

DISCUSSION PAPER

Developing
U.S.-ROK-ASEAN
Cooperation

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Introduction

Since its establishment in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has fostered unprecedented levels of regional economic, political, and security cooperation. The organization has emerged as a major economic center and a political entity with an increasingly important voice in Asian affairs. In 2016, ASEAN's combined gross domestic product (GDP) ranked sixth in the world and third in Asia at \$2.55 trillion, four times larger than it was in 1999.

ASEAN countries have established the ASEAN Economic Community and most of them joined the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and worked to negotiate the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP).¹ Regional affiliated institutions have proliferated, such as ASEAN+1 (ASEAN with either China, India, Japan, or South Korea, also known as the Republic of Korea or ROK), ASEAN+3 (ASEAN with China, Japan, and South Korea), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM Plus) mechanisms. Above of all, ASEAN has brought about five decades of peace as its member nations have been able to build themselves and promote economic development. While disputes and contradictions still exist among the nations, ASEAN has helped to prevent bilateral differences from turning into major conflicts.

Despite these accomplishments, effective regionalism in Southeast Asia faces constraints. ASEAN cannot resolve chronic maritime territorial claims or avoid the influence of competition among major powers outside the region. The organization seeks the power to set norms for cooperation in the region (such as the ASEAN Free-Trade Area or Code of Conduct for the South China Sea with China), but it is vulnerable on issues involving great powers. Regional integration is limited by the emphasis on economic cooperation rather than on forming effective mechanisms to resolve crisis spots such as the South China Sea. Collaboration is based primarily on building confidence (by creating norms and opportunities for dialogue and expanding shared interests) rather than on developing security ties.

ASEAN's priorities and goals for the future include (but are not limited to): maintaining solidarity within ASEAN, upholding the principle of consensus in organizing activities within and outside the bloc, maintaining ASEAN's central role in promoting regional cooperation and in relations with major countries; building and strengthening the ASEAN Community (established in 2015) with the aim of developing a so-called community of caring societies; and enhancing efficiency among nations coordinating with each other and in relations with countries outside the region to address hot spots, contributing to peace, stability, and cooperation in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific.

To solidify itself as a regional security bloc capable of addressing crises, ASEAN should develop greater security cooperation with outside nations, including the United States, Australia, China, India, Japan, Russia, and South Korea. Presently, cooperation among nations within and outside the region is not strong enough to address the fundamental causes of territorial disputes or financial or economic crises that endanger the region's development.

In particular, South Korea stands out as an ideal non-ASEAN Asian power that has the potential to work with both the United States and ASEAN to foster greater regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. Japan, while a major U.S. ally and economy, has geopolitical, historical, and territorial disputes with China and would have difficulty adding to regional cooperation. By taking advantage of South Korea's increasing diplomatic and economic capacity, the United States should seek to improve the state of U.S.-ROK-ASEAN relations to promote regional security and stability in Southeast Asia.

U.S. Policy Toward Southeast Asia

Since the end of World War II, the United States has promoted cooperation in Asia by developing a network of security alliances to ensure a secure environment for trade, economic development, and the fostering of democratic values. It has also guarded against other major powers gaining positions of dominance in Asia. After the Cold War, and especially in the last ten years, the United States has continued to maintain its interests in Asia by strengthening its relationships with Asian countries and regional institutions.

On the military side, the U.S. government has pursued a range of activities, such as redistributing U.S. military forces, with plans for approximately 60 percent of the U.S. Navy to be focused on the Asia-Pacific region by 2020; strengthening the flexibility of military forces to better respond to the region's diverse security challenges, namely the North Korean nuclear issue, disputes in the South China Sea, and nontraditional security challenges; and strengthening the capacity of U.S. partners to cope with terrorism, smuggling, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief issues.²

On the diplomatic side, the United States has strengthened its ties with regional countries and helped to develop regional multilateral diplomatic mechanisms. The United States continues working on improving relations with China; cooperating with its allies, partners, and other major countries; building regional institutions; and maintaining a watchful eye on Asian hot spots. The United States has also helped countries develop a new regional order with standards and rules that are consistent with international laws and practices, enabling Asian nations to develop and strengthen sustainable links with the rest of the world.³ The United States emphasizes both cooperation and competition in its relationship with China to ensure that a rising China does not threaten the region's stability, and it welcomes China's willingness to assume more leadership responsibilities in the region and around the world as far as they help to bolster the liberal international order. In the meantime, it closely monitors China's military development, as well as its assertive sovereignty claims in space, cyberspace, and the Yellow, East China, and South China Seas. The United States has also continually affirmed its determination to protect the interests of its allies and partners—namely Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, and South Korea—when dealing with China's rise and its implications for the region.⁴

On the economic side, the United States continues to strengthen its trade and investment activities in Asia. The Asia-Pacific has a great degree of economic integration and its economic relationship with the United States should be a top priority for any administration.⁵ The Barack Obama administration pushed TPP negotiations as a pillar of the so-called rebalancing policy, and the TPP was seen as a step towards an Asia-Pacific regional free trade agreement. The U.S. withdrawal from the TPP has left many countries in the region frustrated and has delayed the Asia-Pacific's economic integration as well as the United States' cooperation with the region. The Donald J. Trump administration, while continuing to attach importance to relations with the Asia-Pacific, has revisited existing free trade agreements with the region and argues that bilateral trade deals best serve U.S. interests.⁶

U.S.-ASEAN ties have been particularly close over the past decade, especially since the Obama

administration joined the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2009. The United States has always encouraged ASEAN's independent and active development, has strengthened its multifaceted cooperation with ASEAN, and has expressed the wish for ASEAN to play an increasingly powerful role in keeping peace and stability in the area. U.S. policy toward ASEAN is a combination of two approaches: developing an effective relationship with ASEAN as a bloc and pursuing bilateral initiatives with Southeast Asian countries aimed at promoting political stability and market-oriented economic reform.

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of U.S.-ASEAN relations, and the two sides are organizing activities to commemorate the occasion. In April 2017, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence visited the ASEAN secretariat, reaffirming the U.S. commitment to the region and strengthening the strategic partnership between the two parties. Pence said, "We'll continue to work closely with ASEAN to promote peace and stability in the South China Sea by upholding a rules-based order, ensuring the lawful and unimpeded flow of commerce, and encouraging the peaceful and diplomatic resolution of disputes." He also said, "President Trump and I are confident that through our continued partnership . . . [the United States and ASEAN will] reach even greater heights . . . [in fostering] peace and prosperity on these seas and between our lands."⁷

ASEAN has welcomed U.S. initiatives in the region, including the Obama administration's rebalancing policy and the United States' advocacy of the observation of fundamental principles of international law, backed by a continuing U.S. military presence, in its approach to three major hot spots: the Korean Peninsula, the South China Sea, and the East China Sea.

The Trump administration is essentially continuing the previous U.S. policy in the South China Sea, including the continuation of freedom of navigation exercises.⁸ In his speech at the UN General Assembly on September 19, 2017, President Trump stated, "We must reject threats to sovereignty, from the Ukraine to the South China Sea. We must uphold respect for law, respect for borders, and respect for culture, and the peaceful engagement these allow."⁹ ASEAN countries value U.S. policies that uphold international law in the South China Sea, such as:

- prohibiting the use of force or coercion by any of the claimants to resolve sovereignty disputes or change the status quo of disputed South China Sea features;
- promoting freedom of navigation, including unimpeded lawful navigation for commercial, private, and military vessels and aircraft, and requiring that coastal states respect the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) language that all "high seas freedoms," including peaceful military operations, are applicable in the exclusive economic zones of coastal states;
- basing all maritime entitlements to any of the waters of the South China Sea on international law and deriving claims from land features in the South China Sea (China's nine-dash line does not meet this criteria);
- developing an effective code of conduct that would promote a rules-based framework for managing and regulating the behavior of relevant countries in the South China Sea; and
- supporting internationally recognized dispute resolution mechanisms, including those provided for in the UNCLOS treaty.¹⁰

In polls conducted by the Asian Barometer Survey from June 2014 to June 2016, the public in many East Asian countries had a strongly positive view of the regional influence of the United States.¹¹ A

survey by the Pew Research Center in June 2017, spanning thirty-seven nations, showed a drop in favorability of the United States (a global median of 49 percent held a favorable view of the United States, compared to 64 percent in the final years of the Obama administration). In the meantime, there is still strong support for the United States in the Philippines (78 percent), South Korea (75 percent), and Vietnam (84 percent).¹² ASEAN has been cautious while watching the United States change its policy toward the region because of concerns that adjustments could cause instability. U.S. trade and economic arrangements centered on ASEAN have been limited by the vast diversity of ASEAN members' economic development levels. Moreover, the U.S. withdrawal from the TPP raises concerns about the lack of continuity in U.S. staying power and influence in Southeast Asia.

ASEAN-South Korea Cooperation

On its part, strengthening cooperation with Asia in general and with ASEAN in particular could turn South Korea into a focal point for economic integration in the region and enhance security cooperation (especially with the United States) in order to stabilize the situation on the Korean Peninsula and respond to common security challenges in the wider Asia-Pacific region. As a treaty ally, South Korea supports increased U.S. cooperation with Asia and has focused on strengthening both its economic and security cooperation with the United States. On economics, two-way trade in 2016 between the United States and South Korea was \$110 billion.¹³ On security, in addition to hosting 28,500 U.S. troops, South Korea continues to retain the U.S. wartime operational command and works with the United States in promoting regional military cooperation.

South Korea has sought to strengthen its relations with ASEAN since the two parties established diplomatic relations in 1989. South Korea joined the TAC in 2004 and the two sides elevated their relations from so-called comprehensive cooperation to a strategic partnership in 2010, a title change signaling the increased importance of the relationship. In 2012, South Korea sent an ambassador and established a permanent mission to ASEAN. On the political side, South Korea attaches great importance to relations with ASEAN, supports the ASEAN Community and the Community Vision, supports ASEAN's central role in regional structures, and participates in regional forums such as ARF, EAS, ADMM Plus, and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF). In July 2016, the South Korean foreign ministry insisted that peace, stability, and freedom of navigation and aviation should be ensured in the South China Sea, where the world's major international sea-lanes are located, and that disputes in the South China Sea should be resolved based on common rules as well as appropriate agreements and commitments to demilitarize.

In terms of economics, South Korea's total trade value in 2015 reached about \$123 billion, ranking it fifth among ASEAN's partners.¹⁴ South Korea's foreign direct investment flows into ASEAN reached \$5.7 billion in 2015.¹⁵ ASEAN and South Korea have also signed a free trade agreement (in effect since 2010) and other cooperation agreements, paving the way for a stable relationship in the economic, technical, and education fields. On the social side, exchanges of people between ASEAN and South Korea are implemented through many programs: 2017 is the year of ROK-ASEAN exchanges aimed at enhancing cultural ties and understanding.

ASEAN members appreciate cooperation with South Korea for many reasons, from their shared cultural heritage to common interests in economics and trade. South Korea is also considered an important bridge between ASEAN member states and Western countries. ASEAN countries value South Korea's technical and development assistance to the region, especially when responding to political crises or economic difficulties. However, ASEAN countries also expect South Korea to play a bigger role in handling South China Sea tensions as well as nontraditional security challenges.

Prospects for U.S.-ROK-ASEAN Cooperation

ASEAN strives to promote cooperation in Southeast Asia and develop ties between the region and other countries. The organization attaches great importance to its relations with the United States and South Korea. Although there have been times when U.S. cooperation with ASEAN appears to waver, ASEAN has always responded by promoting a more active role by the United States. For its part, the United States has increased participation in regional cooperation forums over the past decade, notably the EAS, ARF, and U.S.-ASEAN summit, although the trajectory remains uncertain under the Trump administration.

The Trump administration's policy planning and implementation, particularly in relation to Southeast Asia, will have direct consequences for U.S. cooperation with South Korea and ASEAN in promoting Asian regionalism. While still the world's leader in soft and hard power, the United States continues to face many challenges, including continued growing geopolitical instability in the international political and security environment; competition from emerging countries, especially from China and partly from Russia; and difficulties in its domestic politics, combined with limited resources, which constrain policy options and priorities for the United States.

In addition, the United States also has to address complex traditional and nontraditional security challenges that lack simple solutions. Notably, Asian nations (including South Korea and ASEAN countries) are interested in how the Trump administration will address Chinese efforts to rewrite the regional rules. There are also concerns that cooperation between the United States and China could sacrifice the interests of other Asian countries or that tensions between the United States and China could lead to regional instability or even military conflict.

The Future of U.S.-ROK-ASEAN Cooperation

The prospects for cooperation on regionalism among the United States, ASEAN, and South Korea are set in the context of Asia's continued economic growth. Efforts to strengthen regional cooperation and promote economic and strategic stability will continue. However, the region faces a number of nontraditional security issues and growing tensions on the Korean Peninsula without a clear resolution in sight.

Nevertheless, in the absence of an alternative regional security mechanism, ASEAN will continue to play a central role, and this will likely be a longstanding trend in Southeast Asia. At the fiftieth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, all countries affirmed the importance of ASEAN to the peace, stability, and development of the region as well as of each ASEAN member. ASEAN should continue to promote solidarity and lead regional cooperation mechanisms to enlist the support of partners in building the ASEAN Community and expanding its external relations. Southeast Asian countries agree that ASEAN is a bright spot in economic cooperation and should champion free and fair trade through the effective implementation of existing free trade agreements and the negotiation of new multilateral agreements, including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

There is a widely accepted perception among ASEAN countries that the United States, South Korea, and other like-minded countries, such as Japan and Australia, aim to strengthen Southeast Asia's multilateral institutions. Therefore, the United States, South Korea, and ASEAN will likely continue to promote cooperation in ASEAN-centered regional groupings, including the ASEAN+3, EAS (an important regional institution in which the United States participated in 2010), and the EAMF, which was established in 2012 to address maritime security issues. The ARF, established in 1994, currently includes twenty-seven participating countries and will remain important. In the field of defense cooperation, the ADMM Plus (established in 2010) presents opportunities for parties to address security challenges. The United States has also expressed support for the establishment of the RCEP among ASEAN and six partners including China and South Korea.

The rise of China, in particular, is an important factor influencing the form of regionalism and U.S.-ROK-ASEAN cooperation in Asia. China seeks to promote alternative rules of the game, affecting prospects for peace and stability in the South and East China Seas. In 2010, China overtook Japan to become the world's second-largest economy and has been increasing its military spending and employing hard and soft power simultaneously to increase its influence in the region. Based on its claim of the so-called nine-dash line, which lays claims to over 80 percent of the South China Sea area, China has been carving out its sphere of influence, altering the status quo, and creating tension in the region. Speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on May 29, 2015, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that, as the strategic configuration in Asia changes, relations between the United States and China are vital to shaping China's peaceful rise. Therefore, other Asian countries want this bilateral relationship to remain stable. He also emphasized the importance of freedom of navigation for important sea-lanes through the South China Sea and warned that ongoing tensions in both the East and South China Seas could destabilize the region.¹⁶

The United States and South Korea will likely continue to gradually promote cooperation in addressing the South China Sea issue, with the United States enhancing its military presence in the region and encouraging other nations to develop a code of conduct between China and ASEAN. This is also a continuation of ASEAN leaders' goals for disputes to be resolved peacefully and for freedom of navigation to be protected, and it is consistent with the commitment between President Obama and ASEAN in February 2016 to uphold "nonmilitarization and self-restraint in the conduct of activities."¹⁷ President Trump will likely continue supporting that course of action.

Cooperation on the South China Sea also illustrates that South Korea is paying more attention to regional security issues than it had before. Security dialogues between South Korea and ASEAN have been held regularly since 2014 and can more directly address the issue of military cooperation than the security forum between Japan and ASEAN focusing on nontraditional security issues. In view of the limited security cooperation between China and ASEAN, this cooperation between South Korea and ASEAN countries is promising.

Promoting regional mechanisms and issues related to the South China Sea are not the only areas where the United States, South Korea, and ASEAN can continue to work together. The three powers can also promote more cooperation on the Korean Peninsula, with ASEAN playing an intermediary role. In addition, South Korea could become more involved in cultural cooperation between the United States and ASEAN as well as technical and humanitarian assistance such as the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) that aims to connect Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam's efforts to solve problems facing the Mekong River region. ASEAN is the seventh-largest market in the world and is the fourth-largest export market for the United States; it therefore deserves more attention and cooperation from the United States and South Korea.

Recommendations

There are still significant gaps among the United States, South Korea, and ASEAN in terms of how each side approaches regionalism in Southeast Asia. The overemphasis on the narrow self-interest of the United States under the Trump administration's America First agenda, embodied by the president's request to reduce the United States' foreign aid budget, could exacerbate these problems.¹⁸ Meanwhile, South Korea has failed to find new ways to move cooperation with ASEAN forward. South Korea's diplomacy is focused on cooperation with Northeast Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Russia, as well as the United States, mainly because of the North Korea issue. In addition, South Koreans are concerned about the possibility of a conflict with China over the South or East China Seas. Within ASEAN, an overemphasis on the principle of consensus has sparked debates about the organization's effectiveness in addressing internal issues and strengthening its cooperation with other countries.

Keeping those differences in mind, if the United States, South Korea, and ASEAN countries can continue to strengthen their cooperation, they will not only promote stable development in the region but also create a model of group collaboration for others to follow. The three parties should focus on promoting cooperation in areas such as trilateral/flexible security cooperation, coordination of capacity building, maritime security contributions, infrastructure development, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In particular, the United States, South Korea, and ASEAN should focus on the South China Sea in the coming years. Although some progress has been made in developing a code of conduct for the South China Sea, ASEAN countries continue to be concerned about potential complications that could threaten peace, security, and stability in the region. Concerning the situation on the Korean Peninsula, the United States, South Korea, and ASEAN should strengthen policy coordination, bring the parties back to the negotiating table, and redouble efforts to prevent clashes from breaking out unexpectedly.

As a major power with a global perspective and enormous resources, the United States needs to be more active in promoting regional cooperation, including bilateral relations with South Korea and ASEAN countries. The United States should maintain its economic and military commitments to the region, including possibly returning to the TPP while supporting the RCEP. Southeast Asian nations also expect that steps by the Trump administration to reduce the U.S. trade deficit will not damage its relationships with the region. The United States should also be more active in promoting initiatives to be discussed in ASEAN-led forums to help improve the situations in the South China Sea and the Korean Peninsula while maintaining a strong military presence to guard against conflicts at regional hot spots.

South Korea should be more proactive in using the power of ASEAN and other regional forums to support the settlement of tensions on the Korean Peninsula through diplomatic means. Meanwhile, South Korea needs to clarify its stance toward promoting peaceful strategies to the South China Sea issue in cooperation with Southeast Asian nations. South Korea should also endeavor to share its cultural values with ASEAN nations and seek to reduce the consequences of the so-called noninterference into the internal affairs of sovereign countries principle, which is a popular slogan used by countries (particularly China) that do not want external powers to become involved in certain regional issues, such as the South China Sea.

The United States, South Korea, and ASEAN should focus on promoting trilateral cooperation by taking the following steps:

- *Enhance discussion on regional security and development issues in bilateral and trilateral mechanisms.* The United States, South Korea, and ASEAN countries should host discussions in their respective countries on topics such as responses to nontraditional security issues; hot spots including the Korean Peninsula, South China Sea, and East China Sea; and enhancing regional economic cooperation (e.g., RCEP).
- *Seek resolutions to security and development issues at regional forums.* Forums focused on ASEAN should not shy away from discussing sensitive issues such as the South China Sea. The most important forums are ASEAN+3, EAS, EAMF, and ADMM+. Discussions should aim to support countries in the region that comply with the principles of international law, peacefully resolve disputes, and facilitate the settlement of specific disputes in order to sustain peace and stability in the area.
- *Promote maritime security cooperation.* In addition to calling for enhanced maritime security in general, the United States, South Korea, and ASEAN need to strengthen joint patrol activities, promote cooperation in avoiding clashes, and cooperate in responding to disasters at sea.
- *Increase contributions to the Lower Mekong Initiative.* Based on the existing framework of the initiative, the United States should call for South Korea to contribute more (together with Japan and Australia) to the LMI to address the increasing challenges facing ASEAN countries along the Mekong.
- *Strengthen infrastructure and information connectivity in Southeast Asia.* Providing affordable rural internet connectivity and enhancing land, maritime, and energy infrastructure will strengthen ASEAN connectivity and reduce the disparity in the levels of development among ASEAN countries. The United States and South Korea are both experienced and capable of promoting infrastructure and information connectivity.
- *Enhance cultural connectivity.* The three parties should organize more cultural activities. Promoting shared cultural values facilitates the building of the ASEAN community and the link between ASEAN and the West. South Korea can act as a link between the United States and ASEAN.

Conclusion

The Asia-Pacific region lacks an effective mechanism to promote international cooperation, particularly in resolving controversial issues. The United States, ASEAN, and South Korea can help to remedy this situation by strengthening their bilateral and trilateral coordination on economic and security policies. The three parties can demonstrate a new model for group collaboration among countries that share common goals despite being at different levels of development. Security collaboration should focus especially on seeking negotiated resolutions to regional tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in the South China Sea. The three entities should promote trilateral collaboration in other areas as well. If this model of regional cooperation and collaboration were to produce encouraging results, the template could be expanded to include other like-minded countries in the region, such as Australia, India, Japan, and even China.

About the Author

Binh Thai Lai is the deputy consul-general of Vietnam in Houston, Texas. Prior to his current position, Lai served as deputy director-general and assistant director-general in the Vietnamese ministry of foreign affairs, director of the American research division, director and deputy director of the North America division, and as a Vietnam-U.S. relations desk officer. Lai has participated in various research projects on U.S.-Vietnam relations, including the book *Vietnam-Americas: Challenges and Opportunities*, and he coauthored the book *U.S.-China relations: Cooperation and Competition From the Perspective of Balance of Power*. Before joining the Vietnamese ministry of foreign affairs, Lai was a product manager for FPT Corporation, the largest IT company in Vietnam, and was a media supervisor for Goldsun Advertising and Printing Company. He earned a BA in international economics from Hanoi Foreign Trade University, another BA in law from Hanoi National University, a post-graduate diploma in international management from the International Management Institute in New Delhi, an MA in international public policy from Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, and a PhD in international relations from the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam.

Endnotes

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1. APEC was founded in November 1989 with twelve founding members: the United States, Australia, Brunei, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a free trade agreement that aims to integrate Asia-Pacific economies. The agreement was originally signed by Brunei, Chile, New Zealand, and Singapore on June 3, 2005 (effective May 28, 2006). The United States, Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, and Vietnam later joined. Twelve member countries concluded talks in Atlanta, Georgia, on October 5, 2015, but the United States withdrew from the agreement in January 2017.
 2. Elizabeth Bumiller, "Words and Deeds Show Focus of the American Military on Asia," *New York Times*, November 10, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/11/world/asia/us-militarys-new-focus-on-asia-becomes-clearer.html>.
 3. In her January 12, 2010, speech at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton underscored the United States' position thus: the relationship between the United States and its allies and counterparts plays an important role in building the structure of the area; regional institutions and mechanisms serve three major objectives: security, economic development, and the promotion of democracy and human rights; institutions and regional mechanisms must be practical and effective, focusing on action; the United States prioritizes three types of new mechanisms: informal, regional and sub-regional, and trilateral dialogue/cooperation; and it is important to identify regional institutions and mechanisms that involve many countries, without having any single country dominating them. Notably, the United States considers the EAS as the focus of regional cooperation, and it also attaches great importance to and attends high-level ASEAN meetings and the ARF. Until recently, the TPP was expected to be an important U.S. tool in building regional economic structures and promoting regional security.
 4. For example, affirming commitments under the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, continually strengthening bilateral defense ties through strategic dialogue and joint operations, and supporting disaster recovery after earthquakes and tsunamis; increasing cooperation with South Korea to guard against instability on the Korean Peninsula, implementing a free trade agreement with South Korea, and holding trilateral meetings among the United States, Japan, and South Korea; increasing coordination with Australia through the continued rotation of U.S. Marine deployments to a base in Darwin; and further strengthening the U.S. presence in the Philippines (until recently) and Singapore by increasing military exchanges, visiting bases, and providing equipment support and technology, and conducting joint exercises and coordination for disaster relief in the region.
 5. According to the United States Trade Representative, in 2012 the United States exported \$942 billion in goods to markets in the Asia-Pacific, accounting for 61 percent of total U.S. exports. The United States regards the Asia-Pacific as a priority group. U.S. investment in the region in 2012 reached \$622 billion, an increase of more than 35 percent from 2009.
 6. Congressional Research Service, "The United States Withdraws from TPP," May 23, 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IN10646.pdf>.
 7. "Remarks by the Vice President at ASEAN," The White House, April 20, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/04/20/remarks-vice-president-asean>.
 8. The Trump administration has already conducted three freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) in the South China Sea since May 2017. The Obama administration conducted three during all of 2016.
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