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United States and European Union Evolving Approaches in Southeast Asia: Moving Closer to Convergence or Divergence?

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Abstract

With the launch of Barack Obama's strategic rebalance to Asia-Pacific, there has been a widening of the United States' military, economic, and diplomatic presence in the Southeast Asian region. Likewise, it is clear that Southeast Asia is currently a region of relevant interest for both the United States and the European Union (EU). Surprisingly, however, up to the present, a systematic comparison of their approaches in the region has been largely lacking. To fill this void, this article compares US and EU interests, strategies, and main instruments of cooperation in Southeast Asia. Special attention is paid to the main developments that occurred in the United States, from Obama's announcement of a strategic rebalance to Asia-Pacific to Donald Trump's National Security Strategy, and in the EU, with the release there of the 2012 "Updated East Asia Policy Guidelines." Examining whether the EU and the United States are moving towards a greater convergence of intent is of crucial importance for identifying opportunities for the further development of the transatlantic relationship in Southeast Asia. This article argues, though, that despite some apparent common traits in the US's and the EU's intentions, their strategies and instruments ultimately differ substantially – reflecting divergent paths. This creates crucial impediments to any further development of transatlantic cooperation in Southeast Asia.

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Keywords

Southeast Asia, EU-US, foreign policy approaches, ASEAN

Introduction

With the launch of Barack Obama's strategic rebalance to Asia-Pacific, there has been a widening of the United States' military, economic, and diplomatic presence in the Southeast Asian region – and, in particular, more extensive engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Likewise, the year 2012 saw an intensification of European Union (EU)–ASEAN relations, testified to *inter alia* by the unprecedented number of official visits from EU officials to ASEAN. These included the first official visit to the ASEAN Secretariat by the then high representative (HR) of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Lady Ashton, by EU accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), and by new commitments in the realm of non-traditional security (NTS).

These developments have attracted increasing attention in academic circles and think tanks. Much has been written about US rebalancing policy in Southeast Asia (see e.g. Graham, 2013; Limaye, 2013) and about the EU's evolving partnerships with the region (Kennes, 2015; Pennisi di Floristella, 2017). At first glance, the United States and the EU appear to have followed parallel approaches. Both actors have acceded to the TAC, which can still be considered the most prominent Southeast Asian security framework, and both have established a diplomatic mission to ASEAN and have appointed a dedicated ambassador. They have committed to a rules-based approach, respect for international law and the peaceful solution of disputes, liberal democracy, and trade and economic interdependence. Both have embarked on new initiatives to tackle transnational security challenges and have emphasised the centrality of regional institutions – above all ASEAN. Furthermore, the United States and the EU have launched regional strategic partnerships. In November 2015, the White House released a “Joint Statement on the ASEAN-US Strategic Partnership.” In a similar manner, the European Parliament and the European Council initiated a joint communication called “The EU and ASEAN: A Partnership with a Strategic Purpose.”

Yet the advent of the new US president, Donald Trump, in 2017 would leave lingering questions about the US's role in the region. Southeast Asia had not figured in Trump's presidential campaign, and local partners have become increasingly worried that under the “America First” motto the United States might abandon its support for multi-lateral institutions and regional diplomacy. At the same time, EU long-term commitment to Southeast Asia has also been increasingly constrained by daunting challenges coming from both within EU borders and its immediate neighbourhood – notably, Brexit, the migration and Eurozone crises, as well as limited available resources in qualitative and quantitative terms. It is clear, though, that Southeast Asia is currently a region of interest for both the EU and the United States despite their different historic, economic, and diplomatic ties with it.

Surprisingly, however, up to the present, the existing literature has not engaged in a systematic comparison of EU and US approaches to Southeast Asia. Examining whether their approaches are moving towards a greater convergence is of crucial importance for identifying opportunities for the further development of the transatlantic relationship in Southeast Asia, through co-operation and the division of labour. To fill this void, and utilising some commonly employed tools of foreign policy analysis, this article aims at comparing US and EU interests, strategies, and main instruments of cooperation in Southeast Asia, drawing on both primary sources, such as official documents and policy papers, and secondary literature.

The focus of this article is on the main developments which occurred in the United States, from Obama's announcement of a strategic rebalance to Asia-Pacific to Trump's National Security Strategy (NSS), and in the EU, with the release there of the 2012 updated "Guidelines on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia." Through this analysis, the article addresses the following key questions: What are the similarities and differences in EU and US approaches to ASEAN? To what extent are the US and the EU growing closer or more distant? And, is there any prospect of transatlantic cooperation in the region occurring? The following comparison of US and EU approaches to the region demonstrates, however, that despite some apparent common traits – ones which emerged especially during the Obama administration – their regional strategies and instruments ultimately differ substantially – reflecting divergent paths. This creates crucial impediments to any further development of transatlantic cooperation in this region.

US Interests

US interests in Southeast Asia have been remarkably consistent since the end of the Cold War. As Capie (2018) points out, Obama's rebalancing strategy can be seen as an expansion rather than a transformation of US policy in the region. Official US speeches and documents outline, in fact, a commitment to long-standing US interests: namely, stability and security as well as a regional order rooted in an open and transparent economic environment; the peaceful resolution of disputes; respect for universal values, human rights, and freedoms; and a rules-based international order (Clinton, 2011; The White House, 2015; US Department of Defense, 2012, 2014).

Maintaining peace and security across the region has been a long-standing US interest in Southeast Asia. As noted by Schambaugh (2013), preserving Southeast Asian stability functions to enhance the US's economic and diplomatic standing in the region and to prevent the emergence of a rival superpower there. Accordingly, during the Cold War era, the United States heavily invested in the region to prevent the expansion of communism and to hold Southeast Asia within the Western sphere of influence. Since the 1990s, meanwhile, Southeast Asia has become one of the centres of US efforts to contain China's rise and to limit its assertive approach vis-à-vis US allies in various domains – including around the question of contested territorial claims in the South China Sea (SCS).

Against this backdrop, the regional Southeast Asian grouping ASEAN has progressively acquired growing relevance for the United States. While the ASEAN-US

Dialogue begun in 1977 with a clear focus on economics, trade, and development, since early in the new century co-operation has rapidly grown to include a wide range of political security and sociocultural areas (Chahavalpongpun, 2012). ASEAN and the United States have engaged in regular dialogue on regional and global concerns via a number of institutional settings such as the ASEAN-US Summit, the Post Ministerial Conferences, the ASEAN-US Dialogue, and the Joint Cooperation Committee Meeting. Since November 2009, ASEAN and US leaders have also met on an annual basis on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit.

In this fashion, ASEAN has become a crucial partner for the United States in Southeast Asia, while there has been a growing interest on the part of the latter in enhancing ASEAN-US ties and in supporting ASEAN centrality. Indeed, ASEAN's framework for regional cooperation – fostered by the cultivation of dialogue, the promotion of trust and confidence among states, and the facilitation of mutual understanding – has supported the US's own interests in maintaining peace and stability in the region. It has, indeed, been widely acknowledged that ASEAN's ability to advocate and diffuse norms for regional governance across the region have, alongside its efforts to offer rules-based solutions, helped to make transactions more predictable and to defuse conflicts (Allison, 2017; Ba, 2010). Of no less importance, ASEAN's central role as a convener and builder of multi-lateral regional institutions in Asia-Pacific and its ability to bring together all the major and regional powers within multi-lateral consultative frameworks – like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Plus (ADMM Plus) – has warded off the potential for Chinese dominance or hegemony (Caballero Anthony, 2014). The ASEAN-led multi-lateral architecture has acted, in fact, as a restraint on China's increasing attempts to pull Southeast Asian states away from the West by pressuring them to adopt more distinctive Asian values (Tow, 2012).

That said, the other key interest of the United States in Southeast Asia is to support trade and economic liberalisation. The White House recognises Southeast Asia's economic centrality given that:

Collectively, the ten member states of ASEAN comprise the third-largest economy in Asia and the seventh-largest in the world, with a combined GDP of US\$ 2.4 trillion. (The White House, 2016)

This robust performance combined with a population of nearly 635 million people as of 2016 makes Southeast Asia an attractive destination for US trade and investment. The region indeed has a vast consumer base, globally behind only China and India. In addition to this, ASEAN as a regional group offers more attractive markets and efficient locations for US investments (Petri and Plummer, 2014). In 2016, the United States was ASEAN's third biggest destination for exports following ASEAN members and China. Meanwhile, the United States ranked fifth as the place of origin for imported goods after ASEAN, China, Japan, and the EU (ASEAN Secretariat, 2017a). In 2016, two-way trade between the United States and ASEAN reached USD 230 billion, having grown by more than 58 per cent since 2010 (Ghosh, 2018). In parallel, US foreign direct investment

(FDI) in ASEAN has almost doubled since 2008. FDI from ASEAN to the United States stood at USD 24.2 billion in 2014 (Nguyen, 2016). Of no less significance, it has been estimated that US exports to ASEAN (worth over USD 100 billion) support 550,000 jobs for American workers and that many US companies – including many of the leading US multi-national corporations – have a presence in ASEAN (Kow, 2018).

Finally, the United States has an interest in promoting a rules-based international order and universal values – including human rights and liberal democracy. In particular since 2009, with the escalation of the SCS dispute, the United States has insisted that it has “important national interests” (Capie, 2018) in respect of international norms and rules, the preservation of freedom of navigation and overflight, and the peaceful resolution of this dispute. The Strait of Malacca is indeed a crucial shipping lane for the United States, being the second-largest choke point in the world after the Strait of Hormuz for the oil trade. Meanwhile, the United States has also partnered with ASEAN and with civil society groups in Southeast Asia to promote openness and good governance, strengthen the rule of law, and to build accountable institutions – including by helping ASEAN human rights bodies to integrate international standards into legislative and judicial processes.

Generally speaking, the advent of Trump has not signalled a deviation in core US interests in the region. However, one might reasonably argue that economic- and security-related concerns have prevailed over other objectives. As indicated by “The Remarks by President Trump on his Trip to Asia,” US interests now have to be read through the lens of an “America First” approach intended to “rebuild America, restore its economic strength, and defend its national security” (The White House, 2017a). Along these lines, the current president has insisted on strengthening ties with US allies, containing China’s power projection, and defusing the North Korea nuclear issue. He has also promoted the need to reshape regional economic trade and rules, prioritising US interests over those of its allies – marking the advent of a more transactional, defensive, and bilaterally focused approach. Some (Kurlantzick, 2017; Sutter, 2017) also warn that the current Trump administration is devoting secondary attention to democracy promotion and universal human rights. If, in fact, Trump’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) idea is supposed to be based on the US prioritising democracy and human rights as core interests even though democracy assistance budgets have remained the same, then high-level policy has begun to undermine American democratic programmes (Carothers and Brown, 2018). For example, Trump barely mentioned human rights abuses in the Philippines when he met President Rodrigo Duterte in 2017, and, unlike his predecessors, he has not publicly condemned them either. Conversely, the White House has continued to boost ties with many of Asia’s authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes – including Duterte, the generals who run the Kingdom of Thailand, and Malaysian prime minister Najib tun Razak (Kurlantzick, 2017).

Consequently, Trump’s praise of dictators abroad has not assuaged concerns over diminishing US interests in democracy and human rights promotion in the region (Parameswaran, 2019). Nevertheless, in December 2018, the adoption of the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) – which includes new funding to promote democracy, civil society, the rule of law, and human rights, occurring in tandem with other initiatives

to promote good governance – suggests some continuity of US policy in this realm. Likewise, the two High-Level Ministerial Meetings held by the US State Department designed to advance religious freedom – coming in the wake of concerns about human rights violations, including abuses perpetrated against the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar – indicate that attention to democracy and human rights has not been completely cast aside.

EU Interests

The EU's increasing gravitation towards Southeast Asia dates back to 1972, when an informal dialogue began between the then European Community (EC) and ASEAN, paving the way for one of the oldest group-to-group relationships worldwide. Economic and trade cooperation, aimed at achieving greater market access for ASEAN's exports and a price stabilisation scheme for its primary commodities, provided the initial impetus for the advancing of relations between these two regional groupings (Yeo, 2010). Meanwhile, the robust economic performance of the ASEAN bloc, the dynamism of the export-led economies of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand which have recently been followed by the Philippines and Vietnam too, led the EU to prioritise trade, investment links, and market opportunities (Yeo, 2010). Importantly, in 1980, the ASEAN-EC Cooperation Agreement was the first interregional one that the EC would sign with a foreign regional group. It had, therefore, a highly symbolic value, as it contributed to consolidating the image of Europe as a civilian power and served to legitimise ASEAN's regional role as well (Camroux, 2008).

Since the inception of its relations with Southeast Asia, the EU's key strategic interest has been economic. In this regard, the data are telling. ASEAN as a whole is the EU's third-largest trading partner outside Europe, after the United States and China; the EU, meanwhile, is ASEAN's second-largest trade partner after China. In 2017, ASEAN exported almost EUR 135 billion worth of goods to the EU while the latter exported EUR 91 billion to the former (EEAS, 2018). Meanwhile, the EU is the biggest provider of FDI to ASEAN with an investment portfolio of over EUR 263 billion (EEAS, 2018).

From a political point of view, the EU's relations with Southeast Asia acquired greater significance with the launch of the first ASEAN-EC Ministerial Meeting (AEMM) in 1978. Over the years, a comprehensive dialogue structure has developed, with the biennial AEMM as the highest forum, alongside the ASEAN-EU Post Ministerial Conference, ASEAN-EU Senior Officials meetings, and the ASEAN-EU Joint Cooperation Committee. These regular meetings have helped ASEAN and the EU better understand one another and build a higher level of familiarity to further cooperation.

In the 1990s, the EU also started to engage with Southeast Asia in security matters in the context of the ARF, which is Asia's first region-wide security institution that brings together ASEAN member states, major powers (United States, China, Japan, and Russia), and the EU. Since its foundation in 1994, the ARF has provided a regular forum for dialogue to contribute to efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in Asia-Pacific. However, the EU's support of peace and stability as well as promotion of the rule of law, human rights, good governance, and peace-oriented values – as espoused

in the principles of the “ASEAN Way” and in ASEAN’s adherence to non-interference – have been relevant sticking points and sources of friction, especially around the Myanmar issue. Notably, that country’s deplorable human rights record, disagreement on how to best engage with it, and its admission as a new member of ASEAN in 1997 – which was strongly opposed by the EU – long hampered ASEAN–EU interregional cooperation.

It was only in the aftermath of 9/11 and the resulting worldwide securitisation trends that the EU manifested a clear related interest in Southeast Asia. Among others, the 2001 Commission Communication “A New Partnership in Southeast Asia” highlights the EU’s interest in supporting the peace, stability, and territorial integrity of Southeast Asian countries, conflict prevention, and cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Since then, a number of other official documents have highlighted the EU’s interest in forging closer cooperation in NTS arenas, including food and maritime security as well as climate change. The SCS dispute also underlines the EU’s increasing interest in the region’s security situation. While the EU has not taken any position on claims to territories and maritime spaces in the SCS, both the EU and its individual member states have committed to safeguarding peace and the unimpeded flow of trade and communication across these waters and to pursuing them in accordance with international law. This includes regarding the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and its arbitration procedures, not least because approximately one-third of EU trade passes through these waters. The more recent 2012 Guidelines state in fact:

The recent increase in tensions in the SCS, with conflicting claims involving several countries in the region, could if unchecked have implications for navigation and commerce across the broader region, including for EU trade and investment interests. (Council of the European Union, 2012)

Finally, the EU has placed multi-lateral dialogue in the ASEAN region as a whole as among its key strategic interests. Notably, ASEAN has been considered as the “key to developing a more rounded Asia strategy” and is regarded as the leading multi-lateral mechanism of dialogue and cooperation on political, security, and economic issues in Southeast Asia (Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, 2015).

US Strategy under Obama

Under the Obama administration (2009–2017), Asia was elevated to a top priority of US strategy. While the United States since the end of the Vietnam War had only sporadically engaged with Southeast Asia, Obama regarded himself as the first “Pacific president” and attempted to bring together several important shifts in US strategy – including the winding-down of costly interventions in the Middle East, greater attention to Asia, and in particular focus on Southeast Asia. In October 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s article “America’s Pacific Century” and, one month later, “Obama’s Remarks to the Australian Parliament” marked the birth of the pivot to Asia.

The secretary of state clearly announced a strategic turn to Asia-Pacific through increased diplomatic, economic, and strategic investments. She also outlined

six key lines of action, namely: strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening our working relationships with emerging powers, including with China; engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights. (Clinton, 2011: 57)

Soon after, Obama defined “the presence and mission in the Asia-Pacific a top priority” and highlighted three critical components of US strategy towards the region: namely, “to advance security, prosperity, and human dignity” (The White House, 2011). Generally speaking, Obama’s rebalancing strategy had a significant Southeast Asian dimension throughout his two terms. While the strategy was rearticulated during Obama’s second term, it maintained the main overarching themes the president had initially presented – that is to say, emphasis on alliances and partnerships, trade and economics, and diplomacy and multi-lateralism.

The security and military dimensions were key components of Obama’s strategy in Southeast Asia. Since his speech of 2011, the president emphasised that the US position on defence needed to evolve in ways that would create a more broadly distributed, flexible, and sustainable presence in the region, with him identifying the need for the enhancement of US forces in Southeast Asia (Tow, 2016). For this aim, the Pentagon endorsed the Defense Strategic Guidance and former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced that the United States would keep 60 per cent of its naval assets in Asia. In addition to this, the United States tried to build up the forces of its allies and to forge new partnerships. In April 2014, the United States and the Philippines signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which allowed the United States access to five military bases in the Philippines and permission to rotate troops via that country.

In 2015, the United States announced the Maritime Security Initiative aimed at providing assistance to countries so as to improve their maritime awareness. The United States has also sought to normalise and strengthen bilateral ties with Vietnam, which culminated in a Comprehensive Partnership in 2013. Of no less significance, the United States tried to re-engage Singapore. The 2015 EDCA permitted the deployment of US aircraft and ships to Singapore on a rotational basis for various regional maritime patrol activities. The United States also stepped up co-operation with Indonesia, with the 2010 Comprehensive Partnership Agreement. The rebalance also included efforts to reach out to countries with which the United States had poor relations in the past, such as Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. Obama’s first-ever visits to Myanmar and Cambodia and Clinton’s visit to Laos epitomised the policy of cooperating with countries with which the United States had either not been engaged or had been under-engaged for nearly a generation (Limaye, 2013). Of no less significance, Obama’s strategy championed a broader security notion, paying attention to NTS challenges – from climate change to human trafficking. Thus, issues ranging from global health, sustainable development, cybersecurity, and countering violent extremism were treated as important areas of cooperation.

The second key pillar of Obama's strategy in Southeast Asia was economic. In this realm, the Obama administration inaugurated the Expanded Economic Engagement Initiative (E3), a framework for economic cooperation designed to expand trade and investment ties between the US and ASEAN and to increase the efficiency of supply chains. In addition, Obama launched the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade initiative, which was considered a central pillar of the US rebalancing strategy – designed to counter China's growing economic influence in Southeast Asia. Signed in February 2016, the TPP was a free trade agreement (FTA) with four small ASEAN countries (Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam) that mandated the liberalisation of trade but also demanded that participants respect labour and environmental standards as well as intellectual property rights and foreign investment protection. Although TPP only included four ASEAN countries, the United States launched a programme to assist other regional states in their understanding of its key tenets.

Finally, the third pillar of the rebalancing strategy was growing multi-lateral engagement, in particular with ASEAN. This multi-lateral attitude was signalled, *inter alia*, by the high number of visits by US leaders and high-ranking diplomats. In 2009, during his first year in office, Obama arranged the first summit with all ten ASEAN members. In 2010, Washington joined the ADMM Plus, a platform for ASEAN and its Dialogue Partners to strengthen security and defence cooperation in the region. In 2011, Obama became the first US president to attend the EAS, a forum founded in 2005 which brought together all the key Asian powers – plus the United States and Russia too (since 2011). Meanwhile, the first resident ambassador of the United States to the ASEAN Secretariat, David Lee Carden, was also appointed. In 2012, the ASEAN-US Summit was institutionalised and, in 2015, the US-ASEAN relationship was elevated to a strategic partnership. This demonstrated US commitment to a multi-dimensional and comprehensive relationship with ASEAN, focusing on efforts to promote a rules-based order in Asia-Pacific, as well as democracy, the rule of law, good governance, and universal human rights. In 2016, the historic Sunnylands Summit was indicative of ASEAN's ascending centrality for the United States and of the importance of multi-lateralism in US foreign policy under Obama. US accession to the TAC was also a very significant “symbolic move to engage more deeply and effectively with Southeast Asia and to cooperate with the ASEAN countries on the regional multi-lateral processes” (Nguyen, 2016: 45), not least because the United States had to accept a normative security framework entirely defined by a group of small and militarily weak countries – which would have constrained the US's ability to renounce the use of force in settling disputes (Caballero Anthony, 2018).

Trump's National Security Strategy

While Obama's strategy attached high priority to Southeast Asia, the Trump administration has announced an end to that pivot to Asia; also, Southeast Asia was rarely mentioned during the presidential campaign in 2015 and 2016. The Trump administration was also rather slow in nominating appointees to the region. This apparent neglect changed in April 2017 with Vice President Mike Pence's visit to Indonesia and, more

importantly, with Trump's twelve-day tour of Asia in November of the same year, which reaffirmed continued US involvement in Southeast Asian affairs.

More importantly, in December 2017, the Trump administration delivered an NSS. The document indicates that Trump's approach to Southeast Asia is conceived of within a new regional framing, the "Indo-Pacific region," defined as "the region, which stretches from the West coast of India to the Western shores of the US" (The White House, 2017b). Significantly, by referring to the Indo-Pacific region at the top of the section devoted to the discussion of the US approach to different world regions, Trump showed a certain degree of continuity with the Obama administration – implicitly considering the Indo-Pacific as the strategically most important geographical area for US foreign policy. Meanwhile, the Indo-Pacific framing attaches an important focus on the maritime domain – specifically, on sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Searight, 2017). This suggests another line of continuity with the Obama administration, which also focused on creating stronger ties with India. Other aspects, such as an emphasis on the importance of traditional alliances as well as on the construction of new economic and security partnerships, are testament that, to some extent, Trump's strategy has not discarded the core themes of Obama's policy in Southeast Asia.

Nevertheless, in contrast to his predecessor who had balanced concerns about China's rise with a cooperative attitude, the diplomatic narrative vis-à-vis that country has now been abandoned in favour of more adversarial tones. The People's Republic of China is defined, indeed, as one of the bigger existential threats to the US whose dominance, aggressive investments, and other economic activities "risk diminishing the sovereignty of many countries in the Indo-Pacific" (The White House, 2017b). On a number of occasions, Trump has identified China as a strategic competitor responsible for "chronic trade abuses" (The White House, 2017c). Pence also reiterated the criticism of China, accusing the latter of

employing a whole-of-government approach, using political, economic, and military tools, as well as propaganda, to advance its influence and benefit its interests in the United States. (2018: 1)

In this regard, despite the fact that Southeast Asian states may share concerns over China's activities in the SCS and unfair trade practices, they are increasingly preoccupied that the US's new strategy could inflame tensions and force them to choose between Washington and Beijing (Chandran, 2018).

Security and defence cooperation have become the other key focuses of Trump's strategy in Southeast Asia. According to the current administration, in 2018, the United States provided more than half a billion dollars in security assistance to Indo-Pacific nations – more than double the previous year (The White House, 2018). A recent statement by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reaffirmed that "security has been a major focus of conversations within the region" (US Department of State, 2018). Washington has also expressed its willingness to work more closely with ASEAN, and that the latter will remain at the centre of efforts to tackle critical security issues in the Indo-Pacific (US Department of State, 2018). On this point, it is worth noting that the NSS is not

framed as a comprehensive approach. Defence and terrorism figure among top-priority policy areas for the United States, while other NTS concerns – above all climate change – have been left aside. In the same vein, the speech by Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018 detailed the FOIP strategy as having four key aspects: maritime issues, interoperability and building networks of allies and partners, the rule of law, and economic development led by the private sector. The speech was noteworthy for its strong emphasis on rising security concerns regarding China's maritime ambitions in the SCS.

Another novelty of the current US strategy towards Southeast Asia is that it seems only partially to be guided by a multi-lateral commitment. In the economic realm, while Obama viewed the multi-lateral TPP as one essential component of the pivot's policy, Trump withdrew from this partnership – considering it more beneficial for the United States to promote bilateral FTAs. Moreover, rather than seeking to raise openness across the region, Trump has reproached countries with which the United States has a trade deficit. The US approach towards regional institutions is also ambivalent and as of yet unclear. On the one hand, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and ASEAN are mentioned as centrepieces of the Indo-Pacific's regional architecture and identified as the main platforms for promoting an order based on freedom (The White House, 2017b).

Yet, on the other hand, since the APEC meeting in Da Nang (2017), Trump has stated his preference for bilateral trade agreements with Indo-Pacific nations. Trump has also shown disdain for the growing dysfunctionality of ASEAN (Searight, 2018). The new emphasis on India and the resurrection of cooperation within the so-called Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: namely, India, Australia, Japan, and the United States) has also been perceived as a challenge to ASEAN centrality. There are also concerns that Trump might selectively employ multi-lateral forums to pursue his own agenda, for example, in areas such as counterterrorism or maritime security (Parameswaran, 2016). It is also not to be forgotten that while Trump attended both the ASEAN and APEC meetings in 2017, 2018 saw a dramatic downturn in US presidential engagement with Southeast Asia – with Trump's absence from the ASEAN Summit in Singapore, skipping of the EAS, and non-hosting of any Southeast Asian leaders in the United States. The recent adoption of the ARIA, which complements the US's NSS, might possibly pave the way for new moves in Trump's strategy towards Southeast Asia. ARIA aims, in fact, at establishing a multi-faced US strategy to increase US security, economic interests, and values in the Indo-Pacific region. In particular, though maintaining a strong security focus, the act urges a comprehensive economic engagement framework with ASEAN and with states that it is in the national security interests of the United States to promote human rights and respect for democratic values within the Indo-Pacific region. It remains to be seen whether the announced initiative will materialise in specific policies for Southeast Asia.

EU Strategy

Generally speaking, the EU's strategy for Southeast Asia is centred on a multi-pronged approach that combines a preference for multi-lateralism with bilateralism; a commitment to a comprehensive approach; and the promotion of the rule of law, democracy,

human rights, and development assistance. Multi-lateralism is one of the key aims of the EU. In particular, ASEAN is considered as the natural counterpart of the EU and as a “key to developing a more rounded Asia strategy” and “at the heart of the efforts to build a more robust regional security order in the wider Asia-Pacific” (Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, 2015). But alongside ASEAN, it is also important for the EU to strengthen its participation in the major regional forums, including the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) – which is an informal forum for dialogue and cooperation on political, economic, and cultural issues between European and Asian states, the European Commission, the ASEAN Secretariat, and the ARF (Council of the European Union, 2012). The EU has also intensified its campaign to join the EAS. However, it has so far failed to become a member of the EAS or of the ADMM Plus.

While, in fact, Asian countries recognise the contribution that the EU is making in supporting regional integration, development, and democratisation, they also perceive the body as lacking actorness and capabilities to carry out a coherent security policy for the region (Kirchner, 2019). In particular, ASEAN members consider the EU as unable to mitigate big powers’ competition (Yeo, 2016) or as tending to side with the United States on sensitive security issues – including the SCS dispute. The EU’s Asia engagement is also often perceived as too Sino-centric (Kirchner, 2019) and, in general terms, the body is considered as having only limited geopolitical influence in comparison to major powers in the region (Xuechen, 2018).

Notwithstanding the fact that multi-lateralism is a key priority of the EU’s strategy since the release of “Towards a New Asia Strategy” in 1994, bilateralism has also paralleled multi-lateralism. The European Commission possesses, in fact, country-specific agendas, and the EU supports Southeast Asian states in sectors ranging from education, agriculture, democracy promotion, and human rights to trade-related assistance and efforts to mitigate climate change. For instance, since 2013, the EU has been assisting Myanmar’s democratic transition and the strengthening of its administrative capacities, policy development, and legal reform. The combination of a multi-lateral and bilateral approach is also evident in the economic realm, where the EU has pursued a mixed strategy on the one hand aiming to create a bi-regional EU-ASEAN FTA, while on the other opting for bilateral accords with individual Southeast Asian states such as Singapore and Vietnam.

The EU’s strategy towards Southeast Asia is also framed by a comprehensive approach. Inter alia, the 2016 EU Global Strategy for foreign and security policy and the 2016 Bangkok Declaration on Promoting an ASEAN-EU Global Partnership for Shared Strategic Goals reiterate the ideas and principles governing that comprehensive approach. Respectively, the documents call on the EU to deepen economic diplomacy as well as increase its security role and to strengthen cooperation with ASEAN in all areas of mutual interest – especially targeting NTS domains. In the political and security realms, the EU has scaled-up efforts to become a security partner for Southeast Asia. As noted by the current HR, Federica Mogherini:

The economic face of Europe is the one that people are most familiar with [. . .]. But it is striking how joint work on security has become the biggest area of growth in terms of our expanding cooperation with Asian partners. (2018: 1)

In recent years, the EU has particularly committed itself to closer cooperation in NTS and has broadened its agenda in this realm – a fact that has even led to the suggestion that the EU was announcing its own pivot to Southeast Asia (Islam, 2015). EU official documents have, indeed, identified a rich and prolific menu of NTS issues, from counter-terrorism to countering radicalisation, extremism, maritime security threats, and climate change. Against this backdrop, a number of initiatives have been launched across various NTS domains. For instance, the Border Management and Migration Programme has aimed at supporting ASEAN in addressing challenges posed by human trafficking and transnational crime. ASEAN and the EU are cooperating on antiterrorism through information sharing via Interpol and Europol and are improving best practices for dealing with violent extremism. Since 2013, a High-Level Dialogue on Maritime Security has taken place regularly to explore maritime security, interagency coordination, the investigation of incidents, and port security. The EU also supports institutional capacities for disaster response in ASEAN and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre). In 2017, meanwhile, two new EU–ASEAN programmes were launched to improve the sustainable use of peatlands and haze mitigation in the ASEAN neighbourhood, as well as to conserve biodiversity and sustainably manage protected areas there.

The rule of law is, as noted earlier, also part of the EU's strategy. On this point, the EU has echoed concerns over rising tensions in the SCS and has expressed a specific interest in guaranteeing the observance of the UNCLOS and issued a statement supporting the International Court of Justice. However, the EU has hitherto only talked about helping local countries build maritime capacities and has particularly promoted reconciliation and confidence-building measures, calling for respect for the rule of law and the peaceful settlement of disputes – without jeopardising its relations with China (Maier-Knapp, 2016).

EU strategy has also traditionally focused on ideas of democracy, human rights, and the protection of fundamental freedoms. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Yeo (2016), the EU has recently toned down its normative power approach, reflecting the idea that it should be a model for Southeast Asian integration. And yet, it has increasingly recognised ASEAN's distinctive *modus operandi*, based on informality, minimal institutionalisation, non-interference, respect for national sovereignty, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and cooperation (European Parliament, 2017).

Finally, as part of its strategy, the EU is promoting regional integration and good regional governance through development cooperation. The European Commission Strategy for Asia 2007–2013 stated that encouraging integration and dialogue with ASEAN is a key strategic priority for EU policy in Asia.

US Instruments of Cooperation

After the launch of its rebalancing policy, the United States made use of a wide range of foreign policy instruments. These included the strengthening of diplomatic and political relations, the enhancement of its regional presence and military position through multi-lateral engagement and alliances, and a set of economic and development assistance tools. On the diplomatic and political fronts, the United States engaged the region

through a set of historical visits. It also supported the democratic transition process. In Myanmar, it

announced the lifting of US sanctions by terminating an emergency order that deemed the policies of the former military government a threat to US national security. (Brunnstrom, 2016: 1)

In 2014, following a coup in Thailand, the United States suspended military aid and high-level contacts and encouraged the military government to restore democratic governance and civil liberties.

The Obama administration was also particularly keen to demonstrate a multi-lateral commitment and actively participated in regional frameworks such as the ADMM Plus, the ARF, and the first Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, held in Manila. In 2009, Obama inaugurated the US-ASEAN Summit and signed the TAC. In 2011, he became the first US president to join the EAS. Significantly, under Obama, the United States sought partnership with ASEAN as a means to cope with NTS issues. Among other initiatives, cooperation in combating transnational crime was reinforced through US engagement with the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Transnational Crime while the country has also assisted ASEAN transnational crime officials in fighting human trafficking and harmonising human rights laws across Southeast Asia. At the Sunnylands Summit, Obama also announced a new USD 1.97 million Aviation and Border Security Program to increase the ability to utilise law enforcement information-sharing tools and authorities already available to them as members of Interpol (ASEAN Secretariat, 2017b). In the spheres of climate change and disaster management, the United States was particularly active. It assisted Cambodia and the Philippines on how to mitigate the impacts of destabilising natural disasters and promoted environmentally sustainable development strategies in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. The United States also provided more than USD 1 million in aid for the disaster monitoring and response systems at the AHA Centre.

All of these instruments were complemented by bilateral tools. On the security front, alliances remained at the heart of the rebalance. Among other initiatives, with the ECDA, the United States supported the Philippines' maritime capabilities. In financial year 2015, the United States committed USD 119 million to maritime capacity-building assistance and engaged in a variety of joint military exercises with Southeast Asian states – including the so-called Cobra Gold Exercise, held in Thailand. The United States also supports training programmes for every Southeast Asian nation with the exception of Myanmar. In 2015, the United States announced the Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative in which USD 425 million in assistance was provided to partners so as to help improve their maritime awareness. Washington has also developed a close defence relationship with Singapore and Indonesia. Since 2016, the United States has also carried out freedom of navigation operations in the SCS following the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling in favour of the Philippines and denying China's historic claims.

On the economic front, the Obama administration demonstrated a preference, as noted, for a multi-lateral approach. The Obama administration also embarked on an important new initiative: US-ASEAN Connect, which was meant to create a network of hubs across the region to better connect entrepreneurs, investors, and businesses with each other across different areas: namely, business, energy, innovation, and policy. Besides all this, the United States also cultivated partnerships with individual ASEAN countries. Notably, it accelerated cooperation with Vietnam.

Additionally, the United States was an active supporter of development assistance. Under the ASEAN Development Vision to Advance National Cooperation and Economic Integration, the US sustained programmes such as Connectivity through Trade and Investment – with a total budget of USD 16.2 million (for the years 2008–2013) – and the ASEAN-US Partnership for Good Governance, Equitable and Sustainable Development, and Security (ASEAN-US PROGRESS) – funded to the tune of USD 14 million. The latter aimed at supporting the realisation of the ASEAN Political Security Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprints (ASEAN Secretariat, 2017b). In 2009, the United States also launched the Lower Mekong Initiative to reduce ASEAN socio-economic disparities and to enhance cooperation in the areas of environment, health, education, and infrastructure development in Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam (CMLV). In addition, the ASEAN Youth Volunteer Programme offered opportunities for development for ASEAN youth. Meanwhile, the United States also assisted individual ASEAN countries.

Up to now, the Trump administration seems to have favoured a more transactional and unilateral approach, in line with the America First principle – especially in the sphere of economic policy, as manifested in the country's withdrawal from the TPP. Security alliances and cooperation on defence are, as noted, at the forefront of Trump's Southeast Asia policy. Given this, Secretary of State Pompeo pledged USD 300 million in new funding to reinforce security cooperation – especially to strengthen maritime security, to develop humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping capabilities, and to enhance programmes that counter transnational threats. On the other hand, according to Narine (2018), Trump has shown little interest in engaging with other states through diplomatic institutions.

Nonetheless, since 2018, there have been some signs of reassurance vis-à-vis the Southeast Asian region. Indeed, the United States has promised USD 10 million in funding to support economic programmes, many of which fall under US-ASEAN Connect. The United States has also unveiled a USD 113 million investment package for technology, energy, and infrastructure. Moreover, the ARIA has authorised USD 1.5 billion annually over the next five years for a range of programmes – such as ones related to counterterrorism, trade, human rights, and security – and for the development of a new finance agency to counter China's rise. However, these efforts are not yet paying off, and according to a poll conducted by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS)-Yusof Ishak Institute, a Singapore think tank, under Trump's presidency Southeast Asian states, lacks confidence in Washington's reliability as a strategic partner and as a provider of regional security (Chandran, 2019).

EU Instruments of Cooperation

It is clear that the EU is committed to a multi-lateral approach and views political dialogue on issues of common concern as a pivotal instrument of its foreign policy towards Southeast Asia. No wonder, then, that the EU has actively engaged the region in military dialogue, exchanges, joint exercises, and cooperation in NTS domains. This it has done especially through institutional networks such as ASEAN, the ARF, and ASEM, promoting new dialogue mechanisms under these umbrella organisations – such as the high-level dialogue on maritime security and the dialogue on human rights to address specifically women’s rights, child protection, and the safety of migrant workers.

Economic cooperation has been furthered through the EU-ASEAN Dialogue, joint seminars, and the EU-ASEAN Business Summit. Since the collapse of the EU-ASEAN free trade talks in 2009, primarily due to concerns over Myanmar’s human rights record, Brussels has pursued bilateral FTAs instead. These have been concluded with Singapore (2013) and Vietnam (2015), while with Malaysia and Thailand negotiations are still ongoing. The EU is also discussing a comprehensive economic partnership with Indonesia. The EU is also an active supporter of ASEAN economic integration. To this end, in mid-2016, the EU launched the Enhanced ASEAN Regional Integration Support by the EU (ARISE Plus) programme, being the largest-ever EU-funded ASEAN one – with it covering such areas as the single market, trade facilitation, reducing non-tariff barriers to trade, intellectual property rights, civil aviation, and ASEAN statistics.

In the security field, the EU has specifically targeted instruments designed to tackle NTS concerns. Since the adoption of the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action 2013–2017, climate change, the environment, disaster management, and maritime security have become vital new areas of cooperation. The EU is supporting activities to mitigate climate change and assisting the AHA Centre as well as boosting the capacity of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity. Inter alia, since 2012, the EU has supported the AHA Centre through knowledge-sharing activities and exchanges. In 2014, a programme of technical assistance – the ASEAN-EU Emergency Management Programme – commenced with the goal of supporting the development of ASEAN capacities. In 2018, the EU signed a EUR 10 million financing agreement designed to support ASEAN and the AHA Centre in promoting the region’s resilience as well as encouraging regional and international cooperation. In the arena of maritime security, the EU participated in 2016 in the first multi-national naval exercise hosted in Indonesia, named “Komodo,” to share best practices and lessons learnt on peacekeeping and the navy. Nevertheless, regarding other hard security issues – such as the SCS dispute – there is no evidence of coordinated patrols nor of information and intelligence sharing either. The EU does not play a significant role in the SCS vis-à-vis ensuring freedom of navigation, and while it rhetorically calls for using peaceful means and the rule of law, it nevertheless lacks concrete instruments to back up these requests.

In terms of development co-operation, the EU is the largest provider of aid to the region and the biggest donor to the ASEAN Secretariat. Between 1996 and 2013, the European Commission provided ASEAN nations with almost EUR 200 million as part of its development assistance programme (Maier-Knapp and Dosch, 2017). The EU has

also funded a number of programmes in supporting the realisation of the three pillars (security, economic, and sociocultural) of the ASEAN Community, such as the ASEAN Programme for Regional Integration Support (APRIS, 2003–2010) and the Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (READI) – which has been ongoing since 2011. It has also targeted non-economic issues such as disaster preparedness and management, energy security, and human rights, crafting ASEAN Regional Integration Support from the EU (ARISE, 2013–2016) to further promote ASEAN economic integration.

The EU also provides ASEAN with technical assistance, capacity-building, lessons learnt, and best practices. Currently, the Enhanced EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI) and ARISE Plus are the most important programmes of development cooperation – with an overall budget of EUR 61 million. For 2014–2020, the EU has also increased its development cooperation funding with a budget of more than EUR 170 million – more than doubling the amount for 2007–2013. This covers support for three focal areas: connectivity through sustainable and inclusive economic integration; climate change, the environment, and disaster management; and comprehensive dialogue facilitation. In addition, the EU has pledged over EUR 3 billion to reduce poverty and address development gaps in low-income ASEAN countries – paying special attention to the CMLV and the Philippines for 2014–2020. Finally, it is worth noting that the EU supports a set of social and cultural cooperation activities. Among others, the EU-SHARE programme aims at raising the quality of higher education in Southeast Asia.

All in all, the EU is not fully able to apply comprehensive tools in Southeast Asia but has nonetheless clearly managed to boost its activities in the economic, development, and NTS arenas. This is also clearly reflected by the allocation of funds, which prioritise the above-mentioned domains.

Comparing EU and US Approaches in and to Southeast Asia

The comparison of EU and US positions in and on Southeast Asia shows that Brussels and Washington share some similar interests here. Examples are the preservation of peace and stability; fostering trade and economic ties; and the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, and universal human values. Under the Obama administration, other commonalities could be identified in a shared vision based on the centrality of multi-lateral institutions – as testified to, among other things, by the fact that both the EU and the United States had appointed a permanent ambassador to the ASEAN Secretariat and elevated their partnership with the group – and a greater emphasis on NTS challenges and development cooperation. Notable in the latter regard were infrastructure and connectivity as well as a shared interest in guaranteeing the unimpeded flow of trade through the SCS.

Against this backdrop, in mid-2012, the EU's first HR, Catherine Ashton, and Secretary of State Clinton signed a Joint Statement promising transatlantic dialogue on political, economic, security, and human rights issues. They committed to closer cooperation with Asian partners in fighting transnational crime, terrorism, and addressing cybersecurity issues – and especially in focusing on maritime cooperation. They stressed the importance of cooperation in promoting democracy and human rights and in

targeting development challenges in the Lower Mekong region. They noted the importance of coordination to address climate change and the need to continue working together so as to improve reciprocal market access for goods and services. All this together suggested the prospect for greater transatlantic cooperation in Southeast Asia.

Nevertheless, a closer comparison of US and EU instruments and strategies suggests that, despite some points of apparent convergence, the United States and the EU have ultimately headed down significantly different paths – thereby casting doubt on future prospects of transatlantic cooperation in this region. In terms of instruments, the United States makes use of a wide range of tools – economic, development, security, and political – that combine hard and soft power; bilateral and multi-lateral ones, including alliances and support given to US allies, are also key instruments, as are ones to cope with NTS challenges too. The EU also makes use of a variety of economic, political, security, and development tools but lacks hard security foreign policy instruments. In particular, the EU shows a preference for multi-lateral dialogue with the ASEAN region as a whole and, unlike the United States, has prioritised support for ASEAN regional integration.

The promotion of regional integration, particularly in the economic sphere but also in a number of other areas besides, as well as support for the ASEAN Secretariat have indeed been key elements of the EU's toolbox in Southeast Asia. As confirmed by high-level ASEAN decision-makers, "ASEAN could not exist without the substantial financial support provided by international donors and above all the EU" (Maier-Knapp and Dosch, 2017: 132). In US foreign policy, meanwhile, multi-lateralism has not replaced bilateralism, in particular US alliances and bilateral security partnerships. The current Trump administration seems to promote bilateral cooperative instruments even more than his predecessor did, as demonstrated by Trump's firm opposition to multi-lateral FTAs and his absence from multi-lateral gatherings.

EU and US strategies also seem to differ on several key points. First, although over the last few years the EU has insisted on its capacity to implement a comprehensive approach – one which has included previously neglected security issues – disparities in its and the US's approach are still huge given the fact that the former clearly lacks the military security pillar as part of its strategy. From a security point of view, the EU pales in comparison with the United States when it comes to hard security – as the former does not possess a network of alliances and has only limited overseas power projection capabilities. The EU in fact, unlike the United States, cannot offer the same security guarantees and has therefore never been taken seriously as a security actor in a region where traditional security threats remain of the greatest importance.

Second, US strategy – both under Obama and Trump – has been largely shaped by China's growing ascendance and by the need to contain its power projection in the region. Conversely, the EU has traditionally not pursued any geopolitical agenda in Southeast Asia (Conley et al., 2016). Thus, while the EU has attempted to simultaneously strengthen its engagement with regional institutions as well as to capture the economic opportunities offered by China's growth, the United States has sought to strengthen ASEAN-led mechanisms primarily to maintain its own local influence and to counterbalance China's growing regional presence as well as its military rise. In this

regard, various US initiatives – from Obama’s TPP to Trump’s new programmes seeking to encourage infrastructure-financing, innovation, and transparency – have all sought to counter China’s various attempts to project influence in the region, including through the Belt and Road Initiative – an ambitious plan for long-term infrastructure development involving some 60 countries.

By contrast, the fact that the United Kingdom, Germany, and other EU member states signed onto the Asian Investment Infrastructure Bank while the United States declined to participate is a further indicator of transatlantic divergences and of the lack of a common strategy vis-à-vis China. That said, it is also true that over the last few years, the EU has become increasingly uneasy about China’s assertiveness. For example, the latter’s attempts to draw Central and Eastern European countries into its orbit through the so-called “16+1” platform has been perceived as a threat to European unity. Some have also interpreted the recently launched EU Connectivity Strategy as an attempt to restrain China. Nevertheless, up to the present, there are no signs of a joint EU-US approach to the East Asian country.

Third, although the EU and the United States share the same interest in strengthening maritime security and open sea lanes, EU engagement in this realm has not gone beyond mere diplomatic statements. Unlike the United States, the EU has not played a significant role in the maritime security of the SCS through exercises, interactions, and patrol activities. Finally, another point of discrepancy – one which has only grown wider under the Trump administration – pertains to NTS. It is clear that while the EU is heavily investing in this domain and, among other things, prioritising climate change, environmental protection, and disaster management, the Trump administration has shifted the focus to issues of defence and counterterrorism while decreasing attention paid to NTS issues. Above all, the president’s decision to pull out of the Paris Agreement on combatting climate change suggests that Southeast Asian countries cannot rely too much in this regard on cooperation with the United States.

In the economic realm, meanwhile, it is also apparent that the United States and the EU have pursued independent trade policies. Transatlantic differences were already evident under Obama, with the United States preferring to utilise the TPP regional framework to enhance its trade and investment rules-based and regulatory framework, while the EU was making use of a mixed strategy combining both bilateral and multi-lateral trade deals (Cameron, 2016). Taking stock of the evolving trade policies under Trump, it is also clear that the EU and US economic strategic agendas are divergent. The current president is opting for a transactional approach centred on fair and reciprocal trade and economic development led by the private sector under the America First paradigm, but with a lack of a vision for a broader economic agenda for the region (Searight, 2018).

Regarding human rights, democracy promotion, and support for a rules-based regional order, the United States and the EU have both shown rather similar commitments. For instance, they have supported Myanmar’s democratic progress by applying a regime of sanctions and both then lifted these in response to recent processes of reform. Nevertheless, the advent of Trump has paved the way for new transatlantic disparities in this realm. Trump, in fact, has shown no interest in tying trade deals to human rights,

unlike his EU counterparts or his predecessor. Furthermore, as noted by Cameron (2018), even when the United States does make public statements about human rights, it now tends not to follow up on them because of a desire to continue selling military equipment. It also needs to be noted that, despite the current administration making efforts vis-à-vis democracy and human rights, “the governance pillar remains the only pillar that has not been advanced in a high-level, stand-alone speech” (Parameswaran, 2019: 2).

Against this backdrop, it is no wonder that transatlantic cooperation has not materialised in concrete form and that the 2012 Joint EU-US Statement has remained words on paper only. Over the coming years, transatlantic cooperation in Southeast Asia is also likely to be hampered by new emerging domestic constraints within both the EU and the United States. Doubts remain about whether the EU can substantially contribute to peace, stability, and development in Southeast Asia, due to crises within and beyond European borders (Brexit, the rise of Euroscepticism, and the migration crisis to mention but a few) that have rendered the Union increasingly unstable and more insecure. Likewise, US-Southeast Asian relations are prone to a higher degree of uncertainty in light of the North American country’s erratic policies.

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