between ASEAN and external parties to inject new dynamism into the discussions, and also to give wider berth for non-ASEAN stakeholders to table their interests. Such calls have been rebuffed by ASEAN, but it is increasingly unreasonable for the institution to continue holding this line without eventual pushback. Proposals such as the co-chairing of the EAS could wean it away from safe, consensus-driven topics and areas of cooperation and potentially pave the way for the inclusion of contentious topics, which in itself might not necessarily be a bad outcome. However, robust discussions may come at the high price of unraveling the delicate state of comity among the eighteen-member grouping and risk allowing the major powers to play out their rivalries in these ASEAN-led processes. ASEAN has to choose between maintaining the interests of the outside states and keeping a firm grip on the leadership mechanisms. Between these binary choices, the lesser evil may be to maintain the status quo and work toward mitigating the risk of marginalizing the external parties.

Conclusion

Despite all of its imperfections, ASEAN remains the only viable anchor for pan-East Asian regionalism. To be sure, it is not—and may never be—to Southeast Asia what the European Coal and Steel Community was to the European Union. The fact that ASEAN, which comprises ten small and medium-sized states, could command the respect and participation of the major powers and other regional partners in processes such as the ARF, ADMM-Plus, and EAS speaks volumes for its relevance and centrality. ASEAN’s “big tent” approach, which connects Southeast Asia to Europe, South Asia, Oceania, Northeast Asia, and North America, predates the current invocation of the Indo-Pacific. The value of the ASEAN-led processes in bringing together external parties from Pakistan to Mongolia to the United States is immeasurable. At a time when multilateralism is under threat and seen as retreating in other parts of the world, ASEAN continues to demonstrate that multilateralism is alive and well in Southeast Asia and its vicinity. ◆

The ARF as a Strategic Waypoint: A Long View of the Forum's 25-Year Journey

Maria Ortuoste

The survival of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is in and of itself an achievement, considering that many policymakers and scholars were initially skeptical about its viability and utility. The large power imbalance, conflicting national interests, and some countries' unfamiliarity with multilateralism are usually cited as barriers to agreeing and acting on common security problems. Yet while it is significant that the ARF has endured for 25 years, "surviving is different from thriving."¹ Despite the optimism and efforts of some policymakers, the forum has not made significant progress in its three-stage development process.

This essay examines three challenges to enhancing the ARF's role in regional security: geopolitical changes, a human security deficit, and ASEAN's diminished leadership in the forum. The ARF needs to take more serious steps toward preventive diplomacy to moderate tensions in the region, prioritize human over state security in practical security cooperation activities, and contextualize ASEAN's "centrality."

The ARF as a Metaphorical Waypoint between Strategic Environments

Scholars differ over how the ARF can influence regional security. Realism considers state power as the primacy mechanism to ensure security, with international organizations only serving to amplify a state's power or constrain other states. Neoliberalism sees the linkages built into the ARF as a means to promote cooperative security and secure some form of "minimum diffuse reciprocity"² where the goal "is to reduce the probability that national power will be exercised to resolve conflicts."³ Constructivists view the ARF as a "norm brewery" where rules and principles organically

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¹ Amitav Acharya, "ASEAN in 2030," East Asia Forum, February 15, 2011 ~ <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2011/02/15/asean-in-2030>.

² Sheldon W. Simon, *ASEAN and Its Security Offspring: Facing New Challenges* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 21 ~ <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB793.pdf>.

³ Sheldon W. Simon, "Evaluating Track II Approaches to Security Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific: The CSCAP Experience," *Pacific Review* 15, no. 1 (2002): 172.

develop⁴ and socialization leads to developing habits of consultation and cooperation.⁵ To study the evolution of the ARF, it is useful to consider the forum as a metaphorical waypoint between two strategic environments.

The ARF was established in 1994 during a critical juncture in international relations history—five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and three years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At that point, there were many perceived perils in the international environment. Would there be a power vacuum if the United States withdrew its forces in the Asia-Pacific? Who would fill that vacuum—Japan, China, or Australia? Was there a growing arms race in Asia? Would tensions between China and Taiwan, North Korea's belligerence, or maritime disputes lead to regional destabilization? How could countries secure their economic gains? The ARF, therefore, could be considered a temporary stop on a geopolitical journey where the status quo based on U.S. superiority would be maintained. Since most of the ARF participants were U.S. allies, there was general support for this tacit goal; nevertheless, participants also recognized that China, Russia, and North Korea were dissatisfied with U.S. dominance and calling for a multipolar world order. Thus, they decided that the ARF would move at a pace comfortable to all participants and reach decisions via consensus.

Some participants viewed the ARF as an opportunity to build a regional security framework that is not solely based on alliances. The forum, after all, is the “most comprehensive security gathering in the world.”⁶ ARF countries have not only a stake in but also the capability to transform regional security, as they account for more than three-quarters of the world's GDP and military spending. To accommodate these hopes, the participants identified three stages of the ARF's development—confidence building, preventive diplomacy, and conflict resolution—and held several intersessional meetings to identify specific activities and steps forward. Unfortunately, there was so little agreement on these specific steps that the ARF generated inadequate mechanisms to achieve two of its key objectives—one implicit, the other explicit.

The implicit objective was to socialize North Korea, China, and perhaps even Russia either as responsible neighbors or, in the case of the latter two countries, as responsible great powers. But that kind of internalization

⁴ Hiro Katsumata, “Establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum: Constructing a ‘Talking Shop’ or a ‘Norm Brewery?’” *Pacific Review* 19, no. 2 (2006): 181–98.

⁵ Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁶ Simon, “Evaluating Track II Approaches,” 169.

would require a socialization process that was more intensive than the ARF was able to deliver at the time. Although the three countries did not have the capability to forcefully challenge the status quo, they never internalized the legitimacy of the U.S.-based regional order; rather, as China gained power, it began to socialize other countries into accepting its regional vision.

The explicit objective was described in the first ARF chairman's statement—"to develop a more predictable constructive pattern of relationships in the region."⁷ A key step forward would have been to develop preventive diplomacy mechanisms that would allow designated representatives to actively broker dialogues or other engagements to ease tensions.⁸ Yet the movement toward this goal was marred by a contentious back-and-forth among the participants.⁹ The ARF held 360 meetings from 1994 to 2017, but only 14 were directly related to preventive diplomacy. It took seventeen years to develop a work plan, which ultimately featured only weak principles of preventive diplomacy and identified confidence-building measures that already existed or were previously proposed.¹⁰

It is no surprise then that the ARF is ill-prepared to meet current geopolitical realities. China has embarked on island-building in the South China Sea, Russia invaded Crimea, and North Korea has developed its nuclear and missile capabilities. This situation is complicated by the unpredictability of the Trump administration, which is upending the very stability that the United States has cultivated since World War II. This complex challenge is already manifest in the ARF, where there have been animated arguments on, but no clear resolution of, issues such as the South China Sea and the Korean Peninsula. China, with the support of Russia, considers the United States to be interfering in an intraregional dispute when it asserts freedom of navigation in Asian waters, while Japan and Australia support the U.S. position. Some Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam and the Philippines, have also publicly decried Chinese actions in the South China Sea, but China has been able to use its diplomatic and economic influence over Cambodia to prevent a united ASEAN front. A similar dynamic is seen regarding the

⁷ The full text of the chairman's statement is available at <https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/ac/csbm/rd/4377.htm>.

⁸ "Preventive diplomacy" was introduced by Kofi Annan in 1992. He defined preventive diplomacy as "action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur." See Kofi Annan, "An Agenda for Peace" United Nations, January 31, 1992. <http://www.un-documents.net/a47-277.htm>.

⁹ Takeshi Yuzawa, "The Evolution of Preventive Diplomacy in the ASEAN Regional Forum: Problems and Prospects," *Asian Survey* 46, no. 5 (2006): 785–804.

¹⁰ Ralf Emmers and See Seng Tan, "The ASEAN Regional Forum and Preventive Diplomacy: Built to Fail?" *Asian Security* 7, no. 1 (2011): 44–60.

Korean Peninsula, about which there were “heated discussions” at the 2017 ARF meeting, according to Japanese foreign minister Taro Kono.¹¹ Most ARF participants supported the U.S. position to push for denuclearization by implementing heavy sanctions on North Korea, but some ASEAN countries still maintain diplomatic ties with Pyongyang. There was less support for the U.S. demand that North Korea be suspended from the ARF in 2017. Seven years ago, one ASEAN observer said that “the annual ARF has now become a showcase for soft competition and nuanced agenda-setting in Southeast Asia between the United States and China.”¹² One can even go further and say that the ARF has become another venue for tense power plays, the very outcome that its architects wanted to avoid.

Practical Security Cooperation and the Human Security Deficit

Despite these setbacks, the ARF has sought to recalibrate its direction as the participants recognized the need to “develop a greater sense of common security and build a more effective regional security framework.”¹³ In 2009, the forum issued a vision statement and plan to become “an action-oriented mechanism that develops concrete and effective responses.”¹⁴ By the 21st ARF in 2014, participants had agreed on four pillars of cooperation—humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), counterterrorism and transnational crime, nonproliferation and disarmament, and maritime security. The importance of such activities to address transnational nontraditional security issues cannot be overstated. Asia is the continent most often hit by natural disasters, and the United Nations estimates that regional countries could lose as much as \$160 billion annually by 2030 as a result.¹⁵ Transnational crime is also expected to grow over the next decade.

¹¹ “Japan Says ‘Heated Discussions’ at Manila Security Meeting,” Reuters, August 7, 2017 ~ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asean-philippines-japan/japan-says-heated-discussions-at-manila-security-meeting-idUSKBN1AN1LV>.

¹² Meidyatama Suryodiningrat, “ASEAN Regional Forum 2011: China and the United States,” East-West Center, Asia Pacific Bulletin, no. 127, August 4, 2011 ~ http://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/apb127_0.pdf.

¹³ “Chairman’s Statement of the 10th Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum” (Phnom Penh, June 18, 2003) ~ <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/library/arf-chairmans-statements-and-reports.html?id=173>.

¹⁴ ASEAN, *ASEAN Document Series 2009* (Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, September 2011), 85.

¹⁵ Debarati Guha-Sapir et al., “Annual Disaster Statistical Review 2016: The Numbers and Trends,” ReliefWeb, October 31, 2017 ~ <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/annual-disaster-statistical-review-2016-numbers-and-trends>; and “Disasters Could Cost Asia-Pacific Region \$160 Billion per Year by 2030, UN Warns,” UN News, April 24, 2018 ~ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/04/1008182>.


To deal with these problems, joint activities must become more complex. This is an opportunity to develop mechanisms related to preventive diplomacy but without immediately transgressing existing guidelines. The Preventive Diplomacy Work Plan states that concrete cooperation on HADR should be strengthened through the establishment of a regional risk-reduction center and the use of technical assistance, good offices, an expanded role for the Experts and Eminent Persons (EEP) Group, and fact-finding and observer missions. The EEP Group could identify obstacles to HADR cooperation as well as provide advice on effective responses to these contingencies. The ARF unit could then slowly integrate the monitoring of possible emergencies into its responsibilities, which could be the seed for a regional risk-reduction center. Finally, the EEP Group could draft a model status of forces agreement that could be utilized when needed.

HADR operations that involve units from specific ARF countries have already been undertaken. One example is when China, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand sent rescue or relief teams to Laos following the collapse of a dam. Such operations to provide HADR or combat terrorism and transnational crime could theoretically increase public support for the ARF.

A key problem, however, is the “human security deficit,” as these operations aim to maintain state sovereignty in the face of transnational challenges rather than being purely humanitarian. An example is the treatment of refugees. Although helping refugees would not necessarily encroach on a country’s sovereignty, several chairman’s statements label them as “irregular migrants,” which effectively diminishes their rights under international law.

Contextualizing ASEAN Centrality

The ARF became one of ASEAN’s “security offspring” due to a convergence of factors: geostrategic changes, the need for increased dialogue, ASEAN’s informal and nonthreatening dialogue process, and its geographic centrality.¹⁶ Despite growing criticisms of ASEAN centrality, all of the ARF’s chairman’s statements support ASEAN’s position in the driver’s seat of the forum. This shows that the organization is still a more

¹⁶ Simon, *ASEAN and Its Security Offspring*; and Maria Consuelo C. Ortuoste, “Reviewing the ASEAN Regional Forum and Its Role in Southeast Asian Security,” Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Occasional Paper, February 2000  <http://apcss.org/Publications/Ocasional%20Papers/OPAseanForum.htm>.

acceptable “driver” than any of the great powers. But what is to be its future role? And what does ASEAN centrality mean in the first place?

See Seng Tan has identified five meanings of this concept: leader/driver, convener/facilitator, hub/key node, an agent of progress, and an expedient device. He argues that this ambiguity actually creates “strategic space” for ASEAN to “enjoy a measure of latitude” in the midst of great-power involvement in the region.¹⁷ Such ambiguity, however, could get in the way of long-term requirements for regional stability. ASEAN faces limited choices. If it relinquishes its central role, it will be jettisoning the opportunity for small states to affect the regional environment. Such a decision would also demonstrate the fragility of ASEAN’s Political-Security Community, of which one component is strengthening the ARF.

Thinking of these five meanings of ASEAN centrality as arrayed along a spectrum rather than as discrete categories could help the organization focus its energies and fine-tune its role in specific areas. For example, ASEAN can be a useful convener/facilitator for meetings on geostrategic issues, like Singapore did for the U.S.–North Korea summit in June 2018. It can be a hub in terms of the ARF’s efforts to develop synergy with other processes and actors like the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) and the ADMM-Plus. It can be an agent of progress in terms of smaller cooperative actions—for example, cooperation among Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand to deal with maritime crime through the Malacca Strait Patrols. ASEAN could also develop guidelines and other capacities in areas such as the Bay of Bengal. Finally, it could be a leader or co-leader in HADR via the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance, which at the time of writing was providing updates on the situation in Indonesia after the Lombok earthquake.


Keeping the ARF unit within the ASEAN Secretariat gives the ASEAN states some control over the day-to-day operation of the forum. ASEAN needs to improve the capacity of that unit by increasing support for the ARF Fund, to which only three ASEAN countries have made contributions since around 2016.¹⁸ Most importantly, ASEAN members must find a renewed consensus position and recommit themselves to the project to lead the forum more cohesively.

¹⁷ See Seng Tan, “Rethinking ‘ASEAN Centrality’ in the Regional Governance of East Asia,” *Singapore Economic Review* 62, no. 3 (2017): 735.

¹⁸ Shaun Narine, *The New ASEAN in Asia Pacific and Beyond* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2018), 108.

Conclusion

The ARF continues to be a useful tool for the different participants to advance their separate agendas. Washington has viewed the ARF as a way to promote dialogue between South Korea and Japan, as well as to address challenges with regional repercussions, while Japan and China use the forum as “a vehicle to enhance their regional diplomacy.”¹⁹ Southeast Asian states, on the other hand, value the ARF for its “hedging utility” and as a tool of “omni-enmeshment.”²⁰

The variety of uses for the ARF has tended to keep the forum in a holding position—stuck at a waypoint. Addressing future regional security challenges will require greater participation and preventive diplomacy, as well as the prioritization of human security. If ASEAN identifies areas where it has a comparative advantage, then it can muster its limited resources to support specific roles in these issue areas. With great-power relations becoming more competitive and nontraditional security issues more urgent, ARF participants must prepare by developing better response mechanisms and constantly reassessing their course. Otherwise, the forum will be doomed to move backward rather than forward. 

¹⁹ Sheldon W. Simon, “The ASEAN Regional Forum: Beyond the Talk Shop,” National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), NBR Analysis Brief, July 2013.

²⁰ Jürgen Rüländ, “Southeast Asian Regionalism and Global Governance: ‘Multilateral Utility’ or ‘Hedging Utility?’” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 33, no. 1 (2011): 83–112; and Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007/2008): 113–57.

Track 2 Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific: Lessons for the Epistemic Community

Huiyun Feng

In the 1990s, Track 2 diplomacy and multilateralism led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) thrived in the Asia-Pacific, playing a major role in facilitating state cooperation in the economic and security arenas.¹ Almost 30 years later, major Track 2 institutions continue to exert influence, while new institutions have emerged in response to new challenges. This form of diplomacy has contributed to regional institution-building and cooperation; however, the contribution of Track 2 groups remains limited, and their influence is waning. Facing potential power shifts and looming U.S.-China competition on the world stage, Track 2 institutions and scholars will need to consider how to adapt to this volatile international situation in order to stay relevant in international relations in the Asia-Pacific.

This essay will first discuss the ups and downs of Track 2 diplomacy since the 1990s, followed by an analysis of the challenges that it faces now. The conclusion will provide suggestions for the future direction of Track 2 diplomacy.

Track 2 Diplomacy: Ups and Downs

In the conventional understanding, Track 1 diplomacy is the use of official governmental diplomatic channels, while Track 2 diplomacy refers to “nonofficial” diplomatic activities that facilitate confidence building and conflict resolution among states. The increase of Track 2 activities in the Asia-Pacific in the 1990s arose as part of regional institution-building efforts and also as a response to the diverse emerging security challenges in the post-Cold War era. New security challenges such as the 1997 financial crisis, haze pollution, maritime disputes, and drug trafficking crossed state

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¹ Track 2 institutions include the ASEAN-Institutes of Strategic and International Studies, the Council on Security and Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, and the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue, among others.

borders, and no single state could deal with them alone. Traditional military means also could not address these challenges effectively or efficiently.²

The strategic uncertainties after the Cold War provided a systemic window of opportunity for idea entrepreneurs—i.e., experts and scholars—to in effect sell their products to the policy community, where there is a high demand for innovative ideas. Track 2 diplomacy functioned well in the 1990s as an innovative, forward-looking generator of big ideas. More importantly, it served as a testing ground for new ideas and proposals.³ Sheldon Simon has pointed out that an epistemic community of “experts outside government will be utilized by governments to deal with issues considered too politically sensitive for Track 1 meetings,” and Track 2 “specialists, unencumbered by governance responsibilities, can gaze into the future, anticipating issues that could become international problems and thus devise coping strategies.”⁴

One unique feature of Track 2 diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific is the close connections and working relations between the two tracks—what Charles Morrison calls “symbiosis.”⁵ Two notable pairs of Track 1 and Track 2 institutions, for example, are the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Council on Security and Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) in the security realm, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) in the economic realm. The establishment of APEC in 1989 was built on the efforts of PECC after almost a decade. CSCAP’s pioneering research on preventive diplomacy was directly adopted by the ARF in the 1990s. The close cooperation between Track 1 and 2 institutions certainly facilitated the transfer of ideas from the epistemic community to policy venues. As Morrison points out, Track 1 “cooperation would never have developed as it did without the ideas and the consensus and support-building activities of Track 2. Track 2 would have been a sterile exercise but for its impact on Track 1.”⁶

Another unique feature of Track 2 diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific, and also one major feature of regional multilateralism, is that most of these

² Early Track 2 diplomacy posed a challenge to traditional state-centric international relations theories that emphasized state sovereignty and noninterference in international relations. This phenomenon was acknowledged by trailblazers such as Desmond Ball, Brian Job, and Sheldon Simon.

³ Charles E. Morrison, “Track 1/Track 2 Symbiosis in Asia-Pacific Regionalism,” *Pacific Review* 17, no. 4 (2004): 547–65.

⁴ Sheldon W. Simon, “Evaluating Track II Approaches to Security Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific: The CSCAP Experience,” *Pacific Review* 15, no. 2 (2002): 168.

⁵ Morrison, “Track 1/Track 2 Symbiosis,” 549.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 550.

activities were not initiated or led by major powers, such as the United States or China, but rather by middle powers, such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, together with the ASEAN countries. For example, PECC's first meeting, the Pacific Community Seminar, was initiated by Australia and Japan and held at the Australian National University in 1980. ASEAN has also played a leading or co-leading role in most Track 2 activities.

Yet the early success of Track 2 diplomacy did not guarantee continued smooth development. Although Track 2 activities grew in numbers in the early 2000s, their contributions and influence measured as direct policy contributions and adoptions remained limited and even declined.⁷ Track 2 diplomacy today faces several challenges, including an autonomy dilemma, a co-option problem, innovation deficiencies, and institutional competition.

What Herman Kraft has called the "autonomy dilemma" is a double-edged sword for Track 2 diplomacy—its connection with and dependence on Track 1.⁸ On the one hand, a close relationship with Track 1 provides Track 2 with a fast, direct channel to influence the policy community. On the other hand, dependence on Track 1, in terms of funding and resources, has seriously compromised the "independence of the Track 2 groups."⁹ As Morrison points out, Track 2 institutions "uncomfortably balance a desire for independence from government against their need for governmental financial resources and their interest in influencing government policies."¹⁰

Second, scholars participating in Track 2 diplomacy might face a co-option problem related to this institutional autonomy dilemma. As Simon has suggested, "experts may also be coopted by governments to justify policy positions taken by states prior to Track II investigations."¹¹ In other words, participants may still talk and behave as if they are representing their official positions even in their private capacity. Even if scholars are not co-opted, they may not dare utter different ideas from official policies. As Morrison points out, "In Asia there may be less rotation in and out of government, but the government/non-governmental roles are often less distinct."¹²

⁷ David Capie, "When Does Track Two Matter? Structure, Agency and Asian Regionalism," *Review of International Political Economy* 17, no. 2 (2010): 291–318.

⁸ Herman Joseph S. Kraft, "The Autonomy Dilemma of Track Two Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," *Security Dialogue* 31, no. 3 (2000): 343–56.

⁹ Simon, "Evaluating Track II Approaches," 172.

¹⁰ Morrison, "Track 1/Track 2 Symbiosis," 549.

¹¹ Simon, "Evaluating Track II Approaches," 168.

¹² Morrison, "Track 1/Track 2 Symbiosis," 549.

Third, in working closely with Track 1 over time, there is the danger of eroding the innovative capacity of these scholars and experts because they are too close to the officials.¹³ In particular, these same experts tend to attend almost all the same functions. Even setting aside their self-interests and institutional interests, it is hard to see innovative ideas or new narratives emerging from the same groups of experts repeatedly. Last but not least, the existing Track 2 institutions are now facing serious competition from newer actors, such as the Shangri-La Dialogue and the Xiangshan Forum. Most of these diplomatic institutions and dialogues in the Asia-Pacific were established in the 1990s, thereby favoring ASEAN's strong presence and leadership position. However, member countries became more domestically focused after the 2008 global financial crisis. Consequently, ASEAN's leadership role in guiding Track 2 diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific is eroding due to outside challenges. For example, the Shangri-La Dialogue is hosted by a British think tank, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, in Singapore and has strong U.S. participation, which has posed an institutional challenge to the norms and practices of ASEAN-oriented Track 2 diplomacy.¹⁴ Though it may be argued that the Shangri-La Dialogue is a Track 1.5 institution, in which many participants are current officials instead of former officials in their personal capacities, its increasing importance nevertheless threatens the relevance of ASEAN in regional institution-building in both Track 1 and Track 2 diplomacy.

New Challenges to Track 2 Diplomacy

Beside the above problems, Track 2 diplomacy faces new challenges in a period of power shifts and a volatile international order. First, high politics has returned to the Asia-Pacific with looming strategic competition between the United States and China. Regional Track 2 diplomacy, such as through CSCAP, seems ineffective in alleviating the inevitable clash between the two countries during this transitional period in the regional order. The role of less formal bilateral channels might appear inadequate unless they can directly influence the top leaders in both countries. Given the rise of strong leadership in both the United States and China, the voice and effectiveness of Track 2 experts and scholars may become more limited in the decision-making process. Strong leaders usually prefer to set their

¹³ David Capie and Brendan Taylor, "The Shangri-La Dialogue and the Institutionalization of Defence Diplomacy in Asia," *Pacific Review* 23, no. 3 (2010): 359–76.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

own political agendas and may not desire supporting voices or reaffirming figures, and certainly not dissonance or new ideas.

Therefore, we will probably see more mirroring, and even what Simon calls co-opting, of Track 2 diplomacy in the future. As a result, regional Track 2 institutions may lose their relevance. As Morrison points out, since “both national policy and global institutions have been more important in economic development than regional institutions (in [the] Asia Pacific),” these institutions might only make a marginal difference in economic cooperation.¹⁵ The media, particularly social media, poses another challenge to Track 2 diplomacy in the way issues gain attention—media “experts” are everywhere to provide comments and opinions regarding a wide range of issues on Facebook, Twitter, and other outlets. Track 2 practitioners will need to compete with such experts for attention on the agenda of the policymakers. This challenge is particularly tough because serious research demands time, while social media analysis is quick and usually spontaneous.

The early stages of Track 2 institution-building consisted mostly of ad hoc efforts targeting immediate issues of concern for possible solutions: CSCAP working groups targeted comprehensive security, North Korean nuclear tests, and maritime issues, while PECC focused on regional economic cooperation. After the initial years of success, these Track 2 institutions are experiencing “middle-age syndrome”—in other words, they are growing old, boring, and perhaps lost in their future direction. From the perspective of Track 1 institutions, Track 2 diplomacy might continue to be useful at certain times when some issues are too sensitive to be addressed directly by official processes. Over time, the sensitivity of these issues might disappear due to the efforts of the nonofficial track.¹⁶ Ironically, the success of Track 2 diplomacy posits a new challenge to its future development when its original function is no longer needed to complement Track 1.

How Can Track 2 Diplomacy Continue to Matter?

A key question that Track 2 institutions must consider is how to change their missions to address new problems and find new outlets to contribute to the policymaking process. The Track 2 process is different from strictly academic research in that it is an epistemic community in which scholars and experts can pool their expertise to conduct more systematic research than

¹⁵ Morrison, “Track 1/Track 2 Symbiosis,” 548.

¹⁶ Capie, “When Does Track Two Matter?” 306.

an individual scholar could do. Some scholars, such as David Capie, rightly point out that Track 2 “may require an unusual window of opportunity to have influence on policy makers.”¹⁷ Capie highlights the significance of structural opportunities for norm entrepreneurs and the Track 2 process. The emerging power transition between the United States and China and the resulting changes in the political and economic order in the Asia-Pacific indeed offer a structural opportunity for Track 2 diplomacy to regain a more important role in influencing the policy community. However, to do so, Track 2 institutions and scholars need to modify their traditional missions and approaches in order to cope with the new challenges ahead.

First, the function of Track 2 diplomacy should remain based on forward-looking research and competitive, comprehensive, and insightful policy analyses. Although it seems fashionable and urgent for academics and analysts to focus on hot spots and current events, it would be shortsighted in the long run. As many scholars have pointed out, the success of Track 2 activities in the past clearly indicates that their value lies in insights in areas where the policy circle lacks expertise. Such diplomacy should continue to provide long-term theoretical and empirical research, combined with cultural and historical understanding, that can serve as the basis for policy. Track 2 institutions should take the leading role in projecting future directions of policy-relevant research.

Second, Track 2 scholars should broaden their research agendas. There is no lack of topics in the Asia-Pacific. For example, these scholars could provide solid analyses on the feasibility and institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific concept through comprehensive and comparative investigations. Because this idea is still new, Track 2 institutions have the potential to exert more influence in shaping the development of an Indo-Pacific strategy with their systematic research and inquiries. On a similar note, China’s Belt and Road Initiative has also attracted worldwide attention. Although there are many suspicions regarding the purpose and implications of the initiative, developing strategies for utilizing its positive elements and minimizing its negative impacts is also a worthy area of discussion and study for Track 2 activities.

In the past, Track 2 diplomacy mainly served as a signaling mechanism or channel for Track 1 institutions to communicate sensitive information and intentions. In the future, Track 2 institutions and scholars should consider playing a more active role in shaping the Track 1 policy agenda

¹⁷ Capie, “When Does Track Two Matter?” 307.

and even state intentions by introducing innovative ideas and proposals. Despite a temporary downturn in the development of Track 2 activities in the last two decades, such diplomacy can continue to play a key role in promoting cooperation and confidence building in the Asia-Pacific. Continuing Track 2 activities and forums is significant in itself because they can shape ideas and norms that cultivate the habit of cooperation among states in the Asia-Pacific. ◆

“No Sole Control” in the South China Sea?

Donald K. Emmerson

Connoisseurs of the international relations of Southeast Asia owe much to the scholarship of the widely published, well-known, and warmly regarded author and educator Sheldon Simon. Relevant for this essay here is a 1985 article of his about China’s relations with Southeast Asia. The manifold ways in which the world has changed have not lessened the value of the opening insight in that piece. Without succumbing to historicism, Simon acknowledged parallels between China’s traditional and twentieth-century ways of dealing with its Southeast Asian neighbors: “The essence of Beijing’s policy, then and now, is that China must play a primary role in determining regional order.”¹

Notwithstanding the differences between the Middle Kingdom and the People’s Republic, Simon saw China maintaining its earlier inclination to benefit “those neighbors willing to acknowledge its regional prominence” while punishing “those who refuse to acquiesce.” One could hardly ask for a more accurate description of China’s approach to Southeast Asia in 2018—more than three decades after Simon wrote the article. Looking forward, he presciently surmised that, for most states in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China would remain “an incipient problem.”²

Problematic China

In Southeast Asia today, China is simultaneously a security problem and an economic opportunity. Due to space constraints, only the problem that China poses for its southern neighbors is discussed, not the opportunity that China also represents for them, and the problem’s scope is limited to Beijing’s intentions and behavior in the South China Sea. The argument is twofold. First, China wants more than prominence

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¹ Sheldon W. Simon, “China and South-East Asia: Protector or Predator,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 39, no. 2 (1985): 93 ~ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10357718508444879>.

² *Ibid.*, 93, 97.

in that body of water. What it wants, and has been working energetically to obtain, is dominance—control. Second, it is time for claimant and user states alike—those that assert sovereignty in the South China Sea, including China, and those that access and transit its waters—to agree that no single country, including any one of them, should control the South China Sea.

Frequently at international colloquies the author has attended, a Chinese diplomat or semi-official analyst will assure his listeners not only that his government does not want to interrupt or shape the flow of traffic in the South China Sea, but that it unilaterally “guarantees” freedom of navigation across the sea’s waters. Only by controlling the South China Sea all by itself could China carry out that assurance. As for sharing responsibility for the protection of maritime traffic equitably with the sea’s other claimants and users, how could Beijing do that without abandoning the ambition for sole control embodied in its notorious nine-dash line?³ The line is therefore discussed below.

China’s long-standing and ongoing strategy in the South China Sea has been to divide, intimidate, entice, and displace its Southeast Asian rivals for the sake of gaining and entrenching Chinese maritime control.⁴ Ample evidence backs this judgment: the unilateral imposition of fishing restrictions on the sea’s northern half; the coercive appropriation of the land features and their surrounding waters up to unspecified limits in nearly all of the sea; the incorporation of the sea’s features and related waters into Hainan Province under Chinese law, including features not yet occupied by China; and the augmentation and transformation of Chinese-occupied features into military bases. Equipped with runways, hangars, docks, missile emplacements, and tools of electronic warfare, these bases back up thinly veiled Chinese threats to attack unwanted visitors, including Philippine and Vietnamese vessels and planes.⁵ Indeed, with such weapons

³ In 2014, China lengthened the line by adding a tenth dash east of Taiwan. Absorbing Taiwan into the mainland ranks at or near the top in importance among Beijing’s “core interests.” The added dash therefore increased the plausibility of the argument that China wants to control the South China Sea at almost any cost.

⁴ For more, see Donald K. Emmerson, “Why Does China Want to Control the South China Sea?” *Diplomat*, May 24, 2016 ≈ <https://thediplomat.com/2016/05/why-does-china-want-to-control-the-south-china-sea>.

⁵ For evidence of such threats, see Associated Press, “Philippines Raises Concern over Chinese Radio Warnings to Stay Away from South China Sea Islands,” *South China Morning Post*, August 7, 2018 ≈ <https://www.scmp.com/print/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2157542/philippines-raises-concern-over-chinese-radio-warnings>; and Carl Thayer “Alarming Escalation in the South China Sea: China Threatens Force if Vietnam Continues Oil Exploration in Spratlys,” *Diplomat*, July 24, 2017 ≈ <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/alarming-escalation-in-the-south-china-sea-china-threatens-force-if-vietnam-continues-oil-exploration-in-spratlys>.

centrally located in the maritime heart of Southeast Asia, Beijing can strike targets throughout the region. For ASEAN's members, China has been economically opportune. But Beijing has also practiced "debt-trap diplomacy" by leveraging its ostensible largesse to motivate recipient states to align with China to the detriment of ASEAN's unity and centrality. The purchase of Cambodian despot Hun Sen's loyalty as a proxy veto of ASEAN positions to which Beijing objects is a case in point.

Mapping Control: Dashes?

In 2009, six years after announcing a "strategic partnership" with the ASEAN states, Beijing unveiled its now infamous nine-dash line. As a claim to sovereignty, the line remains substantively and operationally opaque. But no one could mistake the scale of the presumption that it implies, encompassing as it does nearly all of the 1.4 million square miles of the South China Sea.

The line's *locus classicus* lies in two diplomatic notes that China submitted to the UN secretary-general in May 2009. According to both notes, "China has indisputable sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea and the adjacent waters, and enjoys sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the relevant waters as well as the seabed and subsoil thereof (see attached map)."⁶ The map that China attached featured a series of nine unconnected dashes forming a large U-shape around virtually all of the sea. They lacked coordinates and were separated by spaces of varying lengths. The map bore no explanatory caption or notes, not even a title. Some baffled and suspicious viewers filled in the blanks to imagine a giant "cow's tongue" protruding from the Chinese mainland as if to lap up the entire South China Sea.⁷

What aspiration do the dashes represent? Are they meant to signal, at the greediest extreme, three-dimensional Chinese ownership of everything from the seabed up through the water column, across the surface in all directions, and on up through the air to a flight ceiling 30,000–40,000 feet high? More than a few analysts would consider this

⁶ China issued objections to the continental shelf limits advanced by Malaysia and Vietnam. See, respectively, Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the United Nations, "Note Verbale," CML/17/2009, May 7, 2009 http://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/mysvnm33_09/chn_2009re_mys_vnm_e.pdf; and Permanent Mission of the PRC to the United Nations, "Note Verbale," CML/18/2009, May 7, 2009 http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/vnm37_09/chn_2009re_vnm.pdf.

⁷ "Beijing's Hungry Cow's Tongue in the South China Sea," TV Sarawak, February 28, 2016 <http://tvsarawak.com/2016/07/10/beijings-hungry-cows-tongue-in-the-south-china-sea>.

imputation of all-embracing avarice to Beijing a gratuitous exaggeration. Yet Chinese officials have still not defined “adjacent waters” or “relevant waters,” nor have they clarified the dashed line. How, then, can one be sure that the relevant waters are not synonymous with the entire tongue in all three dimensions?

Are the dashes legal? One could consult two treaties that China has ratified: the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Convention on International Civil Aviation (CICA). Perusing UNCLOS, one would learn that Beijing’s nine-dash diplomacy has skirted and thereby obscured the application of that treaty’s categories and distinctions to the South China Sea. Presumably, “adjacent waters” are next to something, and “relevant waters” are somehow pertinent. But nowhere in UNCLOS’s 202 pages do these coinages appear. One could then search CICA—and fail to find them there.⁸

In July 2016, an international arbitral court, convened and enabled under UNCLOS terms, basically ruled that China’s claim is not consonant with the convention. Having boycotted the arbitration, Beijing denounced its outcome. It could have invited any of its rival claimants in Southeast Asia—Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, or Vietnam—to submit the dispute to the International Court of Justice.⁹ Unlike UNCLOS courts, the International Court of Justice is authorized to adjudicate conflicting sovereignty claims. But China, never having submitted any of its sovereignty conflicts to the court, prefers to continue to label its disputed position “indisputable.”¹⁰

Tweaking Control: Sands?

The defeat in absentia at arbitration in 2016 did seemingly prompt Beijing to tweak its claim the following year. In Boston on August 28 and 29, 2017, behind closed doors at the eighth annual U.S.-China Dialogue on the Law of the Sea and Polar Issues, Chinese foreign ministry official

⁸ See the “United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea,” United Nations, 1982 (effective 1994) ~ http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf; and the *Convention on International Civil Aviation*, 9th edition, 1944 (effective 1947) (Montreal: International Civil Aviation Organization, 2006 ~ https://www.icao.int/publications/Documents/7300_9ed.pdf).

⁹ Although Jakarta still denies that a dispute with Beijing exists, in a small part of Indonesia’s exclusive economic zone that overlaps with the nine-dash line, clashes with Chinese fishermen have occurred.

¹⁰ See, for example, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang’s Regular Press Conference on May 24, 2018,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PRC), Beijing, May 24, 2018 ~ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1562307.shtml.

Ma Xinmin reportedly conveyed to his State Department counterpart a new way of rationalizing Chinese maritime dominance in Southeast Asia. This rationalization, dubbed the “four sha” approach using the Chinese word for sand, asserts Beijing’s sovereignty over three sets of land features: the Paracel, Spratly, and Pratas groups, plus Macclesfield Bank. Reportedly, according to Ma, these formations all rest on China’s continental shelf and warrant two-hundred-nautical-mile exclusive economic zones.¹¹

China’s claims to these features are not new. But unlike the centripetal nine-dash line, in which sovereignty was inferred to flow inward from that perimeter, the four-sha rationale is centrifugal. It infers Chinese sovereignty projected outward from land features to the waters around them. In that respect, the new explanation seems to accommodate a foundational precept in maritime law that rights in the sea must derive from rights to the land, not the reverse. At the meeting in Boston, the nine dashes apparently played no role in Ma’s account of the four-sha position, although the line was not officially abandoned.¹² As for treating the three groups of features as archipelagoes to maximize the sea space thereby entailed, that ploy blatantly violates UNCLOS rules, because obviously China is not itself an archipelagic state and cannot be turned into one merely by claiming the four sha.¹³

The centripetal approach has not died. In 2018, Chinese researchers linked to the Guanghua and Geosciences Club (GGC) said they had discovered a 1951 map on which China’s claim was bordered by two continuous solid lines, one black, representing the sovereign border, and one red, representing an administrative one. But it was a distinction without a difference. Supposedly delineating sovereign versus administrative authority, the two lines were drawn so closely that they almost form a single boundary over what the researchers tellingly called “China’s sea.”¹⁴ Ignored is the legal precept referred to above: that sovereign rights over sea space can

¹¹ Ronald O’Rourke, “China’s Actions in South and East China Seas: Implications for U.S. Interests—Background and Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, R42784, August 1, 2018 ~ <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42784.pdf>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ UNCLOS, part IV.

¹⁴ For more information, see O’Rourke, “China’s Actions,” 84–86; Richard Javad Heydarian, “China’s ‘New’ Map Aims to Extend South China Sea Claims,” *Asia Times*, April 29, 2018 ~ <http://www.atimes.com/article/for-weekend-chinas-new-map-aims-to-extend-south-china-sea-claims>; and S.D. Pradhan, “New Chinese Map of South China Sea: Discovery or Fabrication?” *Times of India*, Chanakya Code, April 30, 2018 ~ <https://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/ChanakyaCode/new-chinese-map-of-south-china-sea-discovery-or-fabrication>.

only be derived outward from ownership of a coast or other land feature from which zones can be legally drawn under UNCLOS.

The four-sha approach uses UNCLOS terms, as if to cultivate an impression of legality, but like the nine-dash line, it contravenes the treaty. Rather than adopt the GGC map as official propaganda, China's government may prefer merely to have it available for citation as evidence of allegedly historical support. Just as the four-sha approach has not replaced the nine dashes, which continue to appear on the broken-line map inside Chinese passports, neither has the solid-line map yet upstaged the four-sha approach. Beijing prefers to leave its rationales plural and murky, but not disavowed, to keep rival claimants off-balance, the better to divide them.

Controlling Conduct?


In the stacks of official statements and declarations that constitute the textual history of diplomacy over the South China Sea, the word “control” is hard to find. Favoring tact over candor, diplomats have preferred a less incendiary term: “conduct.” For more than a quarter-century, since the issue was first officially broached in 1992 by the six states then making up ASEAN, the goal of negotiating a “code of international conduct” in the South China Sea continues to be discussed, but still remains to be achieved.

Responsibility for this prolonged delay rests partly with the positions of some Southeast Asian claimant states and partly with the creativity-stifling “ASEAN way” of consensus as a prerequisite without which policy cannot be made. Mostly, however, the fault belongs to China, whose intransigent claims, military moves, and diplomatic stratagems including cooptation have stoked local pushback while enabling Beijing to turn the ASEAN condition of consensus into a barrier to action. Because Beijing wants control, it continues to oppose and delay an enforceable code that could actually impede or even scuttle that result. Control in this context can be defined simply as the successful exercise of coercive influence consistently affecting the behavior of other states under, in, or above the South China Sea. Realistically, no Southeast Asian state can or does aspire to control even one of these three spheres, for lack of capacity and given the scale and lethality of Chinese force.

In this complex and so far unfruitful context, it is time to consider the value of a joint declaration by several willing and interested states that no single country—not the United States, not China, nor anyone else—should exercise sole, exclusionary, coercive control over the South China Sea.

Launching and pursuing the principle of no sole control could have several merits. First, it would challenge China to explain why anyone should believe that Chinese ownership of the sea and its contents is not synonymous with control. Second, it would augment the abstract “moralpolitik” of international law with a more visceral and compelling realpolitik case against national domination. Third, it would resonate with traditional Southeast Asian notions of nonalignment by ruling out sole rule by any one country, not just China. Fourth, because the phrase “no sole control” states what should not occur, it could stimulate creative thinking about positive outcomes—“win-wins” in Beijing’s terminology—achievable through cooperative alternatives to sole control.

Fifth and finally, inserting the notion of no sole control into the draft text of a code of conduct in the South China Sea could serve, at least on paper, as a warning against turning that body of water into someone’s lake. This last merit is especially timely in light of Chinese efforts in 2018 to persuade ASEAN’s members to accept a code that explicitly bars other states *other than China* from engaging in military exercises or energy exploration with Southeast Asian partners in the South China Sea.¹⁵

Simon’s “incipient problem” has not gone away. In the South China Sea, it has gotten worse. The challenge going forward will be countering Beijing’s ploys of control in ways that avoid dangerous escalation without aiding Chinese domination. An effort to agree on “no sole control” would help. 

¹⁵ “Beijing Wants South China Sea Drills with ASEAN, Excluding U.S.,” *Philippine Star*, August 3, 2018  <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/08/03/1839290/beijing-wants-south-china-sea-drills-asean-excluding-us>.

Fifty-Plus Years of Watching Asia: An American Perspective

Sheldon W. Simon

As a prelude to this personal rumination on the issues in Asian international politics that have occupied my professional life, I wish to express appreciation to See Seng Tan for asking so many well-qualified colleagues to contribute their own assessments to this compendium. My fascination with Asian politics began as an undergraduate in the 1950s at the University of Minnesota, where on a cold, snowy morning in January, Professor Werner Levi—a German-Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany who held three doctorates, including one in politics—stated that the world’s future would lie in Asia. A combination of ancient civilizations, historical grandeur, and a strong work ethic among its populations, he argued, would transform Asia in due course into the world’s most dynamic region. He went on to say that those of us who planned for a career in public affairs should consider becoming students of Asia. I was convinced.

Upon completing my PhD in political science, I took a position with the U.S. government for three years analyzing Soviet and Chinese commentary on Asia. During this time, I honed the research interests that characterized my subsequent academic life—the interface between the great powers and Asian states as well as the dynamics of the developing Asian actors in dealing with great-power pressures and blandishments. Of course, the Asia-Pacific was home to three of those great powers—the United States in the aftermath of World War II, China under the aegis of its Communist Party, and the Soviet Union. This essay addresses these dynamics in two sections—one on the security arrangements in North and Southeast Asia and one on recent U.S. relations with states in both subregions—before concluding with some final thoughts.

Northeast and Southeast Asian Security Arrangements

From an American perspective, it is useful to divide the analysis of East Asia into its northern and southern components. The United States’ Cold War and post-Cold War attention to the region may be assessed through its security arrangements. For Northeast Asia, this would be the ongoing presence of U.S. forces in the aftermath of World War II. Japan and the

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Republic of Korea (ROK) became junior partners in Washington's East Asia strategy opposing the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and North Korea. Thus, the U.S. hub-and-spoke security arrangement came into existence. Unlike NATO, a multilateral European military alliance requiring each member to come to the others' defense in the event of an attack, Washington was unable to effect a similar arrangement between Japan, the ROK, and the United States. Korean bitterness over Japan's colonial legacy meant that Seoul was unwilling to engage in any security agreement with Tokyo. The alternative was separate U.S. bilateral defense treaties between the United States and each country. The United States was the "hub" and its bilateral partners were the separate "spokes." These spokes for the most part did not interact militarily with each other. For example, until recently, the Japanese and ROK navies only directly interacted with each other through U.S. intersession in multilateral maritime exercises such as the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC).

By contrast, the Southeast Asian states assayed a number of times to create multilateral institutions beginning in the 1950s—for example, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, the Association of Southeast Asia, and Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia (MAPHILINDO). None were successful, but all demonstrated a realization among non-Communist elites in the region that some form of political collaboration was necessary to deal with both extraregional and intraregional challenges from China, the Soviet Union, and North Vietnam. Southeast Asian leaders were also concerned that Western states might leave the region as the Indochina wars of the 1950s and 1960s ended with Communist victories.

Southeast Asian leaders conceived a new regional organization in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), composed of Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia. In the mid-1960s, Indonesia's president and founding father Sukarno had attempted to destroy Malaysia, which he saw as a neocolonialist country. Generally seen as the strongest country in Southeast Asia based on geography, population, and abundant natural resources, Indonesia had threatened regional stability during the Sukarno years by aligning with Communist states that he labeled the "new emerging forces."

The political rise of the military under President Suharto shifted the country's orientation to the West as well as to its neighbors, just as other Southeast Asian leaders were searching for a way to embed Indonesia in a regional organization that simultaneously would acknowledge the country's importance while requiring it to follow regional norms. The creation of

ASEAN was partly motivated by Southeast Asian anxiety about how to incorporate Indonesia. Over the next several years, ASEAN developed a number of principles to which all five members agreed. The first of these was to protect the region's autonomy from external interference and to prohibit the involvement of the ASEAN states in each other's domestic affairs. (The recent history of Indonesia's efforts to destroy Malaysia was undoubtedly a motivation.) A second principle was respect for those ASEAN members who had aligned with Western powers—Malaysia and Singapore in the Five Power Defence Arrangements, and the Philippines and Thailand through their bilateral security accords with the United States. Indonesia's formal neutrality was similarly honored.

Beyond these basic political principles, in time ASEAN also added a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality and a Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone. The former constituted a pledge that no new alliances with external states would be struck, while implicitly grandfathering the alignments that had already been formed by members. The latter was designed to keep nuclear weapons out of the region to reassure China and Vietnam.

It is important to emphasize that ASEAN has not become a military alliance. There are no joint exercises involving the armed forces of all member states, though some bilateral exercises exist. The greatest extent of security cooperation is the Malacca Strait Patrol (MSP), which was formed by four littoral states, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand to combat piracy. Ships from these four states patrol their respective maritime zones and notify each other if pirates are encountered. Aircraft containing representatives of the MSP states also patrol the skies above the strait and inform MSP ships of any nefarious activity they observe. Neither the United States nor any other external power is involved in the MSP.

By the end of the 1990s, ASEAN had become one of the most politically diverse regional organizations in the world. In 2015, it contained complete democracies (the Philippines and Indonesia); partial democracies (Singapore and Malaysia); military dictatorships (Myanmar and Thailand); Communist states (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia); and a hereditary monarchy (Brunei). Two members had formal security commitments from Washington (the Philippines and Thailand), and one a less formal but robust military relationship with the United States (Singapore). Nevertheless, even in Southeast Asia, U.S. military arrangements, as in Northeast Asia, remain essentially a hub-and-spoke schema. U.S. security relationships are bilateral.

U.S. Security Relations in Asia

Under the two most recent U.S. presidents, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, the United States has linked Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia both in politico-security dimensions and in economic affairs. Having spent part of his childhood in Indonesia, President Obama had a particular affinity for Southeast Asia. In fact, the region became one of the Obama administration's priorities, and ASEAN became the base for a series of new institutions that brought China, the United States, Japan, and the ROK into ASEAN-initiated forums. The ASEAN Regional Forum, East Asia Summit, and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus are on the political-security side, while the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN Free Trade Area, Asian Monetary Fund, and modified Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) are on the economic side of the ledger. Added to these are China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and Belt and Road Initiative, to which all ASEAN members belong but the United States does not.

Because my primary research interests have been on the security side of the ledger, the remainder of this essay will focus on Asian security. Contrasting the Obama and Trump policies toward Asia yields a stark difference in rhetoric but less so far in practice. President Obama spoke of enhanced Asia-Pacific cooperation centered on ASEAN-initiated institutions, alongside security assistance from Japan and South Korea to Southeast Asian partners. The Trump administration has criticized Asian allies and partners for their trade practices if they ran surpluses with the United States (Japan and the ROK) and censored them for not compensating Washington enough for their defense (again Japan and the ROK). In other words, for President Trump, U.S. forces in Asia are not in the region for joint security but as hired guns to protect other countries, for which Washington should be reimbursed. To this author's knowledge, only one cabinet officer has regularly stood up for the international security order established by the United States in the aftermath of World War II—Secretary of Defense James Mattis. He has spoken and acted on behalf of U.S. alliances and partnerships and promoted ASEAN centrality in Southeast Asia. He has advocated for cooperation with China “wherever possible” and supported both “new opportunities for meaningful multilateral cooperation” and deepening U.S. “engagement

with existing regional mechanisms.” These statements were most recently articulated at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018.¹

A good example of the security linkages between Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia is the equipment transfer and training programs between the coast guards of Japan and South Korea and several ASEAN counterparts. Tokyo, in particular, began providing training for Southeast Asian maritime police as early as the 1990s. Later, because of an attack on a Japanese cargo vessel, the government initiated counterpiracy cooperation in the Malacca Strait. Subsequently, Tokyo launched a series of meetings that gave birth to the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) located in Singapore. These agreements also led to the annual Head of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting. The Malaysian, Philippine, Vietnamese, and Indonesian coast guards have all received training and vessels from Japan via its Overseas Development Assistance program. Thus, the Japan Coast Guard has become an important component of Tokyo’s maritime diplomacy, and the security of Southeast Asian territorial waters and exclusive economic zones (EEZs) has been enhanced through Japanese assistance.

One of the most contentious areas in Asia is the South China Sea, a semi-enclosed body of water through which over half of global commercial maritime traffic passes. The South China Sea is embroiled in overlapping sovereignty claims involving China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, and the Philippines. The U.S. Seventh Fleet has dominated these waters since the 1950s; however, in the last twenty years, China has begun to challenge U.S. preeminence as the country gradually modernized its navy and air force. As early as 1992, the National People’s Congress passed a law that claimed the South China Sea as the PRC’s national waters. Little international attention was paid to this legislation because Beijing did not yet have the means to enforce it. At the same time, China printed maps with a nine-dash line—originally produced in 1947—that encompasses between 80% and 90% of the South China Sea, including the Spratly and Paracel Islands. Vietnam also claims both the Paracels and Spratlys, while Brunei, the Philippines, and Malaysia claim portions of the Spratlys near their land baselines.

China’s legal position with respect to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is idiosyncratic. Beijing argues that whoever owns the water also owns all the land within it—including

¹ James Mattis (remarks at a plenary session of the Shangri-La Dialogue, June 2, 2018, Singapore) ~ <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1538599/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-at-plenary-session-of-the-2018-shangri-la-dialogue>.

shoals, reefs, rocks, and islands. The legal argument of the vast majority of other littoral states is the opposite. That is, land baselines determine twelve-nautical-mile sea extensions of land borders, followed by EEZs extending two-hundred nautical miles. Beyond the EEZs lie international waters. Overlapping EEZs require negotiations to determine boundaries. This latter interpretation comports with UNCLOS as stated by a 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague, but China has refused to accept the ruling.

U.S. involvement in the South China Sea imbroglio can be traced to the Obama administration in 2010. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that the United States had an important interest in the peaceful resolution of the territorial disputes, that they should be resolved through ASEAN-based regional multilateral venues, and that Washington would be willing to assist in a diplomatic resolution if requested.² Washington also stated that it has no preference with respect to any of the claimants' positions. Unsurprisingly, China has vigorously opposed any U.S. diplomatic intervention. The United States has continued regular military exercises with Southeast Asian countries, including Cobra Gold, the U.S.-Philippine Amphibious Landing Exercise (Philbex), Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT), and Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT), as well as Balikatan. The latter was restarted with the Philippines in 2018, following President Rodrigo Duterte's earlier suspension of the joint exercise as a gesture of goodwill to China.

China has supplemented its naval and air force modernization through the artificial enhancement of the Paracel and Spratly reefs and shoals into islands. Beginning in 2017, these formations have been militarized with docks and air strips that can accommodate many units of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy and Air Force. China's goal is to dominate the East and South China Seas in due course and to thereby control the first island chain through Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Concomitant with this goal is the desire to surpass and ultimately eject the U.S. naval presence from the region. These hard-power aspirations are reflected in Beijing's international rhetoric that "it is time for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia." Because the PRC controls most of the Paracels and

² Hillary Rodham Clinton (remarks following the ASEAN Regional Forum, Hanoi, July 23, 2010) ~ <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/07/145095.htm>.

Spratlys, it has employed the China Coast Guard more than the PLA Navy in these waters.³

The U.S. riposte to these developments has been inconsistent in the Trump administration. U.S. freedom of navigation patrols were introduced under Obama, during which U.S. ships would steam within twelve nautical miles of selected Paracel and Spratly Islands that China occupied. The purpose of these patrols, tacitly endorsed by other claimants, was to demonstrate that Washington did not accept China's sovereignty claims. At the same time, the United States urged ASEAN to take the lead in resolving the disputes. Under President Trump, the U.S. Department of Defense, led by Secretary Mattis, has increased the number of freedom of navigation patrols in 2018. Secretary Mattis has also endorsed ASEAN efforts to work with China to craft a code of conduct on the South China Sea that provides a mechanism for the peaceful settlement of territorial claims. In effect, the defense secretary has taken on a diplomatic as well as a military role. However, Trump holds a more jaundiced view of international cooperation. His "America first" mantra translates into a visceral rejection of multilateralism in favor of exclusively bilateral arrangements.

An examination of the U.S. National Security Strategy released in December 2017 shows that Washington is re-energizing bilateral alliances with Thailand and the Philippines and strengthening ties with "cooperative maritime partners" Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Counterterrorism is the hook on which bilateral cooperation on greater law enforcement, defense, and intelligence will be emphasized in Southeast Asia. Darwin, Australia, is also the location of up to 1,500 U.S. marines who serve six-month rotations.

Defense is the sphere in which U.S. multilateral cooperation still occurs in Southeast Asia. Australia, Japan, India, and the United States are discussing ways of balancing China in the Indian and Pacific Oceans through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Although it is premature to call this initiative a move toward a defense agreement, the four states are discussing options for keeping the seas open. Japan, Australia, and the United States, for example, are already supplying Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand with boats, radars, and training to protect their coastal waters and fisheries.

³ In fact, the PLA Navy assumed supervision of the China Coast Guard in July 2018.

Essentially, the South China Sea disputes and the strategic blending of the Indian and Pacific Oceans in the new concept of the Indo-Pacific constitute the latest manifestation of a classic international relations conundrum: how do a dominant power (the United States), a rising power (China), and medium powers (the ASEAN states, Japan, India, and Australia) cope with the rivalry between the two leading states? In terms of realpolitik, there seems to be both internal and external balancing; with respect to international norms, there are efforts to apply UNCLOS and an incipient code of conduct that would craft rules for using these waters. The PRC, by contrast, is emphasizing realpolitik, or hard power, as it militarizes the islands it has built and deploys more navy and coast guard vessels to the region. The United States likewise has increased its own naval and air presence with freedom of navigation patrols and more deployments in the East and South China Seas. At the same time, the ASEAN states, though augmenting their own capabilities to defend their territorial waters and EEZs, are relying more on international norms by attempting to craft a legally binding code of conduct that would apply to all who use the South China Sea.

Closing Thoughts

As I indicated at the outset of this rumination, my scholarly interests have focused on the ways in which small and medium-sized Asian powers interact with their larger and more powerful neighbors, as well as with the United States, to promote their autonomy, prosperity, and security. Hence, my attention to the manner in which middle powers cooperate to elicit support from more powerful partners without at the same time submitting to their control.

The Trump presidency is clearly an aberration in the history of U.S. administrations since the end of World War II. The president seems bent on dismantling the international arrangements that have established global security and economic order, even though these institutions have particularly benefited the United States over the past 70-plus years, especially in the economic dimension. Washington has inaugurated trade wars with allies and adversaries alike based on the invalid economic theory that only bilateral trade surpluses benefit the country and that multilateral trade and financial institutions have harmed the United States. One of Trump's first actions as president was to withdraw the United States from the TPP, thus leaving international trade arrangements in the region primarily to China,

which has launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and Belt and Road Initiative.

Security seems less fraught than economics. Washington's Asian alliances remain intact; joint exercises, for the most part, continue; overseas deployments of U.S. forces endure; and freedom of navigation patrols by the U.S. military have actually increased. However, Trump has threatened to withdraw forces from both Japan and the ROK, primarily as money-saving measures, though no reductions have occurred as yet. Nevertheless, Trump's statements negatively affect the United States' reputation for reliability and the future of its Asian security relationships. No ally or partner wants to abandon the United States and align with China, but many are searching for alternative security arrangements that limit the U.S. role. The longer Trump continues to repeat his "America first" declarations, the more difficult it will be for his successor to recover the United States' prior leadership position in the Asia-Pacific in both security and economics. ◆