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Balancing Act: Competition and Cooperation in US Asia-Pacific Regionalism

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Abstract

While the United States is an important Asia-Pacific actor, its engagement with the region is complex and often difficult. Not only must US regionalism balance the diverse requirements of an ambitious policy agenda, but also US policy norms and priorities often clash with those of other regional actors. This has important implications for the capacity of the United States to provide regional leadership. Recent years have seen growing policy convergence between the United States and other Asia-Pacific actors, particularly in economic terms, but US regionalism continues to feature competition alongside collaboration.

While the Asia-Pacific region has been described as ‘ripe for multilateralism’ (Ikenberry, 2004: 353), regionalism remains under-developed, particularly where security issues are concerned. This can be attributed in part to the demanding nature of security-oriented multilateralism, even where this is relatively ‘shallow’ (Job, 1994: 2). More significant is the diversity of the region in political and economic terms, which greatly complicates the growth of regionalism. US regionalism in the Asia-Pacific is particularly complex as a result of its requirements of competition and cooperation with key regional actors in the pursuit of demanding security and economic objectives.

This study examines the foundations, salient features, and course of US regionalism in the Asia-Pacific. After discussing the role of norms, power politics, and interests in US Asia-Pacific regionalism, the study examines its complex inter-state relations, and concludes by considering the prospects for US Asia-Pacific regionalism. The difficulties inherent in pursuing US regionalism in the Asia-Pacific are growing as the region

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develops. While the norms and interests of US regionalism often are at odds with regional trends, the United States remains a key actor and has considerable capacity to adapt to changing requirements and conditions. The recent re-engagement of regional multilateral processes, as demonstrated by participation in the East Asia Summit and entering into negotiations with a view to joining the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (also known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)) free-trade agreement, demonstrate the changed US attitude toward Asia-Pacific regionalism.

The US way of regionalism

Before examining the key features of US regionalism, it is important to note the contested nature of the concept. Borrowing from Christopher Dent, regionalism is understood to involve state-led initiatives designed to foster regional cooperation or integration in a particular issue area (Dent, 2008: 7). Analyses of regionalism typically focus on its framework. Multilateralism, which is often regarded as embodying the essence of regionalism, is the subject of particular attention. Regionalism is not necessarily synonymous with multilateralism, but they are closely related, with regionalism frequently being operationalized multilaterally. Multilateralism may take a variety of organizational forms, ranging from formal inter-state mechanisms and dialog processes to informal regimes, and may be quite broad or narrowly focused on specific issues of regional concern. Just as important to multilateralism are the generalized principles of conduct underpinning inter-state cooperation (Ruggie, 1993: 11). In essence, multilateralism rests on all participants treating all other participants in similar terms.

The US approach to regionalism requires the distinction between regionalism and multilateralism to be maintained. Regionalism constitutes a prominent pillar of US foreign policy, with successive administrations appreciating the need to address important policy issues in regional contexts through dedicated mechanisms. US regionalism is notable, however, for the extent to which this has been pursued in terms other than multilateralism. This reflects the importance of power politics to the United States, and reflects the fact that it has less need than most of the 'economies of scale' multilateralism offers (Katzenstein, 2005: 23). The US approach to multilateralism is instrumentalist in that this generally is promoted only when it is regarded as absolutely necessary; rarely does this constitute the preferred policy approach. This feature divides the United States from many Asia-Pacific states. Despite their differences, however, the importance of the region to the United States and of the United States to the region ensures extensive interaction, even where there is concern over the processes involved.

Although the United States has long been engaged in the region, authorities in many Asia-Pacific states remain reluctant to accept it as a part of the region. This ongoing regional legitimacy crisis necessitates a sustained US effort to promote inclusive Asia-Pacific as opposed to more restrictive Asian forms of regionalism. US efforts to gain regional acceptance must contend with the obstacle posed by its approach to regionalism. Multilateralism has complemented bilateralism rather than providing

an alternative in US Asia-Pacific regionalism, with a focus on developing security arrangements such as the ‘San Francisco system’. This encourages regional perceptions of US ‘resistance’ to multilateralism (Moore, 2009: 202).

US Asia-Pacific regionalism has not developed in a linear evolutionary manner, though there are noteworthy trends such as the declining importance attached to institutionalization after the early 1970s. Changing policy priorities, including the importance attached to engaging particular Asia-Pacific states, and developments within the region have contributed to important policy shifts. Heightened security concerns have seen US authorities redouble their efforts to promote security regionalism, while economic downturns have underpinned deepening engagement of the Asia-Pacific through economic regionalism. International crises and structural changes in the international system often constitute notable watersheds in US Asia-Pacific regionalism. Particularly noteworthy is that produced by the passing of the post-Cold War ‘unipolar moment’ of the United States, which underlined the importance of enhanced cooperation with other states in the Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere. This has weathered the impact of the widening gap between the United States and many Asia-Pacific states over security issues following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, which focused US attention on the ‘war on terror’. Recent renewed interest in Asia-Pacific economic regionalism demonstrates the continuing capacity of US authorities to adapt their policy approach to changing requirements.

The domestic policy environment has a relatively minor impact on US Asia-Pacific regionalism. There is little internal debate over this issue, even between the two major political parties, with the result that changes in government often have little impact on the substance of US regionalism (see Katzenstein, 2005: 22–3; Cossa, 2009: 34). Key individuals can have a significant impact on US regionalism. The US record in the Asia-Pacific demonstrates the important contribution of particular presidents, for example. President Bill Clinton, whose term in office saw greater interest in economic regionalism, was succeeded in 2000 by President George W. Bush, who oversaw a reversion to a focus on security issues. The role of senior officials such as secretaries of state in advising and implementing foreign policy provides them with considerable scope to place their stamp on US regionalism as well. While there may be significant differences of opinion with respect to regionalism, not least as a result of distinct institutional interests within the foreign policy bureaucracy, which are beyond the scope of this study, policy developments often center around the extent rather than the form or focus of engagement of regionalism. This helps to account for US policy continuity in Asia-Pacific regionalism.

Norms in US regionalism

Particular norms govern US regionalism. It is important to distinguish between the liberal-institutionalist norms of multilateralism that constitute the ideal of US foreign policy and those which guide US regionalism in practice. This particularly is the case where security issues are concerned. The US practice of security regionalism

is consistent with the foreign policy of a major power, and involves a significant departure from the general preference for inclusiveness and openness to compromise in the interests of broadening international participation. US Asia-Pacific regionalism demonstrates the importance attached to the promotion of US interests in a competitive regional environment. The difficulties inherent in reconciling US regionalist ideals and practices were particularly evident under President George W. Bush, when the United States sought to exploit existing regionalist mechanisms for its own ends in ways that were inconsistent with their terms of reference, as discussed below.

The tension between the norms of multilateralism and the norms of US regionalism impacts at times on the credibility of the United States within the region. This undermines the capacity of the United States to engage Asia-Pacific states through regionalism, including over economic issues, by heightening concern over US policy objectives (see Higgott, 2004: 432–4).

US regionalism is distinguished by a marked tendency toward exclusiveness. US regionalist initiatives often focus on particular sets of states, rather than being widely open to those actors found within the region or which are concerned with the issue in question. This tendency is most pronounced in terms of security regionalism, as demonstrated by arrangements such as the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) launched in 2003. US-led security regionalism often is multinational rather than multilateral. Multinationalism is distinguished by the lack of influence wielded by non-leading states. The United States often practices what Hedley Bull termed ‘hegemonic regionalism’, focusing on developing arrangements that are under its effective control (Bull, 1977: 222–3). US regionalism in the Asia-Pacific is characterized by the development of initiatives involving select constellations of states where the United States plays a dominant role. An emphasis on multinationalism long predates post-Cold War US initiatives to develop ‘coalitions of the willing’ as a means of addressing issues of particular policy concern. Examples of this are to be found in the long-defunct South-East Treaty Organization (SEATO) as well as the more recent Six-Party Talks process for engaging the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea).

US regionalism also manifests concern over the capacity of the United States to ensure that regionalist processes do not harm its interests through constraining its freedom of action. The United States effectively approaches regional mechanisms as institutional vehicles for its foreign policy. US authorities are reluctant to participate in regional arrangements that they regard as imposing undue limitations on their capacity to independently pursue important policy objectives (Webber, 2007: 150–1). It took some two years, for example, for Australian officials to convince their US counterparts that the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) would not limit the US freedom of action in the region (Sheridan, 2009: 163). This wariness toward multilateral agreements that are beyond its effective control was particularly evident under President George W. Bush (Karns, 2008: 9). The difficulty of pursuing multilateralism on what are regarded as acceptable terms encourages a highly selective engagement of regionalist processes.

Richard Haass, the Director of Policy Planning at the United States State Department, advocated the practice of 'a la carte multilateralism', for example (Limaye, 2007: 141). Despite this, the importance attached to regionalism ensures that the United States has sought extensive participation in regional arrangements. US authorities seek to minimize the threat to their freedom of independent action by encouraging flexibility in those mechanisms that it is not in a position to dominate (Mastanduno, 2005: 328).

Power and interests in US regionalism

The requirements of power politics exert a strong influence on US regionalism in terms of both the approach and functioning of regionalism. While the role of national interests in underpinning regionalism is hardly unique to the United States, and power relations often provide the underlying dynamic of processes of regionalism, the position of the United States is such that it has less incentive to compromise its policy objectives and has greater capacity for promoting its vision of regionalism.

The role of power politics in US regionalism is a product of the importance accorded national security issues in its post-Second World War policy agenda. Indeed, it can be argued that even where security issues are not the explicit focus of US regionalism, they constitute an important feature of its policy (see Ikenberry, 2008: 221). The central position of security issues initially derived from the US rivalry with the Soviet Union, and survived the changed international environment that accompanied the end of the Cold War, which provided scope for increased attention to foreign economic policy. While security developments in the Middle East and Central Asia have generated greater concern on the part of US authorities in recent years, the Asia-Pacific region also is a source of considerable concern, particularly where the DPRK and to a lesser extent China are concerned. Given the perceived level of threat to vital interests, security is likely to retain its position at the apex of the US hierarchy of policy concerns.

There is a strong focus on security issues in US Asia-Pacific regionalism. US authorities pursue economic regionalism as well, but this does not attract the same level of attention and here the US approach is more reactive, with little in the way of regional initiatives. This contrasts sharply with the pivotal role exercised by the United States in developing regional security mechanisms during and following the Cold War. US engagement of the Asia-Pacific region centers around constructing a political landscape that best supports its efforts to promote its strategic interests. US authorities are intent on exercising regional security leadership and ensuring a stable security environment. The impact of these interests on US regionalism in the Asia-Pacific is explored in the sections that follow.

Engaging the region: 'allies and friends' and others

The importance attached to security issues by the United States encourages a particular approach to regional engagement. Some Asia-Pacific states are more important in security terms than others, and the nature of the regional security landscape enables US authorities to be highly selective in setting the terms of

engagement. Such an approach is less viable where economic issues are concerned due to the extensive integration of regional economies and the dense network of regionalist mechanisms that supports this.

While US authorities have not sought to restrict the membership of multilateral mechanisms established on the initiative of other states, they have focused their own initiatives on key relationships, reinforcing the 'San Francisco system' of political and economic relations that developed out of the peace treaty signed with Japan in 1951 (see Calder, 2004). This involves a continuing emphasis on bilateralism and multinationalism, rather than multilateralism. The choice of security partners is noteworthy. US initiatives focus on developing security arrangements with states considered 'allies and friends' (See Limaye, 2007: 139). Such efforts often build on long-standing security relationships. US regionalism is sufficiently flexible to accommodate changing policy requirements and the need to work with emerging 'allies and friends', however. Recent years have seen increasing engagement of China and India (for the latter, see Jain, 2011). Engaging China is a particularly demanding exercise for US authorities as a result of the complex Sino-US political and economic relationship, as is explored in greater depth below.

US security relationships can be quite varied in form, depending on the requirements of the participating states and the issues concerned. It has been some time since the United States sought to develop formal alliance structures in the region. Its approach since the 1970s has focused on developing bilateral or multinational 'strategic partnerships' or other forms of security engagement with key actors. US authorities are very pragmatic in how they go about this. They are prepared to develop formal or informal measures and issue-specific relationships where necessary, which in some cases involves establishing overlapping arrangements with different states. The example provided by the DPRK is quite instructive on this point. Here the United States has promoted the Six-Party Talks process that includes China as well as Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea), and Russia, while arriving at a separate arrangement with China to 'co-manage' dealing with the DPRK's nuclear weapons programme (see Dittmer, 2008: 676).

Contemporary US security regionalism represents a major shift from the Cold War in that it no longer is driven by particular politico-military rivalries. Recent US initiatives are not designed to 'contain' specific threats, though the US security agenda with respect to China is perceived in some quarters as 'latent containment' (see Acharya, 2003: 210). US authorities are even prepared to engage hostile states such as the DPRK through security regionalism when there is no viable alternative.

US regionalism is far less discriminating where economic issues are concerned. Here policy requirements and the broader range of states that are engaged in regionalist initiatives promoted by other Asia-Pacific states ensure that this is the case. The issue facing US authorities in economic regionalism is ensuring that US participation is as comprehensive as they would like. As noted below, the United States is not always included in the economic regionalist initiatives of other Asia-Pacific states. The

United States has been able to compensate for its relative lack of engagement in some areas, particularly where economic regionalism is concerned, by having regional allies promote its agenda. The United States has relied on Japan on occasion, for example, to veto Malaysian initiatives that did not serve its interests (Mastanduno, 2005: 328).

Driving regionalism's agenda: the issue of leadership

The importance attached to security issues in US foreign policy has major implications for the agenda of regionalism in the Asia-Pacific. The United States has provided much of the leadership in developing security mechanisms in the region since early in the Cold War. The United States plays only a very limited role as a guarantor of security in the region, however, and does not seek to develop a 'security community' as this commonly is understood. US authorities are intent on structuring the regional security environment so that it best supports their long-term security objectives. During the Cold War, this involved developing a regional alliance system. Notable US multinational initiatives from this period include the Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (ANZUS) arrangement, SEATO, which functioned from 1954 to 1977, and the Asian and Pacific Council of 1966–73 (Dent, 2008: 26). While many of these mechanisms eventually fell into abeyance, the structure of security relations that the United States developed during the Cold War survives largely intact, and provides much of the structure of the present Asia-Pacific security environment. US authorities continue to rely heavily on the 'San Francisco system' of bilateral collaborative security arrangements with key states such as Japan, the ROK, and Singapore.

US security regionalism has seen some recent multinational initiatives. The Six-Party Talks process mentioned above was preceded by the unsuccessful Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG), which was based on an even more limited group of states. The TCOG was established by the United States in 1999 to coordinate its approach to the DPRK with Japan and the ROK (Deng, 2008: 214). It is noteworthy that while developing an international response to the DPRK over its nuclear weapons programme is regarded as crucial, US authorities have not sought to develop a genuinely multilateral mechanism to this end.

The United States has not been a notable source of regionalist initiatives outside the realm of security, and has been quite hesitant toward the initiatives of other states. Francis Fukuyama has noted the 'deafening silence' of the United States toward multilateralism in the region (Fukuyama, 2008: 234–5). The United States has remained relatively aloof from processes of regionalism which it did not initiate, other than those focusing on economic matters. US engagement of other states' initiatives often has been opportunistic, intended to support its regional interests. Until recently the United States displayed relatively little interest in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), for example, only warming to it when it began to regard this body as complementing its bilateral security arrangements (Acharya, 2009: 122–3), while US support of the ARF was promoted by a desire to establish a mechanism for dialogue between Japan and the ROK in the absence of any bilateral mechanism (Dosch, 2006:

110). The US position has softened somewhat under President Barack Obama, as demonstrated by the decision to sign ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (see Kurlantzick, 2010: 30), but this remains a feature of US regionalism.

A generally negative US perspective toward multilateralism has been reflected in the treatment of multilateral mechanisms established by other states. In a number of cases, US authorities have sought to modify them, typically in terms of using non-security mechanisms to address security issues of concern to the United States. On at least two occasions, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has been the subject of US efforts to have it address security issues. The first was when Secretary of Defense William Perry suggested in 1995 that APEC discuss regional security issues (Ravenhill, 2007: 142), and more recently President George W. Bush sought to harness APEC to its prosecution of the 'war on terror' (Camroux, 2007: 17). The United States also has sought on occasion to forestall the emergence of rival initiatives, including by incorporating new partner states into existing arrangements (Limaye, 2007: 140–1). At the same time, however, the United States has demonstrated strong support for developments that support its objectives, such as the efforts of some ASEAN members to develop more of a security focus for the organization and by other ARF members to develop more substantive measures to combat terrorism (Simon, 2007: 123–4).

The US record of economic regionalism testifies to the disinclination of US authorities to provide leadership in this area. US authorities engage in economic regionalism, but are content for the most part to allow regionalization – regional economic integration driven by economic processes – to run its course (Katzenstein, 2002: 105). US economic regionalism in the Asia-Pacific focuses on bilateral initiatives. The United States has negotiated an extensive array of free-trade area (FTA) agreements, including with the ROK, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. US authorities have displayed a notable lack of enthusiasm toward economic multilateralism in the past. This extended to Japan's Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) proposal of September 1997, which was developed in response to the Asian Economic Crisis but was seen as conflicting with US interests in supporting the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Terada, 2007: 68–9). It is noteworthy that US authorities lobbied China to oppose the AMF proposal (Calder, 2008: 27).

The election of President Obama in November 2008 heralded a reappraisal of the importance of economic regionalism in the Asia-Pacific to the United States. While the importance of this has been reinforced by the Global Financial Crisis, this has yet to prompt US authorities to exercise regional leadership in the area. The United States has deepened its economic interaction with the region by engaging established multilateral mechanisms. In November 2009, it was announced that the United States would enter into negotiations with a view to joining the TPP, which came into force in 2006 (Fergusson and Vaughn, 2010: 1). The United States is also involved in the negotiations to establish the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP).

Despite the prominent role of the United States, its approach to regionalism restricts its capacity to provide regional leadership, even in the security field. The

emphasis on developing security cooperation with select regional states, which largely are 'strategic partners' of the United States, in support of the US security agenda, comes at the expense of providing general regional or even sub-regional leadership on security issues. The United States is poorly positioned to set the agenda in developing regional arrangements, but continues to have a critical structural impact on the regional security landscape through its bilateral security arrangements, which constitute an important pillar of security for a number of states. There is little prospect for US regionalism to produce a security community with a substantive collective identity.

US regionalism has had little impact on the economic landscape of the Asia-Pacific. While the focus and approach of US regionalism have not resulted in the economic marginalization of the United States, the US approach to regionalism has rendered it a far less influential participant in regional economic processes than might be expected given its economic position and interests. The frequently restrained support of US authorities for economic regionalism in the Asia-Pacific has not necessarily adversely affected the effectiveness of regional initiatives, and may in some cases contribute to their acceptability, thereby facilitating the participation of states that might be concerned were these processes to be US led or dominated. The impact of the United States potentially is greatest where it is necessary to dovetail regional and global measures. The position and influence of the United States in institutions such as the IMF and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) ensures that US acquiescence, if not support, is crucial where these are concerned.

In general, the US vision of regionalism has had a detrimental effect on the capacity of the United States to exercise influence in the region. The distinct approaches to regionalism of the United States and many Asia-Pacific states often produce competing policy agendas and strategies, though the impact of this is mitigated by their tendency to focus on separate issues. The complexity of US Asia-Pacific regionalism is only rivalled by that of Australia (He, 2011).

US interaction with Asia-Pacific states

US interaction with Asia-Pacific states is quite complex, in keeping with US requirements of competition and cooperation. Even where there are mutual policy interests, the United States and Asia-Pacific states may differ in terms of their relative prioritization and policy approaches, complicating efforts to develop meaningful cooperation. The pattern of US interaction with Asia-Pacific states is very uneven. This is as much the case with states that traditionally have enjoyed close political relations with the United States as with those that have not.

The extent of the policy divide where regionalism is concerned is readily apparent in their respective policy focuses. Most Asia-Pacific states are reluctant to pursue security regionalism, which is under-developed in the region as a result. Where there is interest in this, it often involves a focus on what Sheldon Simon terms 'soft security' issues (Simon, 2007: 114). Where security regionalism has been pursued, this typically has produced

relatively weak mechanisms such as the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) and ASEAN. Political authorities in many Asia-Pacific states remain wary of security-oriented regionalism and generally have displayed little interest in moving beyond consultative mechanisms in a multilateral context. Asia-Pacific states are far more open to economic regionalism. This reflects the importance of economic progress to states throughout the region, which encourages international collaboration. Economic regionalism is far advanced in the Asia-Pacific region as a result. The region has seen a succession of initiatives designed to foster closer, more collaborative economic relations based on shared visions of export-led economic development. These include the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) as well as APEC.

Their distinct policy focuses generate considerable tension between the United States and other Asia-Pacific states. US expectations of regionalism often are unrealistic. In most cases, states in the region remain reluctant to engage as substantively as the United States would like. There is considerable dissatisfaction in the United States with what are regarded as ineffectual regional 'talk shops' (Emmerson, 2010: 7). Meanwhile, apparent US ambivalence to issues widely regarded as important in the region has not gone unnoticed. Many Asia-Pacific states were disappointed with the muted US response to the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–7, for example. While there is greater interest in the past in the United States in economic regionalism, the gulf between the United States and many states over security issues widened as a result of the US response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (Narine, 2007: 215).

The US position on inclusiveness constitutes a significant obstacle to regional engagement as well. In contrast to the US tendency toward developing exclusionary arrangements, political authorities in Asia-Pacific states generally support regionalism that is relatively open, with processes which are less open to domination by any one state. This perspective underlies the consensus-based decision-making norm of ASEAN (see Acharya, 2003: 214). Such importance that sub-regionalism had in the Asia-Pacific is declining, as is exemplified by the willingness of ASEAN to engage other states on issues of mutual interest through the ARF and broad support for 'open regionalism' in the Asia-Pacific. There are contrary trends which serve to reinforce the dissimilar positions of the United States and many Asia-Pacific states: while the importance of formal institutionalization to the United States has declined since the 1970s, recent years have seen growing support for the development of formal institutions within the region.

There are notable differences between the United States and most Asia-Pacific states with respect to identity, but a focus on identity issues is problematic in analysing US Asia-Pacific regionalism. While there is some potential for identity issues to influence perspectives on regionalism, as explored by Katzenstein (see Katzenstein, 1996: 22–3), the fact that the US policy community constitutes a relatively cohesive constituency and pragmatic nature of US regionalism minimizes the impact of this. As Acharya notes, such considerations have had less of an impact on US regionalism than on other states' perspectives on US regionalism (see Acharya, 2009: 2–3).

There are important differences in general positions regarding US regionalism. A number of states, which have enjoyed relatively close political relations with the United States, are more inclined to be receptive to US regionalism. The complexity of the regional political and economic landscape and the extent to which US objectives potentially conflict with those of Asia-Pacific states means that common ground in terms of regionalism cannot be taken for granted. Japan, for example, often elects to engage the United States in terms similar to those traditionally preferred by the United States (see Cha, 2011: 47), but has been responsible for initiatives such as the AMF that are incompatible with US objectives, despite the strength of their relationship and many shared interests.

The resulting pattern of US interaction with Asia-Pacific states is complex. The United States features as an important contributor to security, and yet remains an outsider in many regional security processes. A similar situation characterizes economic regionalism, where the United States is an important actor, and yet remains less integrated than many Asia-Pacific states. On a number of occasions, Asia-Pacific states have excluded the United States from regional economic mechanisms in which it sought participation (Dieter, 2009: 79). The United States simultaneously features as a competitor and collaborator with a number of states, and must carefully balance its relations with states as a result.

Engaging China

No case better illustrates the complexity of US regionalism in the Asia-Pacific than that of China. The US relationship with China must balance the requirements of competition and cooperation in terms of both security and economic issues. Engaging China is complicated by the sensitivity of Chinese political authorities to international processes that are perceived as discriminating against China. Wariness toward such processes is the product of past treatment by the international community, including during the 'Century of Shame' between the 1840s and 1940s and at the hands of the Soviet Union after the mid-1950s. The role of power politics in US regionalism and the general reluctance of US authorities to engage in multilateralism have considerable potential to generate concern on the part of China (Wang, 2011).

The policy dilemma facing US authorities is increasing as China 'rises'. The economic development of China and its emergence as an important political actor at the regional and global levels expands the range of issues in which engagement is necessary. In the process, areas of policy convergence and divergence are emerging. US efforts to engage China are further complicated, particularly where security issues are concerned, by its pattern of engaging other Asia-Pacific states on security issues. The effective compartmentalization of US security regionalism through bilateralism and multinationalism enables US authorities to engage individual states or small groups of states on a case-by-case basis, but leads to difficulties in reconciling the various sets of relationships. There is little in the way of precedents to guide US authorities in dealing

with China, as they have not previously had to deal with any state on the terms now facing them.

The complexity of US engagement of China is manifest with respect to both security and economic regionalism. China formerly was not the subject of significant US security engagement, even following the US recognition of the People's Republic. China's program of military development and its growing importance as a contributor to Asia-Pacific security encourage engagement in quite distinct contexts. US authorities engage China bilaterally for the most part where security issues are concerned. This involves consultative mechanisms and confidence-building measures, which are designed to improve relations between them. US authorities also are working with China in dealing with mutual concern over the nuclear weapons program of the DPRK, as noted above. The value of this approach potentially is offset, however, by US security relations with a number of China's neighbors, particularly Japan, which reflect US concern over China as a potential security threat and which from a Chinese perspective appear geared to the requirements of strategic competition and 'constraint', if not 'containment'.

US economic regionalism toward China is less conflicted, with generally compatible interests and engagement through multilateral as well as bilateral mechanisms. There has been a steady trend of policy convergence between the United States and China as processes of economic reform in China have advanced and economic integration into regional and global economic structures has deepened. Recent heightened interest in economic regionalism on the part of the United States has further helped to close the gap with China. This was reinforced by the recent economic crisis, which highlighted the importance of 'G-2' collaboration between the United States and China (Sutter, 2009: 199–200). Security concerns continue to cast a shadow over economic engagement, however, with security considerations impacting on high-technology trade and investment. The potential for any increase in security concerns regarding China to impact on economic engagement are considerable.

US engagement of China is further complicated by its impact on US regionalism elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific. Not only is it the case that US engagement of other Asia-Pacific states can be a source of concern in China, but US engagement of China has the potential to generate concern elsewhere in the region. This is the case with respect to both security and economic issues.

Bridging the gap? The prospects for US regionalism

The substantial gulf that currently separates the United States from many Asia-Pacific states where regionalism is concerned is not necessarily unbridgeable. Policy convergence over the medium to long term is possible given trends in both the United States and the Asia-Pacific. Increasing interest in promoting economic progress may well continue to encourage greater attention in the United States to its foreign economic policy in the Asia-Pacific region. Engaging regional states on economic issues more closely will require much greater support for economic regionalism than in the past, thereby expanding the common ground with Asia-Pacific states.

The scope for addressing security issues in a multilateral context also is expanding. Growing concern over national security is manifest in processes of defense sector development, and also can be seen in processes of institutional development. Functionalists long have argued that the exercise of collaboration in less-sensitive issue areas potentially provides a basis for collaboration in more sensitive security-related issues, as has been demonstrated by ASEAN. Led by states such as Singapore, ASEAN has gradually moved toward addressing national security issues, albeit still largely of a non-traditional nature. This also is the case with APEC, which has made substantial progress in explicitly addressing non-traditional security issues such as energy security and even in more traditional areas such as maritime security and terrorism, though, in the case of maritime security, this resulted from concern over its negative impact in developmental terms (Ravenhill, 2007: 142 and 148–50).

Increasing concern over security issues, which is particularly evident on the part of states in Southeast Asia, potentially will generate greater interest in security regionalism than has been evident in the past. This may engender the development of regional security mechanisms, while the importance of politico-military rivalries within the Asia-Pacific region in generating national security concerns suggests that the US model of bilateralism and multinationalism retains considerable potential. The importance of the security role of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region has been enhanced. Not only have US authorities been able to develop stronger bilateral defence ties with states such as Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, but there is growing recognition of the stabilizing role of the United States in the region. Even Vietnam has come to perceive this in a positive light (Acharya, 2003: 208). This trend is strengthening the basis for engagement in multilateral fora, as is evidenced by the US–ASEAN Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism of August 2002 (Dosch, 2006: 114–15).

Recent economic trends also serve to increase the common ground between the United States and the rest of the region. Asia-Pacific states such as China figure increasingly prominently in US economic planning. The much less damaging US response to the recent economic crisis stands in stark contrast to the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–8, where US policy was developed and implemented with little apparent regard for the states of the region (see Beeson and Berger, 2003: 40).

The prospects for US regionalism in the Asia-Pacific will depend in large part on the leadership of the United States. While the general characteristics of the US approach to regionalism noted above are likely to prove enduring, there is considerable scope for flexibility and for the evolution of policy to meet changing requirements and conditions, as perceived by the president and those from whom they receive advice. US efforts to develop bilateral and multinational security relationships have not abated, with recent years seeing the establishment of a Trilateral Security Dialogue with Australia and Japan, and the extension of ‘major non-NATO ally’ status to additional Asia-Pacific states (Moore, 2009: 204–5).

Recent trends and developments serve as important indicators of the future of US regionalism in the Asia-Pacific. The efforts now being exerted to engage the region through multilateral economic mechanisms demonstrate the importance of this to US authorities. President Obama's evident concern to engage the Asia-Pacific region also is very important. He stated in a speech in Japan on 14 November 2009 that 'the growth of multilateral organizations can advance the security and prosperity of this region' and emphasized that the US attitude toward multilateral mechanisms had changed, so that it would no longer be 'disengaged' from them (Obama, 2009). The impact of the Obama presidency has been slight thus far, however. The US effort to heighten engagement of the region has been well received, with the United States being invited to participate in the East Asian Summit (EAS) series from 2011.

While tensions between the United States and other Asia-Pacific states stemming from underlying differences over regionalism are unlikely to abate, common interests are helping to bridge the gap between them. This provides a strong basis for closer engagement in security as well as economic terms, but the prospects for sustaining this are dependent upon the development of the regional economic landscape and particularly the regional security landscape. The course of US regionalism will be crucial to this; the success of US authorities in balancing the requirements of competition and cooperation will impact not only on their approach to engaging the region and their scope for influencing the development of regional structures and processes, but on how states in the region manage relations with the United States.

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