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Abstract	As ASEAN marks its 40 anniversary, US-ASEAN relations show signs of success and potential future growth. Viewed from the perspective of where US-ASEAN relations were four decades ago, signs of structural change and the prospect of a more focused-and action-oriented ASEAN organization, there remains every possibility of further filling a glass of interactions that is now only half full. The US is considering several ways in which to enhance its relations with ASEAN including through signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, appointing an ambassador to ASEAN and participating in a range of regional and bilateral activities in the economic, political and military realms. It is quite likely that the US will take one or more of these measures to demonstrate its commitment to ASEAN. However, the ultimate guarantor of strengthened US-ASEAN relations will be the ability of member countries to demonstrate that they as individual countries and as ASEAN can be and wish to be partners of the US in this new century.

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United States-ASEAN Relations on ASEAN's Fortieth Anniversary: A Glass Half Full

SATU P. LIMAYE

As ASEAN marks its 40th anniversary, US-ASEAN relations, for all their complexities and dissonances, also show signs of success and potential future growth. Viewed from the perspective of where US-ASEAN relations were four decades ago, signs of structural change and the prospect of a more focused- and action-oriented ASEAN organization, there remains every possibility of further filling a glass of interactions that is now only half full. The US is considering several ways in which to enhance its relations with ASEAN including through signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, appointing an ambassador to ASEAN and participating in a range of regional and bilateral activities in the economic, political and military realms. It is quite likely that the US will take one or more of these measures to demonstrate its commitment to ASEAN. However, the ultimate guarantor of strengthened US-ASEAN relations will be the ability of member countries to demonstrate that they as individual countries and as ASEAN can be and wish to be partners of the US in this new century.

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During this 40th anniversary of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and 30th anniversary of the United States-ASEAN Dialogue, unfortunate scheduling decisions have overshadowed

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generally improving ties between the United States and ASEAN. Recent attention has been monopolized by the postponement of President George W. Bush's planned visit to Singapore for the first-ever US-ASEAN Summit in September 2007, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's decision not to attend (for the second time in three years) the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) as well as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Manila in August 2007, and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Christopher Hill's no-show at the US-ASEAN dialogue meeting held earlier this summer in Washington.

These two anniversaries provide a useful occasion on which to go beyond day-to-day events and examine trends not only in US relations with ASEAN as an organization, but also US relations with ASEAN member countries. There are of course overlaps amongst the organizational and bilateral "levels" of interactions, but they are also distinct — and, importantly, seen differently in Washington.

Though understandably disappointing to ASEAN (which marked its 40th anniversary in August 2007) — not to mention many American officials and observers who thought the Bush Administration's high-level postponements and substitutions were misguided — the recent diplomatic contretemps should not obscure positive elements of US-ASEAN relations. These positive elements appear even more stark when set against what relations were roughly thirty years ago following the long, bloody US war in Vietnam, communist takeovers in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and the even deeper cleavages between communist Indochina and the then founding members of ASEAN. While there is certainly ample room for improvement in US-ASEAN relations, this assessment from one American's perspective presents a number of hopeful elements as well. Before turning to several important "issue areas" in US-ASEAN relations (e.g., economic ties, counter-terrorism cooperation), it would be useful to highlight a couple of "structural" features of US-ASEAN relations and how they are changing — largely for the better.

Calibrating Bilateralism, Sub-Regionalism, Regionalism, Globalism and Multilateralism in US-ASEAN Relations

First, the United States is challenged to calibrate relations with ASEAN as an organization; with Southeast Asia as a geographical sub-region of wider US East Asia policies; with Southeast Asia as part of US global strategies, interests and values; and most importantly on a day-to-day basis with sovereign, unique countries. Meanwhile,

ASEAN and its member-countries are simultaneously calibrating their own relations with the United States. The United States, however, has a wider range of imperatives affecting its relations with ASEAN than ASEAN does in dealing with America. These imperatives often have spill-over effects in the various approaches to Southeast Asia. One example is US concerns about Myanmar's human rights and democracy situation impinging upon US attitudes towards ASEAN's efficacy as an organization, or global democracy and human rights considerations complicating bilateral relations with individual ASEAN states. Moreover, both the United States and ASEAN must balance domestic considerations — further complicating the management of mutual relations.

It is fair to say that in the past three decades, bilateral and global factors have dominated US approaches to Southeast Asia and continue do so. However, there are signs that wider East Asian developments (e.g., China's rising regional profile, growth in transnational threats such as avian flu, terrorism, natural and manmade disasters, and efforts to create regional multilateral institutions) as well as the ASEAN's own efforts to strengthen and institutionalize itself (e.g., movement towards an ASEAN Community by 2015 and the framing of an ASEAN Charter) are requiring Washington to take a more "regional" (rather than bilateral and global) approach. The net effect of such developments has been to highlight the need for Washington to consider ways in which to strengthen its relations with ASEAN *qua* ASEAN.

For example, within the United States there has been much discussion of how to demonstrate greater commitment to ASEAN as an organization. Generally, discussion revolves around four main possible initiatives: the hosting of a regular "heads of government" US-ASEAN Summit (rather than a meeting on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation which does not include all ASEAN member-states), the appointment of a US Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs; signing and/or ratifying the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC); and "putting meat on the bones" of already-announced initiatives such as the US-ASEAN Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), ASEAN Cooperation Plan (ACP), Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI), and the ASEAN-US Enhanced Partnership (EP). Each of these avenues for enhancing US relations with ASEAN as an organization has its difficulties and limitations.

As noted at the outset, the planned first-ever US-ASEAN Summit for September 2007 has been postponed — though since the anniversary year of relations runs through the autumn of 2008, there is an

opportunity to reschedule. As of this writing, there is a possibility that President Bush may host ASEAN leaders in Crawford, Texas in March 2008. The postponement of the planned September 2007 summit unfortunately obscures an important change in US policy: that is, to hold a US-ASEAN Summit at all. In the past, there has been wariness about holding such a summit for many reasons including a view that ASEAN is insufficiently "action-oriented", that it would de facto accord legitimacy to the government in Myanmar, undermine US interests in strengthening APEC, and even because ASEAN espouses or at least tolerates regional multilateralism that excludes the United States — i.e. the East Asian Summit (EAS). Most of these arguments have missed the symbolic and diplomatic gains of a summit between the government leaders of ASEAN member countries and the United States. With these concerns seemingly overcome at least in terms of holding a summit, it remains now to either reschedule the event in the remainder of the "anniversary year" or maintain a commitment to holding it early in a new US administration that will take office in 2009. (It would be unhelpful to hold the summit in the relatively brief interregnum between the end of the official anniversary year and the start of a new administration.) The US Senate has already expressed its commitment to a US-ASEAN Summit as outlined in Senate Resolution 110 marking the thirtieth anniversary of US-ASEAN dialogue and relations.

Another relatively uncomplicated "initiative", also backed by the US Senate resolution, is the appointment of a US Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs. Largely symbolic, such a step would nevertheless have the benefit of signalling US commitment to ASEAN as an organization at little cost or perturbation of the State Department bureaucracy. Current thinking in Washington appears to support the idea of "dual-hatting" a Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs with the position of ambassador though a final resolution of the arrangement is pending. However, discussions within the administration and between it and Congress are continuing on this matter.

More complicated is a US signature and/or ratification of the TAC. It is noteworthy that the US Senate resolution on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the US-ASEAN dialogue, while supporting the appointment of an ambassador for ASEAN and the convening of a US-ASEAN Summit, makes no mention of the United States signing much less ratifying the TAC. This is significant because ratification of the treaty would require Senate approval. Concerns

in the United States about signing and/or ratifying TAC are wide-ranging. One US analyst summed up the objections as follows:

The United States has not signed it [TAC] because: (1) 'we shouldn't limit our freedom of action in any way;' (2) 'we take treaties seriously but the TAC is a meaningless [sic] and we don't sign things like this;' and (3) 'Congress may not like it, and we have bigger fish to fry, notably restoring military ties with Indonesia' (Frost, 2006).

ASEAN's evolution to a legally based, action-oriented institution (including the prospect of a stronger human rights component) would address the underlying "ASEAN so what?" attitude which impedes signing the TAC. If such an attitudinal change on the part of the United States were to occur in light of ASEAN's own evolution, the legalistic worries about a TAC signature impeding American freedom of action (emanating mostly from the "High Council" provision of the Treaty itself) could be overcome. The issue of Senate ratification cannot be circumvented, but it is quite likely that the diplomatic and symbolic gains of a US signature on TAC would be sufficient enough for both sides that the issue of ratification could be put off indefinitely without risk to relations. Another reported obstacle to the US Government's unwillingness to become a TAC signatory is the impact on treaty commitments and alliance relationships in the Asia-Pacific region (related to the US concerns about "freedom of action"). This being an "obstacle" is difficult to understand. As Ralph Cossa has argued: "The oft-stated contention that this [signing TAC] would somehow undercut America's Asian alliances appears unfounded: two of Washington's Asian allies — Thailand and the Philippines — are charter members of ASEAN, while the other three — Australia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea — have now acceded to the TAC without any perceptible impact on Washington's network of bilateral alliances" (Cossa 2006). There would be no support in Washington for an encumbrance on flexibility of action but the general consensus, if not bureaucratic decision, is that signing TAC would not be such an encumbrance.

In addition to the symbolic and diplomatic benefits of signing TAC, it has been argued by some Americans that another reason for acceding to the Treaty is that it is one of the three criteria (the other two are dialogue partnership and significant economic relations with ASEAN — both of which the United States already has) required for membership in the EAS (Romberg 2006). For other Americans this is not a compelling argument. To sceptics, the EAS is yet another

"talk shop" without clear meaning or purpose that has the net effect of undermining a broader regional multilateral effort where the United States plays a central role — namely, APEC. In other words, EAS membership is an insufficient motivation to accede to the TAC. Doubts about the EAS are part of a wider US ambivalence about regional multilateralism and institution building in the region. There are signs, however, that both the "negatives" and "incentives" to signing the TAC are being rethought in Washington. As the US policy and analytical community sifts through regional developments in the Asia Pacific, there appears to be a growing consensus that the benefits of acceding to TAC outweigh the constraints and costs. Perhaps, when and if a US-ASEAN Summit is re-scheduled, a US signature on TAC would be a major "deliverable".

A fourth approach to shoring up US support for ASEAN in recent years has been the promulgation of a number of specific initiatives. These include the 2002 ASEAN Cooperation Plan (ACP) to help integrate the newest members into ASEAN and address transnational challenges such as HIV/AIDS and trafficking in persons; the October 2002 launch of the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI) to enhance trade and investment relations and provide the basis for negotiating FTAs; the November 2005 ASEAN-US Enhanced Partnership (EP) to promote multi-sector cooperation; and finally in August 2006, a US-ASEAN Trade and Investment Framework (TIFA) to provide a framework for the development of trade and investment arrangements. Close observers of these efforts, while supporting the objectives of these various initiatives have not been impressed with their implementation so far. As one such observer, Richard Cronin, has recently written:

One reason for Southeast Asian doubts about the Bush Administration's intentions has been its reliance on a succession of initiatives that involve little cost and very modest objectives. The Administration's proposals for greater cooperation with ASEAN have served as useful frameworks for US policy formulation and coordination across bureaucratic lines, but their actual impact has been very limited (Cronin 2007)

Addressing specifically the trade and investment promotion initiatives, he goes on to say that "A number of the Administration's trade-related initiatives such as the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI), ASEAN-US Enhanced Partnership (EP), and the initiation of the ASEAN-US Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement (TIFA) have had largely symbolic importance thus far" (Cronin 2007).

As this review of Washington thinking about how to strengthen relations with ASEAN as an organization suggests, there is still a considerable way to go before US-ASEAN relations are as thick, regularized and meaningful as those between the United States and (some) individual ASEAN countries. However, it is important to note that there is a growing recognition of the need to engage ASEAN regularly and substantively, and concrete ways of doing so are under discussion. The ability of ASEAN to transform itself into a rule-based institution which does not rely on consensus and does not shirk from taking actions against countries that violate its own declared values and goals would do much to make Americans regard ASEAN as a more effective partner. As ASEAN moves towards its Heads of Government meeting in November marking the 40th anniversary of the organization, many in Washington will be watching to see if ASEAN, under its new charter — including human rights provisions, is prepared to take the steps to be an institution with clout and clarity of purpose.

Narrowing Asymmetries in US-ASEAN Relations

Another important feature of US-ASEAN relations is the asymmetry in America's relations with the countries of maritime Southeast Asia (including Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore) and those countries of mainland Southeast Asia (including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam). For example, US trade with maritime Southeast Asia is about 80 per cent of total US trade with all ASEAN countries and US direct investment in maritime Southeast Asia is about 90 per cent of total US direct investment in all ASEAN countries. There are further asymmetries between maritime Southeast Asia and mainland Southeast Asia countries with Singapore dominating US trade and investment within the former grouping and Thailand within the latter. The differences in US engagement with these two "subregions" of ASEAN stem from both historical and structural factors. The Vietnam War and its outcome of creating communist states in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia stunted mainland Southeast Asia dynamics and hence US engagement with the area for nearly two decades. The process of US normalization with the area, beginning roughly with the Cambodia Peace Accords in 1991, is still underway and has a long way to go. Furthermore, ASEAN's — in this case essentially maritime Southeast Asia plus Thailand — normalization with mainland Southeast Asia did not commence

formally until those countries were inducted into ASEAN, which only occurred during the past decade.¹ For these reasons there is a significant imbalance in the degree of US political, security and economic engagement between the two main constituent elements of today's ASEAN.

The asymmetrical importance of mainland and maritime South-east Asia for the United States is magnified by the fact that core US national security interests are also concentrated (though not exclusive) in maritime Southeast Asia. So, for example, given the large Muslim populations, the presence of critical sea-lanes, and comparatively thicker military cooperation with countries, maritime ASEAN's importance is disproportionate. Certain US global objectives, such as the promotion of democracy and human rights, however, are at play across all of ASEAN. In fact, given the comparative state of human rights and democracy conditions in mainland South-east Asia, the fact that the largest share of America's Southeast Asian-origin population come from mainland Southeast Asia, and given these populations' personal historical background, human rights and democracy considerations are especially intense in US-mainland Southeast Asia relations.

But the asymmetry in US dealings with maritime and mainland Southeast Asia may be narrowing — to the overall benefit of US-ASEAN relations. First, US relations with the newer members of ASEAN (all of whom are from mainland Southeast Asia — with the exception of Thailand which was a founding member) are beginning to improve. The most visible sign of improvement is the US-Vietnam relationship. The June 2007 visit to the United States of Vietnam's President Nguyen Minh Triet was the first by the country's leader since 1975. Human rights concerns were expressed before and during the visit, but the occurrence of the visit and agreements ranging from the signing of a TIFA to commercial deals between Vietnam and the US private sector indicate a pragmatic approach to relations that recognizes differences but proceeds with areas of mutual benefit. That there were differences on display during the US-Vietnam meeting are not surprising; more noteworthy is that the meeting occurred and elicited few extreme reactions within the United States.

Meanwhile, America's relations with Cambodia, too, are making slow progress. One US official dealing with the region characterized the situation in US-Cambodia relations as "quiet improvement in the past two years". Among the examples given were local commune elections, movement towards a tribunal for human rights violations during the Khmer Rouge period, and even military to military contacts

including the first US ship visit in thirty years. Indeed, this official went on to say, "Cambodia is not disruptive to ASEAN, but is trying to break away from the bottom." Whether ongoing domestic difficulties in Cambodia will inhibit the improving trend of relations with the United States remains to be seen.

In the case of Laos, while it is, as one US official put it, "difficult to find policy for talks" and Vientiane "has not actively sought better relations with the United States", there are some signs of improved conditions in Laos and in US-Laotian relations. Among the latter are cooperative exchanges on Prisoner of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) issues, unexploded ordinance, as well as law enforcement. Regarding the former, there reportedly has even been some "mild improvement" in the conditions of the ethnic Hmong including steps to integrate them into national life. However, the conditions of the Hmong continue to be a major concern in the US Congress. On the US side, in early June the US FBI arrested a former Laotian General and now American citizen, General Vang Pao, with trying to overthrow the Lao Government.

Myanmar remains an outlier to improving US relations with mainland Southeast Asia. The US continues to insist on a dialogue between the military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), and the opposition including the National League for Democracy (NLD), the release of all political prisoners, unfettered room to operate for UN and other international NGOs and an end to ethnic violence. Unfortunately, according to one US official's perspective, there is "no sign of success in Myanmar, but there is some success in working with other US partners in the region". Indeed, as of this writing in late October 2007, the situation in Myanmar appears to be extremely fluid with tens of thousands of Buddhist monks, students and others having participated in large-scale protests in the country. And it may be that the US position in the midst of the most current developments is hardening against the military regime despite talks just a few months ago in Beijing between US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Eric John and representatives of the SPDC junta. It appears that the Bush Administration is returning to its strong stance against the regime first exhibited in January 2007 when the United States and United Kingdom introduced a joint resolution identifying Myanmar as a threat to international peace and stability. In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on 25 September 2007, President Bush outlined a new series of steps to isolate and constrain the military junta while urging "the United Nations and all nations to

use their diplomatic and economic leverage to help the Burmese people reclaim their freedom”.

The significance of the improvements in US relations with the newest members of ASEAN, located in mainland Southeast Asia, excepting Myanmar, is that they provide the basis for a more balanced approach to ASEAN as a whole. As noted, the strengthening of ASEAN itself is critical to deeper, more substantive engagement between the United States and ASEAN as an organization. So too a more engaged and balanced posture in US relations with all ASEAN member countries will facilitate ties to ASEAN as an organization. Given history, conditions, interests and values a true balance will be a long time coming if ever, but the size of the gap may begin to decrease, particularly as US-Vietnam relations rebuild.

Human Rights, Democracy and Governance

Among the issues that animate Washington's perceptions of and interactions with ASEAN and its member countries are human rights, democracy and governance. This is true across the executive and legislative branches of the US Government as well as the public including non-government organizations. The distribution of ethnic Southeast Asians (predominantly from countries in mainland Southeast Asia) creates a local political impetus to consideration of such issues and connects with US Government global interests and values. Congress regularly holds hearings on Southeast Asian human rights and democracy-related issues. In the first session of the 110th Congress, for example, hearings have been held on extra-judicial killings in the Philippines and the impact of coup-related sanctions on Thailand and Fiji. Moreover, scores of individual members of Congress have entered statements into the *Congressional Record* expressing human rights and democracy concerns and such issues are a staple of confirmation hearings for new US ambassadors to regional countries.

Inevitably, there is significant disagreement in Washington about the state of affairs regarding human rights, democracy and governance amongst individual ASEAN member-countries; especially since the situation changes on the ground — e.g. on the negative side of the September 2006 coup in Thailand and ongoing intensifying troubles in Myanmar and on the positive side the democratic transition in Indonesia starting a decade ago. One subject of near-total consensus is Myanmar. Even those in the United States who argue for engagement with Myanmar do so not because the situation there is not dire,

but because they assess other US interests as sufficiently compelling as to argue for dealing with the SPDC *despite* its dismal human rights and democracy record. Myanmar aside, the picture across this vast region is mixed, but on the whole improved from the situation thirty years ago; a glass half full on human rights, democracy and governance.

The US interest in and attention to human rights, democracy and governance issues will not fade. The question is how and how much do they impinge upon relations between the United States and ASEAN. The single most significant way in which human rights considerations affects US-ASEAN relations specifically is the inability (many Americans views it as unwillingness) of ASEAN to move the Myanmar military government towards democracy and improved human rights. The very entrance of Myanmar into ASEAN has, to some Americans, undermined the legitimacy of the organization though not all professionals dealing with the region would go so far. Nevertheless, even those who appreciate ASEAN's efforts to influence Myanmar are critical. One US official recently said, "The main driver of ASEAN policy toward Burma is Burma — not the US... [but this policy] tarnishes ASEAN [and] is not very productive to ASEAN's organizational status." As there appears to be little prospect of political change in Myanmar and little prospect that the United States will therefore ease up on demands for change there, spill-over to US-ASEAN ties could be mitigated by a much more pro-active role on ASEAN's own part towards Myanmar. The new ASEAN charter and human rights mechanism holds out the hope to some that ASEAN can become more active in pressing Myanmar for change, but it must be noted that there is considerable questioning whether either the charter or the mechanism will be crafted or acted upon in such a way as to effect real change. On the other hand, it is important for Washington not to let Myanmar hold hostage our relations with ASEAN as a whole which encompasses a range of American interests

US-ASEAN Economic Relations

America's economic relations with ASEAN punch above ASEAN's weight in the international system. For example, though ASEAN has only 2 per cent of the world's GDP, it is America's fourth largest trade partner with two way trade valued at nearly \$170 billion (US Department of State 2007) — despite the existence of both tariff and non-tariff barriers to the entry of US goods and services. Tariffs on US agricultural goods have come in for particular criticism; with

tariffs ranging from 25 to 48 per cent (White House 2002). Moreover, US companies have invested some \$90 billion in ASEAN countries. To be sure, as noted earlier, US economic relations are uneven — focused on certain key states within ASEAN, but the overall trend is positive. For example, since Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status was accorded to Vietnam, trade has increased five-fold (some estimates put the rate of growth even higher). In other cases, such as that of the smaller mainland Southeast Asian countries, there will be only very limited commercial opportunities for the United States given national policies, but also the capacity and conditions of these countries. But overall the region has shown recovery and resilience since the 1997 financial crisis and the prospects for continued robust US-ASEAN economic ties seem promising.

At the government-to-government level, the focus of US-ASEAN interaction has been the pursuit of free trade agreements. This has been the case since the launch of the EAI in 2002 whose stated “goal is to create a network of bilateral FTAs, which will increase trade and investment...” (White House 2002). The two conditions required for an FTA with the United States are membership in the World Trade organization (WTO) and the conclusion of a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) with the United States. As matters now stand, with the signing of the August 2006 US-ASEAN TIFA, the latter criterion has been fully met. Only one ASEAN member country is not a WTO member — Laos.

However, progress on reaching FTAs has been slow. Only one has been completed — with Singapore. The Bush Administration initiated negotiations with Thailand in late 2003 and with Malaysia in early 2006, but both of these are essentially stalled for a variety of reasons. In the case of Thailand, the September 2006 coup, Thai farmers’ objections and disagreements over pharmaceuticals are the main impediments. How matters will develop following the planned elections in Thailand in December remains to be seen. In the case of Malaysia, the reported problems are over intellectual property, genetically modified crops and agriculture issues. Neither of these FTAs is likely to be completed soon given the bilateral differences, the expiry of the President’s trade promotion authority and the sharply critical view in the US Congress about trade. A deeper problem according to Richard Cronin is that the “Administration has aggressively pursued in Southeast Asia a global strategy of seeking bilateral ‘WTO-plus’ FTAs. The ‘plus’ involves negotiating trade deals with concessions by individual trading partners on sensitive issues touching on national

sovereignty that go beyond current WTO rules or what would be achievable even in a successful Doha Round."

US-ASEAN Relations and the China Factor

An increasingly important consideration in US-ASEAN relations from a Washington vantage point is the rising role and influence of China. There is a spirited debate about the subject in US policy and analytical circles.²

Rather than engaging in the on-going debate about whether China is or is not displacing the United States as the pre-eminent external power in Southeast Asia (it is not though its role has certainly been enhanced), it may be useful to consider how China's rising role affects US-ASEAN relations.

First, China's role in the region is not new — either historically or since the United States began to play a significant role in Southeast Asia, namely after World War II. It is fair to say that China's role in the region for the first fifty years of the past century, say from 1949 until 1995, was largely destabilizing and negative and ranged from fomenting communist insurgencies to "teaching lessons" through military action to moving aggressively to claim disputed territory. Hence, China's role largely worked to increase interest amongst several key Asian states (particularly those in maritime Southeast Asia) to regard the United States as a useful friend. In other words, a choice was clear and a choice was made. Today, China's role does not occasion the same Southeast Asian thinking: in fact, because China's expanding role combines a commercial and diplomatic focus, US-ASEAN relations must grapple with the reality that no Southeast Asian country, in maritime or mainland Southeast Asia wishes to choose between the United States and China. This includes Myanmar, which has had a choice thrust upon it. In the early days of the first Bush Administration, when tensions between the United States and China were especially acute, there was much concern amongst Southeast Asians that they would have to "choose" between America and China. An overt "struggle for the mastery of Southeast Asia" would more likely have the effect of complicating US efforts to build ties with ASEAN than to help them.

Second, while ASEAN countries do not want to choose, they also welcome a certain "creative tension" in US-China relations because it works to keep both major powers competing for influence. In this vein, Southeast Asia also welcomes other regional players such as Japan and India to contribute to the region.

Third, the very rise of China has led a number of Southeast Asian countries to take the opportunity to improve relations with Washington. Indeed, one of the striking features over the past few years is the steady enhancement of military and defense relations between the United States and many Southeast Asian countries (more on this below).

Counter-Terrorism Cooperation in US-ASEAN Relations

The issue of terrorism is an extraordinarily complex one in US-Southeast Asia relations given the large Muslim populations (both in the majority and minority) across regional countries, long-running insurgencies some of which involve Muslims, domestic political calculations ranging from the role of opposition parties to democratic transitions to public sentiments, and the reality that internationally-connected terrorists have lived and operated in the region (Limaye 2004). Over the past six years, since the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, the degree of and sentiments about counter-terrorism cooperation between the United States and the region have waxed and waned. Most American analysts today see an improving picture. For example, Joshua Kurlantzick of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, has written that "the region's newest leaders openly wage war on terror. Moreover, the United States has played a leading role in these successes, and it has done so without creating much in the way of an anti-American reaction. Indeed, Southeast Asia is proving to be a model for the 'long war' against Islamist terror" (Kurlantzick 2007). A case in point is Indonesia. According to Sheldon Simon:

The US additionally praised Indonesia's significant counter-terrorism achievements [during 2007] in arresting two top Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) militants. The capture of the group's overall leader, Zarkasih, and the military commander, Abu Dujana, was described by International Crisis Group expert Sydney Jones as 'a body blow' to JI. The arrests were the work of an elite counterterrorism unit of the national police, Detachment 88, established in 2003 with assistance from the US and Australia. The US State Department hailed Indonesia's success and promised to continue US assistance to bolster Jakarta's counterterrorism capabilities. Authorities are still searching for Malaysian-born JI bomb specialist Noordin M. Top, who some analysts believe has started a splinter group that may be responsible for several bombings in Indonesia (Simon 2007).

The current situation in the Philippines is less positive — despite successes earlier in the year. The United States has had a small contingent of its soldiers based in the southern Philippines to train the Philippine army in counter-terrorism. Indeed, this year the Cooperative Afloat and Readiness Training (CARAT) exercise for the Philippine and US navies was held for the first time in southwestern Mindanao where Philippine forces have been battling the Al Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Beginning on 31 May [2007], the exercise focused on maritime terrorism with Philippine and American forces operating together in teams” (Simon 2007). The United States has also helped track militants through the use of Predator drones. Notwithstanding these efforts, the current situation (at the time of this writing) appears to have worsened. In August more than 50 persons were killed, half of them government soldiers, in fierce fighting in Jolo, southern Philippines. The government blames the ASG, but at least one ambush of government troops has been claimed by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).³ Overall, it would be accurate to say that the immediate post-9/11 urgency of focus on Southeast Asia arising from the discovery of terrorist plots in Singapore and the actual attacks in Bali (the so-called “second front” in the global war on terrorism) has muted. The irritants that bedeviled initial cooperation appear to have abated. It is striking that a recently promulgated US State Department Fact Sheet on *Thirty Years of Dialogue and Cooperation in US-ASEAN relations* does not mention the word terrorism. And in US non-official discussions about Southeast Asia, terrorism is regarded as one element of relations but does not rank at the top of the list.

Many in the United States are concerned, however, about the growth of anti-American sentiment in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. Administration public diplomacy efforts have done little to mitigate such attitudes. At the same time, US actions such as the massive rescue and relief effort after the December 2004 tsunami have helped create a more balanced view of the United States. It is also important not to either dismiss or obsess on the Muslim element of views about America but rather to focus on divergences in policies. While admitting to the presence in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia of anti-American views, on balance these views have not led to any major ruptures in relations.

US-ASEAN Security Cooperation

From the perspective of the United States, ASEAN member countries include a number of close security partners of long-standing — such as the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore — and potentially increasingly important partners such as Indonesia and Vietnam. In fact, the overall trend has been an increase in military cooperation between the United States and many ASEAN member countries. Some of this has occurred in the context of counter-terrorism cooperation noted above, but there also has been progress on other fronts as well.

Indeed, notwithstanding differences regarding human rights, various political issues such as US Middle East policies, approaches to countering terrorism, military coups and even stalled progress on economic arrangements, defence relations have generally progressed forward. From a long-term perspective, it is useful to recall that the US has treaty-based security relationships with Thailand and the Philippines, both of whom have now been accorded Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) status — a designation that remains despite the September 2006 coup in Thailand. Over the past years, there has been a steady growth in US-Philippine military cooperation not only in the context of the “southern problem” and the ASG, but also more generally on defence modernization and reform. With Thailand, and following the September 2006 coup, there was a freeze on several forms of military cooperation. However, not all defence ties have been severed. In April 2007 the United States proffered counter-insurgency training for Thai troops — an offer that was rejected by Bangkok. Other forms of cooperation include the multi-country Cobra Gold military exercise and other air and naval exercises such as Cope Tiger and CARAT. It remains to be seen whether, following planned elections in Thailand in December, some of the suspended elements of military cooperation will be renewed. Meanwhile, very close non-alliance based military cooperation continues with Singapore and Malaysia.

Among the important changes in defence cooperation between the United States and the region have occurred between the US and Indonesia. In this year both the US Marine Corps and Army have signed agreements for cooperation with their Indonesian counterparts and there are plans to further expand training and operations between the US and Indonesian military. International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds have also been restored to Indonesia, as have the sales of non-lethal weapons. However, the future progress of

these efforts will be shaped at least in part by continuing opposition in certain parts of the US Congress to such cooperation given the Indonesian military's involvement in businesses and human rights violations. Finally, even with Vietnam there is a basis for cooperation through IMET, cooperation over transnational threats (mainly medical such as avian flu), POW/MIA missions and naval ship visits.

The generally upward state of US-Southeast Asia military relations speaks to the view on the part of ASEAN member countries that the United States is a vital partner for regional peace and prosperity notwithstanding difficulties in other areas of bilateral or multilateral relations.

Conclusions

It is easy to look at the myriad of dissonances in US-ASEAN relations and conclude that there is a troubled relationship — or at least one that lacks vigor or a grand design. However, viewed in comparison with the past, from the perspective of current trends, and a careful accounting of what is happening one might arrive at a more hopeful picture of US-ASEAN relations as ASEAN marks its arrival at middle age.

Ebbs and flows in US-ASEAN relations and shifting anxieties have long been a regular feature of interactions between the two sides and that will not likely change given the enormous diversity and range of issues that characterize interactions at the bilateral and regional levels.

The most important determinants of the future of America's relations with ASEAN will not be whether or not the United States regularly attends regional meetings (though it would certainly be useful to do so), signs and/or ratifies the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (which the US ought to sign) or appoints an "Ambassador for ASEAN" (which is likely to complicate relations as much as facilitate them). Rather, given an assessment that fundamental US approaches to the region — which meet US interests and values — are unlikely to be altered absent some tectonic shifts globally or regionally, the key determinants of US interest and engagement in ASEAN will be ASEAN member countries' attractiveness as and interest in economic, political and security partnerships with the United States. And, if and when ASEAN becomes a stronger, and more action-oriented organization, US interests in engaging with it will rise as well.

NOTES

- 1 Vietnam joined ASEAN in 1995, Laos and Myanmar were included in 1997, and Cambodia was admitted in 1999.
- 2 A useful review of the issues may be found in Bruce Vaughn and Wayne M. Morrison, "China-Southeast Asia Relations: Trends, Issues and Implications for the United States", *Congressional Research Service*, Updated 4 April 2006, pp. 1–40. See also Bronson Percival, *The Dragon Looks South: China and Southeast Asia in the New Century* (Greenwood Press, 2007). Other useful studies of China's role in Southeast Asia are Joshua Kurlantzick, "Chinese Soft Power in Southeast Asia", *The Globalist*, Parts I & II, 2 and 3 July 2007; and Robert Sutter & Chin-Hao Huang, "China's Activism Faces Persistent Challenges", *Comparative Connections*, 13 July 2007, accessed at <<http://www.csis.org/pacfor/ccejournal.html>>. Earlier, quarterly, coverage of PRC-Southeast Asia relations by Sutter/Huang are available at the same website.
- 3 "Thousands Flee Philippine Clashes," *BBC News*, accessed at <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6941768.stm>>.

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