Obstinate or obsolete? The US alliance structure in the Asia–Pacific

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Abstract

The longstanding US security network of bilateral alliances in the Asia–Pacific, also known as the ‘San Francisco System’, has reached a historical crossroads. Its purpose is becoming more questionable as the United States, its allies and friends and other key Asian security actors engage in an increasingly complex set of regional security relationships. This paper argues that while the San Francisco System will not be dissolved over the near-term, it must adapt to rapidly changing structural and politico-economic conditions in the region if its utility is to be sustained and its eventual conversion into a more relevant and effective network of Asia–Pacific order-building. It argues that ‘alliance mutuality’ is the essential element in any such conversion process.

This paper develops its argument in three successive sections. To begin with, the initial rationales and recent trends underpinning the San Francisco System are described. It then evaluates that network in the context of alliance theory. A third section evaluates those factors that are contributing to the ‘obsolescence’ of these bilateral alliances. Finally, the concept of ‘alliance mutuality’ is developed as a viable policy avenue for better meeting the contemporary security interests of both the United States and its allies in the Asia–Pacific.
Obstinate or obsolete? The US alliance structure in the Asia–Pacific

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… for much of my adult lifetime security and stability in the Pacific was maintained essentially by a network of bilateral defense relationships between the United States and our allies and partners. This was notably unlike the situation in Europe, where we had a relatively large, formal alliance—the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. But now we see an expanding network of security cooperation in this region, both bilaterally between nations and multilaterally among nations—with the United States as a partner. This is a welcome shift.1

The United States security role in Asia is undergoing historic change. Its strategic interests in that region can no longer be managed on the basis of the ‘hub and spokes’ strategy of bilateral alliance politics that has underwritten US strategy directed toward this region since the outset of the Cold War. This is particularly true as Washington has become increasingly preoccupied with the Middle East and Persian Gulf as central to its ‘global war on terrorism’. Nor can a new Asian security order be exclusively predicated on a US ‘concert of powers’ strategy involving China, Japan, Russia and India. Strategic partnerships with and between these states are constrained by nationalistic history and culture. Less traditional and more nuanced policy approaches must be identified and applied if a stable and enduring Asia–Pacific security order is to be realised.

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The George W. Bush administration’s preoccupation with countering international terrorism (a campaign it has now termed the ‘Long War’) and stabilising Iraq has allowed it to slip too easily into the trap of rationalising past strategy as appropriate for contemporary geopolitics. Illustratively, in recent years, administration officials and independent supporters of the United States’ Pacific alliance network have argued that the hub and spoke strategy is an entirely appropriate response to the rise of China and to East Asian security concerns. James Kelly, the Bush administration’s Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs during 2001 and 2005, argued in Congressional testimony that ‘Our five traditional allies—Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Australia, and Thailand—are our strategic partners in and beyond the region. We share with them a common perspective on a steadily increasing range of interests … Our alliances in East Asia are stronger and deeper than ever’.2

In a recent briefing to Singapore’s Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), US Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, John Hillen, insisted that US bilateral alliances in Asia would evolve beyond responding to the largely threat-centric rationales which justified their creation. However, he concluded, they would still comprise an integral part of future, American-led ‘coalitions of the willing’ directed against new global threats.3 Two analysts from the conservative Heritage Foundation, perhaps Washington’s most influential think-tank during the Republican Party’s recent control of the US government, have insisted that ‘faced with the unanticipated insecurities of a new [Asian] security environment’ in an era of intensifying international terrorism, “… these bilateral alliances will provide the cornerstone of future stability and prosperity’.4

We argue that the US bilateral alliance system in Asia is not nearly as viable as these observations imply. The vision of pax Americana underwriting the Asian and global security systems was transitory, at best, if

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3 Briefing to the IDSS, Singapore, 7 February 2006.
Obstinate or obsolete? The US alliance structure in the Asia–Pacific

not completely illusory. Instead, we assert that the old Cold War security order in Asia, spearheaded by the traditional US alliances known collectively as the ‘San Francisco System’ (SFS), has outlived any usefulness in its original form. We do not envision the demise of the United States’ Pacific alliances, per se, or that bilateral security politics or ‘bilateralism’ is necessarily ‘finished’. We do contend that it is being transformed to a more complex structure of security relationships involving the US, its Asian friends and allies and other key Asian security actors traditionally outside the US strategic orbit. Such a transformation, which we term and conceptualise as ‘alliance mutuality’ and ‘convergent security’, is beginning to occur, notwithstanding the insistence of American policymakers that the old bilateral security structure is still alive and well.

The aim of this essay is to examine the nature of and reasons for this transition and to assess its implications for Asian security. We proceed with three initial phases. The first describes the San Francisco System. The second looks at theories of alliance maintenance and examines the extent to which they explain, or fail to explain, the alliance shifts taking place in Asia. Third, we identify a number of factors that are contributing to the ‘obsolescence’ of the SFS and we examine how these factors validate the ‘alliance mutuality’ and ‘convergent security’, as a successor strategy to ‘hub and spokes’. We then evaluate the prospect of ‘alliance mutuality’ better meeting the contemporary security interests of both the US and its allies in the region. We conclude by asserting that alliance mutuality is the essential element in the eventual conversion of the US/Asian bilateral collective defence strategy into an enduring bilateral-multilateral (and eventually a comprehensive multilateral) regional security system.

5 We employ the term bilateralism here to mean one-on-one security cooperation with dyadic characteristics—largely contained to two actors with sufficient collaborative interests to be labelled ‘allies’ (if a treaty commitment is involved) or ‘coalition partners’ (more informally). Brian Job has stated that ‘bilateralism arises from the belief that state behavior is best carried out through one-on-one relationships … that the combination of their security interests, their relative capabilities and the systemic context in which they operate is such that dyadic relationships will be most effective’. Bilateralism is exclusionary in character because states interacting with each other in this mode ‘seek to keep separate their relationships with other actors’. See Brian Job, ‘Multilateralism in the Asia–Pacific region’, in William Tow, Russell Trood and Toshiya Hoshino (eds), Bilateralism in a Multilateral Era (Tokyo/Nathan: Japan Institute of International Affairs/Centre for the Study of Australia–Asia relations, 1997), p. 161.
THE SAN FRANCISCO SYSTEM REVISITED

The SFS originated with the signing of the Japanese peace treaty at the San Francisco conference in September 1951 and provided a framework for the US to effect a bilateral security strategy. Kent Calder has recently outlined the six major features that have perpetuated the SFS: (1) a dense framework of formal, mainly bilateral, security alliances between the US and key nations of the Pacific; (2) the formalisation of a hub and spokes network; (3) an asymmetrical bargain of security and economic benefits to US allies in return for their alliance affiliation; (4) precedence to Japan in terms of both economic opportunities and security commitments (often referred to as the ‘Yoshida Doctrine’); (5) qualified support for the Japan peace treaty by other US wartime allies in the Pacific; and (6) extensive economic benefits to security allies. Calder admits that the ‘smooth post-war transformation of Japan into the global economy and the entry of China as a key market force into that economy and as a conditional security collaborator on key issues’ have eroded the original logic of the system. However, he insists that the:

underlying structure [of the SFS] has proved remarkably durable … it continues to define the broad profile of Pacific relations in highly distinctive ways, with renewed salience in the wake of the Iraq War, and with enduring implications for the global structure of international relations.

As the Cold War began to thaw, however, signs that the hub and spokes rationale was beginning to wear thin intensified. The US–Taiwan Mutual Defense Treaty was dissolved a few short years after President Richard Nixon’s visit to China in 1972. The New Zealand component of the Australia, New Zealand, United States (ANZUS) alliance was jettisoned by Washington when differences on nuclear strategy between the US and that Pacific ally deepened in 1985–86. While formal security ties between the US and the Philippines remained intact after American basing operations were closed down in that Southeast Asian country in 1992, rising nationalism, with a decided anti-American tint, in the ‘Pearl of the Orient Seas’ frustrated the United States Pacific Command’s (PACOM) aspirations

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7 Ibid., pp. 136–7.
Obstinate or obsolete? The US alliance structure in the Asia–Pacific

to conduct sustained joint exercises and to coordinate anti-insurgency strategy with their Philippine counterparts until after 11 September 2001.

Despite these glitches, the SFS remained in place throughout most of the 1990s. It was reaffirmed by President Bill Clinton’s visits to each of the five allied capitals during 1996 after episodes of North Korean nuclear brinksmanship and Chinese military harassment of Taiwan had almost plunged the region into war during the previous two years. In November 1998, the Clinton administration’s second East Asian strategy report reaffirmed the value of each alliance. It predicted, however, that these relationships would ‘expand in both scope and degree in coming years to encompass more comprehensive concepts of security cooperation.’

This signalled Washington’s recognition that a shift could occur in the identity and function of the SFS, despite maintaining its still distinct exclusivist configuration.

We agree with Calder’s description of the system’s key structural aspects, but Calder fails to capture one key feature of the SFS: alliance exclusivism. Alliance exclusivism was pursued in the SFS from the 1950s through the late 1980s, coordinated by the US PACOM. Its mechanisms included US basing operations, regular consultations and occasionally acerbic negotiations over US nuclear and warfighting strategies, joint command arrangements, extensive maritime patrolling coordination and logistical support. Bilateral consultative committees and command arrangements were implemented to monitor and support the ‘asset specificity’ associated with each bilateral alliance. The exclusivist nature of Japan’s and South Korea’s separate alliances with the US enabled successive US administrations to fashion unique American security commitments toward these countries.

Exclusivism, moreover, ‘sanitised’ the Japanese and South


9 Victor Cha has argued that one of the few common elements of alliance politics that Japan and South Korea shared during the Cold War was a mutual fear of alliance abandonment by the US. This worked, he argues, to create a ‘quasi-alliance’ between Japan and South Korea, particularly at times when both Japan’s and South Korea’s fear of US alliance abandonment was high. See Victor Cha, ‘Abandonment, entrapment, and neoclassical realism in Asia: The United States, Japan and Korea’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 44(3) 2000: 261–91, especially 272–3. This ‘quasi-alliance’ model, however, is not widely accepted by most security analysts who believe that Japan’s and South
Korean alliances regarding traditionally hostile Japanese–Korean relationships and thus did not require Washington to arbitrate between its two Northeast Asian allies. The US was able to balance the Japanese and South Korean ‘spokes’ along Bismarckian lines, playing its role as the indispensable power around which both Tokyo and Seoul must bandwagon to avoid their incorporation into either the Soviet or Chinese geopolitical orbits.10

We also disagree with Calder’s conclusion that the SFS’s originally exclusivist structure remains so viable. We posit that the real reason why the SFS has endured is not due to structural consistency but to essential adaptation to a rapidly changing Asia–Pacific security environment. Three powerful components are at work: (1) an enduring interest by the US and its Asia–Pacific allies in sustaining the alliance network based on rationales of order-building that, in turn, are underwritten by ‘alliance mutuality’; (2) a growing recognition that such alliance mutuality provides this network with its best chance to realise strategic gains during current ‘critical junctures’ of historical and structural change; and (3) a growing capability of the system’s allies to contribute to US global security strategy. These components combine to overcome the dominant realist theoretical axiom that changing threat perceptions, intermittent doubts over alliance credibility and/or domestic regime changes in allied member-states usually lead to alliance dissolution.11 We assess below in detail some key inter-linked factors that help explain why the SFS must transform—and is transforming—from an exclusively bilateral instrument of collective defence and containment into a new, but still bilateral, regional security system more attuned to regional order-building.

WHY THE SYSTEM ENDURES?
Arguments suggesting the continuity of the SFS fall into three broad categories. The first, a neorealist perspective, focuses on balancing

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behaviour. This perspective assumes that power balancing is the dominant mode of alliance politics in the region. Hence, it anticipates that US bilateral alliances will be sustained by and inevitably directed toward, precluding China from achieving parity with or hegemony over American interests there. US bilateral alliance durability in Asia is thus regarded as largely a function of the rise of China and the American-perceived need to balance emerging Chinese power by sustaining tight bilateral or exclusivist ties with traditional regional allies. It also derives from the perceptions that North Korea is the predominant threat rationale for the preservation of the US–Japan and US–South Korea bilateral alliances.

Several developments demonstrate that the logic of balancing may not hold in the region. First, there is limited evidence that Asian states are balancing China. This does not mean they are bandwagoning. While some balancing or bandwagoning may be occurring, it is not occurring throughout the SFS in any uniform manner. On the contrary, some realists envision a process where most Asia–Pacific states will either shift toward China’s geopolitical orbit, or one in which the Sino–American conundrum will eventuate with ‘continental’ actors moving toward closer affinity with China and their maritime counterparts gravitating toward the US. This perspective has much in common with constructivist arguments which hold that ‘Asia’s future will resemble its past’ with a strong and relatively

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aggressive China exercising economic and strategic leadership over a continental Asia that has always been comfortable with power hierarchy.  

One key limitation of the balancing perspective is its failure to take into account the fact that America’s Asian allies entertain substantial differences in perception regarding the strategic implications of Beijing’s rise to prominence and regarding how American power, within an alliance context, can be effective in the region. Japanese apprehensions about China, for example, are intensifying. However, South Korea, under an increasingly liberal government, appears capable of moving strategically closer to Beijing even if still outstanding historical issues may impede such progress over the short-term. That country has also demonstrated little willingness in recent years to follow the American and Japanese hardline over North Korea, instead adopting a more conciliatory approach toward Pyongyang in line with China’s North Korean posture. Japanese policy-makers were particularly upset over what they viewed as Seoul’s initially weak response to North Korea’s missile tests in July 2006 (scheduled intra-Korean dialogue went ahead in Busan days after the tests were conducted) and US officials could only watch this intra-alliance rift intensify. Australia has recently demurred from American and Japanese efforts to convince European allies to sustain an arms embargo against the Chinese, and would be, at best, an uncomfortable, if likely, US supporter in any Sino–American confrontation over Taiwan. The simple fact of rising Chinese power, in the

17 This point is developed by Amitav Acharya, ‘Will Asia’s past be its future?’, International Security, 28(3) 2003/04: 149–64, especially 152.
18 ‘US stays neutral in rift between Seoul and Tokyo’, The Hankyoreh (Seoul), 13 July 2006 (English edition) <http://english.hani.co.kr/kisa/section-014000000/home01.html>. The Hankyoreh describes itself as a ‘progressive’ newspaper but its reportage is regarded by most observers as reliable and balanced. Also see Donald Kirk, ‘North Koreans let their feet do the talking’, Asia Times Online, 14 July 2006, who reports that Chinese and South Korean agreement that Japanese and US responses to the North Korean missile test were too hardline.
19 In 2003, China surpassed the US as South Korea’s largest trading partner and the South Korean government clearly advocated a softer line than its American ally in dealing with North Korea. In April 2004, however, a Sino–Korean dispute erupted over how to interpret the status of the ancient Koguryo (Goguryeo) Kingdom (37 BC–668 AD) when the Chinese Foreign Ministry web site deleted previous historical references to that kingdom—a development widely interpreted in South Korea as China laying the groundwork to claim the territory involved as part of China. Beijing’s claim was thus viewed as a Chinese attempt to usurp a key component of Korea’s history, claiming that Koguryo was a ‘subordinate state that fell under the jurisdiction of the Chinese dynasties’. It
absence of a credible threat that it might pose to regional order, cannot be
the only glue holding together US alliances in the region. Accordingly, the
logic of balancing is being sharply tested.

A second argument suggesting that the SFS will endure comes from the
functionalist approach. Functionalist arguments about ‘asset specificity’
offer a differing perspective on alliance maintenance. Basically a rationalist
argument along functionalist lines, and originally stemming from research
on economic organisations by Oliver Williamson, the asset specificity
perspective focuses on common assets and constituencies—military,

economic, industrial and diplomatic—that work to underwrite the

 persistence of security alliances even when the initial threat precipitating

 alliance formation no longer exists.20 In an Asia–Pacific context, the

 networks and physical infrastructures built up under the US bilateral

 security network over four decades involved a significant level of American

 and allied national security assets by the time the Cold War ended. US naval

 bases in the region, for example, constituted significant asset specificity.21

 In the case of the US–South Korea Mutual Defense Treaty, factors such as

 force interoperability (based on ‘equipment specificity’ and the mutual

 development and production of weapons systems), and joint training,

 together constitute an asset specificity that, in turn, cultivates a natural

 ‘alliance constituency’. This provided the support needed for perpetuating

 US–South Korean defence ties during the early 1990s, notwithstanding the

 end of the Cold War and the thawing of relations between North and South

 Korea. American intelligence operations in Australia both facilitated US

 global capabilities to track weapons of mass destruction (WMD)

 alienated both Koreas and led South Korea to reassess its growing strategic relationship with China.


 <www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/FH25Dg01.html>. On Sino–Australian ties factoring into

 Australian alliance behaviour with the US, see Greg Sheridan, ‘PM defies Bush over China arms’,


 20 Oliver E. Williamson, The Economic Institutions of Capitalism: Firms, Markets, Relational

 Contracting (New York: Free Press, 1987). Asset specificity has been developed in a security

 alliance context by J. J. Suh, ‘Bound to last? The US–Korea alliance and analytical eclecticism’, in J.

 J. Suh, Peter Katzenstein and Allen Carlson (eds), Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power,

 and Efficiency (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 131–71, especially pp. 142–5; and by

 Celeste A. Wallander, ‘Institutional assets and adaptability: NATO after the Cold War’, International


 21 David Lake, Entangling Relations: American Foreign Policy in Its Century (Princeton: Princeton

proliferation and enhanced cooperation in military interventions in the Middle East and other regions.22

Notwithstanding what historical validity the asset specificity interpretation may have, the recent erosion of alliance exclusivism in the Asia–Pacific draws into question the continued relevance of the asset specificity school of thought. In late 2005, the United States’ Global Posture Review, and its Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) released in early 2006, signalled integration of US global strategic planning with its Pacific strategy and a major restructuring of force deployments and basing systems in the Asia–Pacific. Basing operations in Japan and South Korea were reduced or consolidated. The asset specificity argument was further undercut by a realignment plan that anticipated a substantial cut in forward deployed US forces in South Korea and a greater dispersal of US assets to forward operating sites or cooperative security locations in Australia, the Philippines and Thailand.23 In this fluid strategic landscape, asset specificity has appeared to play little or no role.

A third argument supporting the durability of the SFS has been made by constructivist scholars. Jae-Jung Suh argues that as a result of the long process of socialisation brought about by the US–South Korea alliance, the cultural and social gaps between the two countries have narrowed, leading the way for the emergence of a shared identity between the two nations. Suh concludes that ‘The US–South Korea alliance has taken on the collective identity of “an alliance forged in blood in a fight against the communist North”. The identity of the North as “the other” has been solidified; this has, in turn, hegemonized the collective identity of the alliance.’24 Shared identity is also seen as a cementing factor in the durability of the US–Australia alliance and as part of a larger, English-speaking ‘Anglophile community’. A recent work by James Bennett plays on this theme: a ‘network commonwealth’ of English-speaking nations based on the existing

shared values of Anglo-American cultural and political traditions offering ‘the prospect not of radical change but of a reaffirmation of deep cultural roots’.  

This constructivist perspective suffers from major limitations. First, there is no guarantee that a period of socialisation through an alliance will necessarily lead to shared identity. While New Zealand had been a long-standing active member of ANZUS and an enthusiastic champion of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, and shares with the US the same cultural, political and civilisation values as Australia, it has not remained a de facto part of the ANZUS alliance. Domestic political concerns and changing political norms have led to its exclusion from participation in most US intelligence and military operations since the mid-1980s (although, as noted below, US–New Zealand politico-security ties have recently warmed somewhat). Second, the emergence of a shared identity between the US and South Korea may be overstated. This appears especially to be the case when one looks at growing domestic resentment in South Korea, at the popular level, against the US military presence in the country. Indeed, Victor Cha has recently argued that identity dissonance between the US and South Korea may be growing, not narrowing, leading to serious questions about the future of the US–Korea alliance. Moreover, the constructivist explanation does not apply to the other ‘spokes’ in the SFS, including its US–Thailand, and US–Philippine elements. While it may have applicability to one or two of the alliances, it certainly does not explain the durability of the SFS as a whole.

We argue that leading alliance theories have thus not kept pace with ‘real world’ developments in the Asia–Pacific security order. In our view, alliances will transform to a degree not anticipated by the above perspectives, and different explanations are needed to understand such


change. Some of the key developments affecting the future of the SFS are briefly described below.

FACTORS SHAPING CHANGE
Cold War alliances in Asia are now being supplanted by new types of US bilateral security relationships, both within those original alliances and beyond them. We identify the following factors engendering such supplantation: (1) a broadening of the purview of existing bilateral alliances, essentially replacing them with ‘coalitions of the willing’; (2) regional/global disjunctures; (3) domestic politics; and (4) linkage of bilateral security with transnational issues.

Broadening of alliances
Following 11 September and the Iraq War, the US has shifted its approach to international security from a predominantly unilateralist and hierarchical posture to one increasingly dependent on forging ‘coalitions of the willing’. US Assistant Secretary of State Hillen has described this as ‘coalition building in advance’ involving both formal allies and other states who share concerns about international terrorism. The US Central Command, for example, has established 63 military liaison offices with other countries over the past five years to coordinate actions in the Middle East and Afghanistan: ‘You’ll see 63 trailers with 63 different flags flying from 63 partner nations that are participating in some military way in the global war on terror.’ In late April 2006, the Bush administration pushed for NATO to forge ‘privileged ties’ with New Zealand, Australia and perhaps Japan and South Korea as a formalisation of de facto command relationships these countries have shared with NATO allies in Iraq, Afghanistan and other operations involving Western ‘coalitions of the willing’. Although the Europeans were wary that any such affiliations could symbolise NATO’s intention to become a global policeman, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer supported the initiative by arguing that ‘if you look at the threats we are faced with today, they are of

a global nature … There is a difference between a global alliance and an alliance with global partners’.  

Washington’s transition from exercising tight control over a few allies to embracing a more comprehensive, but less tightly structured, approach was triggered by its growing realisation that its national security resources had become seriously overextended after 11 September and especially after the US-led coalition invasion of Iraq. Alliance exclusivism was gradually relinquished in favour of a commitment to allied ‘coalition-building’. Richard Haas, a former national security official in the Bush administration, has recently described this transition in stark terms: ‘The United States, for all of its powers, simply does not have serious and sustainable unilateral options. And this administration, I believe, has come to this realisation, perhaps belatedly, perhaps reluctantly. And interestingly enough, more than anything else, it is Iraq, which has brought us to this point.’

This transition is clearly reflected in US security policy toward the Asia–Pacific. Bush assumed the presidency in early 2001 determined to reinvigorate America’s Asian alliances as part of a strategy that would treat China as a ‘strategic competitor’ rather than a strategic partner (‘I’m … going to make it clear to China that our alliances in the Far East are important to us’). The 2001 US Department of Defense QDR released on 30 September 2001—just days after the commencement of ‘Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan’—implicitly prioritised Asia as the most important long-range theatre of US military operations and called for the ‘transformation’ of US force deployments’ size and character, especially in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. This was in response to the QDR’s


29 US Department of State, ‘US works to add allies in war on terrorism’.


speculation that ‘a military competitor with a formidable resource base’
might emerge, a clear reference to growing Chinese power.\textsuperscript{32} The 2001
\textit{QDR} envisioned the bolstering of US air and naval forces in the western
Pacific, strengthening traditional alliances with Japan and Australia and
forming new coalitions with India and Singapore as an offshore balancing
(some would say even containment) policy directed against Beijing.\textsuperscript{33}

Even while pursuing what effectively amounted to a ‘containment
revisited’ posture towards China, however, the new administration was
effectively broadening its strategy in the Asia–Pacific in ways that went far
beyond the SFS’s traditional purview. The rapid expansion of Indo–
American strategic relations is illustrative. In May 2002, Douglas Feith,
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, convened the ‘US–India Defense
Policy Group’ in Washington, DC, to shape closer strategic Indo–American
strategic relations. These reportedly included planning joint naval patrols of
the strategic Malacca Strait, workshops on ballistic missile defence, and
cooperation in defence technology.\textsuperscript{34} Subsequent leaks of a secret US
Department of Defense study that was highly critical of Indian defence
preparation quoted an anonymous American admiral as, nevertheless,
concluding that India will become ‘a vital component of US strategy’ and
that the US should view Indian military power as a future hedge against
China in the Asia–Pacific region.\textsuperscript{35}

In late June 2005, Washington and New Delhi entered into a ten-year
‘New Framework for the US–India Defense Relationship’ (NFDR)
authorising the establishment of a defence production and procurement
group, missile defence cooperation and joint maritime patrolling.\textsuperscript{36}
Precedents for the latter had already been set in 2002 when the Indian Navy

fronts’, in Robert M. Hathaway and Wilson Lee (eds), \textit{George W. Bush and East Asia: A First-Term
Assessment} (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, Asia Program,
2005), p. 87.

\textsuperscript{33} Harry Harding, ‘Change and continuity in the Bush administration’s Asia policy’, in Hathaway and
Lee (eds), \textit{George W. Bush and East Asia}, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{34} Conn Hallinan, ‘US and India: A dangerous alliance’, \textit{Asia Times Online}, 9 May 2003,
<www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/EE09Df03.html>.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{36} Chidanand Rajghatta, ‘India, US sign defence pact’, \textit{The Times of India}, 29 June 2005,
ships *Sukanya* and *Sharda* helped escort US ships through the Malacca Straits in support of ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’, and with American warships routinely refuelling in Chennai and Mumbai, the largest US–India naval exercise in history was conducted.\(^{37}\) The two states entered into an agreement in July 2005 for the US to support modifying restrictions imposed by the Nuclear Suppliers Group so that it could upgrade its civilian nuclear energy cooperation with India.\(^{38}\) This agreement was reached despite India not being a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and not allowing full-scope nuclear safeguards. However, India did not contribute troops to Iraq despite strong American pressure to do so. Some American critics questioned the value of the NFDR—India had already signed a ‘Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity’ with China in April 2005. Critics of the NFDR and nuclear energy agreements speculated that India was skillfully manipulating the US into conceding too much in the nuclear proliferation realm and playing off the US and China against each other in order to establish its own regional power base.\(^{39}\)

A second informal US bilateral security relationship that has strengthened notably over the past decade is with Singapore. Since the end of the Cold War, Singapore has arguably surpassed Thailand and the Philippines—formal US treaty allies—in importance to the US as a regional security partner. Uncertainty over the future of the US basing system in the Philippines led to the US and Singapore signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 1990 allowing US forces’ access to Singapore’s air and naval facilities. This was followed up with MOUs in 1992 and 1998 transferring the US logistics command group for the western Pacific to Singapore and giving the US Navy access to the Changi Naval Base’s deep

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water pier. In July 2005, President Bush and Singapore’s Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, announced that their two countries would sign a Strategic Framework Agreement for a ‘Closer Cooperation Partnership in Defense and Security’. By this agreement the US would recognise Singapore as a ‘major security cooperation partner’ and expand bilateral ties across a wide array of defence functions: counterterrorism, counterproliferation, joint military exercises and training, policy dialogues, and defence technology. Concerns remained, however, within Singapore’s leadership that their city-state could not afford to become a formal US ally for fear of alienating its much larger Malaysian and Indonesian neighbours and of undercutting the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) principle of non-alignment with great powers. On that basis, it backed down from supporting a 2004 American initiative to pursue a Regional Maritime Surveillance Initiative for the Malacca Straits when its two large Malay neighbours rejected it. It is, however, an active participant in both the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and Container Security Initiative that entail aggressive patrolling of maritime passages and cargo. Singapore is also the only ASEAN country to have joined the US Joint Strike Fighter Initiative. Singapore and the US still differ over human rights questions. But this is a small hiccup in what otherwise must be regarded as a security relationship that is experiencing the most significant growth and greatest depth among all those security ties the US is cultivating with various Asian states.

In the cases of both India and Singapore, the US is adopting an alliance management style that clearly departs from the traditional hub and spokes model that existed in the postwar era. In increasingly fluid Asia–Pacific and global security environments, US policy planners are discovering that they must engage in tough bargaining and accept more evenhanded strategic trade-offs with potential security coalition partners if their strategic objectives are to be realised. Unlike the situation at the height of the Cold


War, these states have distinct options to aligning with Washington regarding key regional security issues and are able to be more selective regarding the aspects of security collaboration on which they will cooperate with the US. Even formal treaty allies such as Australia, South Korea and Thailand are now capable of forging independent and important security relations with potential rivals (i.e. China) while maintaining core elements of their security ties with the US. This broadening of alliance and security relationships has diluted the hierarchical characteristics of US power in Asia–Pacific alliance politics.

Reconciling alliances with emerging coalitions of the willing

However, the question remains as to what extent Pacific alliance exclusivism remains intact as the US attempts to integrate its alliance politics with its emphasis on shaping new coalitions of the willing. The current American administration increasingly prefers ad hoc groupings that can respond rapidly and flexibly to international crises to more formal alliance frameworks that demand adherence to formal and often cumbersome negotiations and processes before they can act.42 This preference is clearly stipulated in Bush’s March 2006 National Security Strategy (NSS) report: ‘Bilateral policies that ignore regional and global realities are unlikely to succeed … Where existing institutions can be reformed to meet new challenges we, along with our partners, must reform them. Where appropriate institutions do not exist, we, along with our partners, must create them.’43 In his previous NSS (September 2002), Bush openly praised Asia–Pacific allies for their support in the Afghanistan conflict, specifically citing Australia, Japan and South Korea for their military logistical support in that campaign and the Philippines and Thailand for their upgrading of counterterrorism efforts in Southeast Asia.44

Notwithstanding the president’s statement, traditional US allies in the Asia–Pacific faced some initial difficulties in making the policy adjustments

42 As Kurt Campbell has observed, ‘the United States has in fact given more value to those alliances that can reliably support US interests in the war on terrorism and participate decisively in coalitions of the willing’. Kurt Campbell, ‘The end of alliances? Not so fast’, Washington Quarterly, 27(2) 2004: 151–63, at 158.


required to integrate their own national security postures with the new US ‘coalition strategy’. Because US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld asserted soon after 11 September that ‘the mission determines the coalition, not the coalition the mission’, America’s Pacific allies and friends were required to reassess their own force postures and adjust them to the new reality. Australia’s shift from a ‘defence-self reliance’ posture to one more attuned to building up expeditionary force capabilities precipitated widespread national debate. Japanese and South Korean force planners, accustomed to thinking about North Korean missiles and rising Chinese power, likewise were facing the hard reality that their national military capabilities were not configured to supporting US forces to pre-empt or intervene against distant international threats. To emphasise its independent view on the purpose and timing of coalition warfare, Thailand’s government rejected a US request to station supply ships in the Gulf of Thailand; Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra later argued at a November 2001 ASEAN meeting that ‘we have no problems, we can look after ourselves’.

There is growing evidence, however, that American bilateral alliances in the Asia–Pacific have adapted over the past few years to emerging geopolitical conditions. Australia and Japan remain ‘core’ bilateral allies who, along with Britain and perhaps Israel, must be regarded as among Washington’s closest security partners in the post-11 September timeframe. Both Asia–Pacific states have supported US operations in Afghanistan and Iraq with land forces and offshore assets. Both are collaborating with the US on key aspects of missile defence technology. Australia is now ranked by many independent observers of alliance politics as one of America’s two most intimate allies (along with Britain) in terms of intelligence disclosures, and perhaps its most ‘comfortable’ international security partner.

Despite lingering differences over a realignment of American military basing operations on Okinawa, and vestiges of Japanese nationalism

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affecting Sino–Japanese and Korean–Japanese ties, the US–Japan alliance also remains critical to American global coalition strategy. Several hundred Japan Self-Defense Force troops were deployed from early 2004 to July 2006 in the Samawah region of southern Iraq to provide humanitarian and logistical support for the US-led coalition in that country (and Japanese Air Self-Defense Force C-130s are still supporting the Iraq mission from Kuwait). In mid-September 2005, the US and Japan launched a Strategic Development Alliance to coordinate their international aid and development strategies toward terrorist-prone states. The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force provides at-sea refuelling to coalition vessels from 12 countries collaborating on maritime interdiction operations in the Indian Ocean. A Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force contingent of 300 special operations troops is earmarked for counterterrorist operations. Japan has also been an active player in the Six Party Talks to denuclearise the Korean peninsula.48 All of these developments reflect ‘Tokyo’s calculation that cooperation with the United States globally helps to advance its [own] regional interests’.49

US alliance relations with the Philippines, Thailand and South Korea, however, remain less intimate than before the end of the Cold War. In part, this is due to Thailand’s and South Korea’s relatively more benign interpretation of China’s emerging regional security posture than that held by Washington—a view reinforced by Beijing’s perceived support for regional multilateralism as reflected in its ‘New Security Concept’. Less enamoured with Chinese ‘smile diplomacy’, the Philippines remains a fragile state, confronting serious internal security problems. Its need for US counterterrorism assistance explains its status in the Bush administration as a ‘non-NATO ally’ and its hospitable outlook toward US security assistance. Philippines nationalism with its anti-American connotations, however, still lurks just below the surface. The Arroyo government, for example, has


resisted the Bush administration’s pressures to declare the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, active throughout Mindanao, as a terrorist organisation. To do so would jeopardise its negotiations with that formidable Islamist force on the island.\(^5\)

South Korea has evolved into a unique case of US bilateral security relations in Asia. The Bush administration has assigned increasing weight to Pyongyang’s nuclear capabilities and has responded aggressively. Bush’s 2002 NSS underscored what it argued was the right of the US to engage in military pre-emption as a supplement to more traditional deterrence strategies.\(^5\) South Korea’s policy perceptions on this issue are shaped in no small part by its obvious vulnerability to a North Korean military attack that could destroy most of Seoul and much of the overall South Korean national infrastructure. The lack of South Korean support for an American pre-emptive strike against the North’s nuclear installations signals the hard reality from the South’s perspective that ‘… any military confrontation on the peninsula would be a disaster that should be avoided at all costs’.\(^5\) This reflects an increasingly ‘order-centric’ South Korean worldview and a growing rejection by Seoul of strategic pre-emption as having any real role to play in stabilising Northeast Asia.

Other factors are imposing tensions on the US–South Korea alliance. One key consideration relates to generational change in South Korea. In February 2006, the Korea Times polled 1,000 South Koreans between the ages of 18 and 23 and found that 48 per cent of respondents would support


\(^5\) The key passages justifying this doctrine are contained in Bush, National Security Strategy, 2002, <www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>. They assert that the US: ‘… must adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today’s adversaries. Rogue states and terrorists do not seek to attack us using conventional means. They know such attacks would fail. Instead, they rely on acts of terror and, potentially, the use of weapons of mass destruction—weapons that can be easily concealed, delivered covertly, and used without warning ... The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction—and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.’

North Korea if the US conducted a pre-emptive strike against North Korean nuclear facilities. Forty per cent of those polled believed China was the most important country with which to cultivate foreign relations; the US followed with a relatively poor percentage of 18.4 per cent and North Korea came in third with 18 per cent.53 Such figures must always be absorbed with caution: they reflect a young electorate’s response to what remains an improbable conflict scenario and its fascination with a growing ‘China market’.54 Even the most liberal Korean leaders (including the current South Korean president), however, continue to value the US alliance as an essential insurance policy for as long as North Korea poses a genuine military threat to the South.55

Dealing with regional–global disjunctures

Since 11 September, US Pacific alliances have incurred an identity problem in relating to both US regional strategy and US global strategy. Can the same alliances which are perceived as balancing rising Chinese power in Asia be justified as integral components in the American global war against terrorism in which China is also an ally? The Bush administration has experienced difficulties in passing off its regional alliance network as serving this ‘dual capacity’. From Beijing’s perspective, the danger of a ‘global’ SFS is that it may be used to legitimise US global leadership and strengthen its hegemonic position.56 China has responded by promoting ‘multipolarity’ in the global world order (cultivating other power centres of which it constitutes a key part) to dilute American hegemony in both Asia and beyond and by insisting that US intervention against terrorist movements must have multilateral—and, more specifically UN—backing.

54 Bilateral trade between China and South Korea totaled US$90 billion in 2004, a 42 per cent increase from 2003.
The above observation leads to a third explanation for US bilateral alliance persistence in the region. It may well be that the SFS’s existing architecture constitutes the only asset or mechanism available for the US to use at a time when it desires to support its global postures with a sustained Asia–Pacific presence and role. The 2001 QDR acknowledged this, even prior to the war on terror, by observing that the contemporary geopolitical setting is ‘complex and unpredictable’ and that allied cooperation in the Asia–Pacific is indispensable to implementing a broader American strategy directed toward cultivating and maintaining international stability.\(^\text{57}\) It is notable that every US bilateral ally in Asia eventually deployed forces to ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ in Afghanistan and, to various degrees, also contributed troops to the Iraq War. Among the United States’ 16 designated ‘major non-NATO allies’, Asia–Pacific states constitute nearly half of that category: Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, Pakistan, South Korea and Thailand. Gaining this status allows a state to engage with the US ‘in joint research and development on military systems and to cooperate on matters like counterterrorism with close security partners’.\(^\text{58}\)

WMD non-proliferation is another US global security objective in which its Asia–Pacific treaty allies are prominently involved. The US is currently working with Japan and South Korea, for example, in responding to an emerging threat (North Korean nuclear capabilities) by engaging with them and with China, Russia and North Korea in the Six Party Talks. Specific points of disagreement still exist between the US and its South Korean ally on what constitutes the right combination of pressure and inducement that needs to be applied to North Korea. But South Korea has largely closed ranks with the US over North Korea’s reported counterfeiting activities to finance its alleged nuclear weapons program and was scheduled to send observers to the PSI maritime interdiction exercise in April 2006 that involved US, Japanese and Australian units practicing interception of WMD contraband on the high seas—an activity North Korea perceives as directly aimed against itself.\(^\text{59}\)


The above trend of the US integrating Asia–Pacific regional and global strategic planning and mechanisms could be characterised as a bilateralism/multilateralism ‘hybridisation’ strategy. Another recent example of the US’ receptivity to this approach was its favourable response to an Australian initiative to more closely coordinate Australia–Japan–US security relations.60 A proposal for establishing a ‘Trilateral Security Dialogue’ process between the three allies was advanced by Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer in July 2001 when both Australia and the US regarded multilateral processes such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as having been weakened by the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the 1999 East Timor crisis.61 Although no ministerial meetings initially took place, low-level informal discussions at the vice ministerial level commenced in 2002.62 In May 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Downer announced that these consultations would be upgraded to full ministerial level to be conducted over a ‘number of years’ and cover both global and regional security issues.63 In March 2006, the inaugural ministerial Trilateral Strategic Dialogue was convened in Sydney. The joint communiqué generated by this meeting insisted that the three powers involved ‘have a common cause in working to maintain stability and security globally with a particular focus on the Asia–Pacific region … [to] strengthen cooperative frameworks in the Asia–Pacific region’.64

Any emerging Australia–Japan–US ‘security triangle’, however, must struggle to acquire regional legitimacy. Arguably, a more legitimate and viable strategic relationship between the three depends on a gradual consolidation and extension of their bilateral relationships within the framework of a security community. None of the three actors in the

60 Extensive background is provided by various chapters in Brad Williams and Andrew Newman (eds), *Japan, Australia and Asia–Pacific Security* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
Australia–Japan–US security triumvirate view ‘cooperative security’ as the most preferred means of pursuing regional order.

Under the Bush administration, the US has projected limited enthusiasm for the principles of multilateralism beyond extending existing bilateral security instrumentalities on an intermittent and somewhat narrow base (the Six Party Talks stand as a major exception). Japan, despite the role played by its Foreign Minister, Taro Nakayama, in envisioning a ‘forum for political dialogue’ that helped promote the creation of the ARF in 1993–94, has never fully converted to the idea of cooperative security. Australia has only recently acceded to ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) and attended the first East Asia Summit meeting in Kuala Lumpur in December 2005. Australia, however, has yet to establish a high level of credibility as a fully committed proponent of multilateral security politics.

**Factoring in domestic politics**

Domestic security politics may also be relevant in explaining the SFS’s move away from its original alliance exclusivism rationales. Various domestic interest groups may be instrumental in sustaining public support for an alliance. Policy elites may regard alliance support or alliance opposition as manipulation for accruing or maintaining power. Regime change bringing to power elites whose ideological commitments or policy perspectives significantly diverge from their predecessors are also key determinants of alliance durability or dissolution. To date, there have been few instances of these factors working to reconstitute the SFS. Nixon’s decision to engage China led to the eventual dissolution of the formal US alliance with Taiwan. New Zealand’s aforementioned opposition to US extended nuclear deterrence postures led to that country’s de facto extrication from ANZUS in 1985. Riding a wave of nationalist sentiment, the Philippines discontinued the hosting of US basing operations in the early 1990s even though the US–Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty remained in force.

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66 These factors are assessed by Walt, ‘Why alliances endure or collapse’.
Domestic politics and especially public opinion in allied electorates may, however, become increasingly important in the obsolescence of the US Pacific alliances. Generational change in South Korea is recognised as a key determinant of how viable the US–South Korea Mutual Defense Treaty will remain. Incessant challenges to national leaderships in the Philippines and Thailand could lead to situations where the American mutual defence treaties are challenged. Japanese and Australian populations and politicians appear to strongly support their US alliances, but few expected New Zealand to dissent from US strategy as strongly as it did 20 years ago. Ultimately, alliances are marriages of convenience rather than permanent bonds of affection and thus are susceptible to major change.

Linking bilateral security with transnational issues
A core challenge to bilateralism’s future relevance and credibility in the Asia–Pacific will be the confirmation of non-military security challenges. When original threats predating alliance formation disappear, other security problems may nevertheless remain or emerge. A major issue then arises to what extent existing alliance infrastructures are able to adapt. Can bilateral infrastructures be as responsive or efficient to non-traditional security challenges as they are to more traditional military threats? If not, can largely hierarchical bilateral alliance infrastructures be appropriately reconstituted?

The evidence to date is that such adaptation is occurring only intermittently rather than systematically or comprehensively. The aforementioned Trilateral Strategic Dialogue communiqué cited the need for Australia, Japan and the US to address ‘pressing non-traditional security issues’ such as pandemics. The US PACOM has initiated a ‘Global Peace Operations Program’ focusing on pandemic influenza and the coordination of allied cooperation in future natural disasters. The tsunami relief effort in late 2004 and early 2005 provides the foundation for such planning. There is little evidence, however, that non-traditional security has thus far assumed


a central role in the security thinking and planning of the US and its Pacific allies at a time when they remain preoccupied with international terrorism, WMD proliferation, regional flashpoints and other traditional security preoccupations.69

Energy security appears to be the most likely candidate to break through this conceptual barrier because it contains elements of both traditional and non-traditional security politics. China’s and India’s massive populaces are now experiencing unprecedented economic growth, supported largely by massive fossil fuel consumption that generates increasingly critical energy distribution and environmental problems. The geopolitics underlying this trend is clear: the Asia–Pacific’s thirst for future energy supplies renders the propensity to conform to Kyoto Protocol-type limitations on greenhouse emissions standards remote. In January 2006, the US, Japan, South Korea and Australia met in Sydney with Chinese and Indian representatives to initiate the Asia–Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate. In subsequent testimony to Congress, US Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill posited that the ‘Partnership will build on existing bilateral partnerships and multilateral climate change-related energy technology initiatives’ to pursue new approaches for defusing energy security tensions.70

Related issues are how China and India will develop their own maritime capabilities to support their growing oil exploitation activities in the Persian Gulf, western Africa, and elsewhere and to what extent these capabilities will function independently, in competition or cooperation with US and allied maritime forces to sustain overall Asia–Pacific stability and economic growth.

HUB AND SPOKES SUCCESSORS
The above changes are making SFS obsolescent, but what is coming in its place? The long-range significance of changes occurring to the SFS has not yet been fully grasped by Washington. We present this shift as one

69 In-depth discussion on this problem is offered by Paul M. Evans, ‘Human security and East Asia: In the beginning’, Journal of East Asian Studies, 4(2) 2004: 263–84.

from *alliance exclusivism* to *alliance mutuality*. We further argue that strategies that accommodate and nurture the condition of alliance mutuality could ultimately form the basis of a new strategy of *convergent security* for more effective and comprehensive Asia-Pacific order-building.

**Alliance mutuality**

*Alliance exclusivism* refers to two states pursuing mutual security interests against a common threat by applying their collective resources to maximise alliance benefits or ‘public good’. ‘Pure’ bilateralism’s most important characteristic is the simplicity of security policy management, and exclusivism is a central feature.71 Various alliance theorists have observed that alliance strategies underwritten by exclusivism appear better suited to facing unmitigated external threats, while inclusive strategies are better for managing intra-alliance risks such as entrapment or abandonment or for co-opting potential adversaries into alliance or other institutional arrangements.72

*Alliance mutuality* as used here refers to ‘those collective or shared interests and values that cut across different alliances, particularly bilateral ones, to reinforce cooperation throughout an entire network of alliances’.73 It is a *condition* (rather than a strategy or process) reached in bilateral alliance politics where relations between the more powerful and less powerful ally in a particular security dyad have matured from distinctly asymmetrical to more evenly balanced sets of interests and interactions. This situation of progressive equilibrium, moreover, is increasingly acknowledged and operationalised by both states in their security relations with the other. The alliance ‘hegemon’ or more powerful state is increasingly prepared to acknowledge the importance and take into account the interests of its smaller ally in the context of structural changes in the security environment within which the alliance operates and to respond more sensitively to those interests in order to minimise prospects for the

smaller power’s alliance defection. This is due to an increased recognition by the major ally that it cannot defuse potential regional threats and crisis or, alternatively, pursue commonly shared visions and values regarding regional order-building on its own. Finally, alliance mutuality is not only restricted to one dyad within an alliance network led by its hegemon or major ally. It can also apply to intensifying and increasingly independent security relations among other allies within the network as long as those allies’ existing ties with the major ally provides a key catalyst for such independent cooperation.74

Alliance mutuality occurs when interests held by separate alliances converge to forge an inter-alliance consensus over how order-building will be pursued and what its outcome should be. This does not necessarily imply that the US, as the dominant power in each of the bilateral alliances, will lose all control over the future directions of each alliance arrangement. It does mean, however, that a shift from alliance exclusivism to alliance mutuality presages US bilateral allies in the Asia–Pacific enjoying greater symmetry and independence from the US than was the case during the Cold War. This allows them to pursue separate economic ties with the Chinese and to build or participate in regional economic and political institutions (such as the East Asia Summit) in a way they could not during the pinnacle of Soviet-American competition.

In the postwar Asia–Pacific, exclusivism prevailed because multilateral contacts among many of the newly decolonized countries in the region rarely existed.75 Defence associations with the US or other Western powers were in place, however, and these were exploited to support Washington’s global containment posture in response to what US officials perceived to be core security threats: Soviet global power projected into Asian locales,


75 Kuniko Ashizawa, ‘Japan’s approach toward Asian regional security: From ‘hub-and-spoke’ bilateralism to multitiered’, Pacific Review, 16(3) 2003: 362. Australia’s ties with New Zealand and its diminishing security relations with Britain was the partial exception but the US became increasingly predominant in Australian defence relations from the late 1960s onward.
communist regimes in the region and communist-sponsored internal insurgencies. The Soviet threat directly confronted Japan and the North Korean threat menaced South Korea. Thailand and the Philippines confronted domestic insurgency threats that, while supported by Moscow and Beijing, were largely indigenous and nationalist in composition. Australia and New Zealand confronted no direct security threats at either the domestic or regional level but regarded their trade lifelines and democratic way of life to ultimately be at stake. While this myriad of diverse regional threats was perceived by American policy-makers as sufficiently clear and compelling to mandate US commitments to its regional allies, the Americans were able to tailor their guarantees in ways that maximised US flexibility in meeting whatever crisis or conflicts may have emerged. Unlike NATO, where an evolving European politico-economic community comprised of many separate states needed to be consulted within that multilateral alliance framework, Washington had no such obligation relative to its security relations with its Asia–Pacific allies. Each bilateral alliance was treated by Washington on its own terms. This condition of ‘exclusivism’ integrated each ally’s unique local security concerns into a cohesive American strategy of containment and extended deterrence across the region.\textsuperscript{76}

During the years of Soviet–American global rivalry, the American ‘hub’ exercised tight control over Asia–Pacific allies or ‘spokes’, reflecting US asymmetrical power. Eurocentric biases, combined with traditional intra-regional animosities in Asia, precluded the structuring of ‘an alliance of equals’ in that region such as that of the North Atlantic community.\textsuperscript{77} In the absence of an established collective Asian identity, American hierarchical management was perceived by both the US and its Asia–Pacific security allies as the glue essential to bind what little normative cohesion existed.

At the end of the Cold War all five ‘active’ US Pacific allies (Australia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand) faced a choice over continued alliance affiliation with the US. US interests in the region were defined in a seminal East Asian Strategy Initiative (EASI) report released by

\textsuperscript{76} A comprehensive account of this American approach to Cold War strategy in the Asia–Pacific is in William T. Tow, Encountering the Dominant Player (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

the US Department of Defense in April 1990 and updated in July 1992: preventing hegemony in Asia by a country or countries hostile to the US through power balancing, maintaining growing American economic involvement in the world’s most dynamic region for economic growth, and cultivating the development of liberal democracy in that region wherever possible.\textsuperscript{78} Although Washington still viewed its Pacific alliances through the lenses of hub and spokes logic, it recognised even then that the ‘fabric of shared economic interests’ would primarily ‘connect the spokes’ of the US regional engagement architecture.\textsuperscript{79} Nor were Japan and Australia—perhaps the Asia–Pacific region’s ‘steadiest’ democracies—any longer standing by themselves as unmitigated liberal polities in the region. Thailand and South Korea were combining their impressive economic growth with progress in democratic governance and even the Philippines, still encumbered by a persistently moribund national economy, was commemorating its 1986 ‘People’s Power’ revolution that liberated the country from an entrenched autocratic regime.

What evolved in Asia–Pacific regional security politics throughout the 1990s and intensified after 11 September was very different from the sustained power balancing strategies American policy-makers had propagated at the outset of the decade. US allies in the Pacific still wanted strategic relations with the US but these ties were to be increasingly symmetrical rather than hierarchical. Japan wanted to become a ‘normal power’; South Korea wanted unification of the Korean peninsula on Korean terms; Thailand and the Philippines wanted to balance their US ties with what they deemed to be an increasingly viable ASEAN. Even Australia, apart from a brief interlude at the end of the decade, wanted to ‘balance’ its alliance with its long-standing great and powerful American friend with a greater Asian identity. Three discernible features emerged as this new situation’s key components: (1) a reduction of the alliance ‘exclusiveness’ that effectively reconstituted the hub and spokes asymmetry prevailing during the Cold War; (2) US–Pacific allied cooperation on other than threat


issues; and (3) greater communication and cooperation among the allies (‘spokes’ maturity in their security relations with each other).

These three components together comprise alliance mutuality. To be sure, the US now shares an overriding interest with its Pacific allies in avoiding future Asian-Pacific conflicts so that each can prosper from the region’s substantial economic growth. They also share a desire to cultivate regional order-building in ways that will preclude an intensification of Sino–American tensions over such Asian ‘flashpoints’ as Taiwan and the Korean peninsula. The allies posit that, hopefully, China largely shares their vision for uninterrupted regional economic growth and will work to realise it as long as two overriding national interests—control over its own national sovereignty and freedom from external hegemony—are not undercut by precipitate Taiwanese behaviour or by American overreactions to future Sino–Taiwanese crises. China’s willingness to assume the pivot position in the ongoing Six Party Talks concerning the North Korean nuclear issue illustrates how perceptions of alliance mutuality may not only unite the interests of Japan and South Korea—two US allies who normally view each other with suspicion—but those of other large powers such as China and Russia. Such large powers might be more hostile to US regional interests if they regarded the US bilateral alliances in the Pacific as merely designed to advance their own interests.

Alliance mutuality envisions American military power as an instrument for ‘selective’ balancing rather than the sustained balancing that distinguished the hub and spokes approach throughout the Cold War. The new balancing strategy includes supporting Japan’s development as a first-class maritime power, fostering closer US defence ties with India without establishing a formal US–India alliance, and preventing China from establishing hierarchy over Southeast Asia. The strategy is delicate and cautious, however, because it relies on China understanding and acquiescing to this mild form of balancing strategy as a hedging rather than a containment posture. Existing US bilateral alliances and emerging coalition partners can be utilised by a second Bush administration and its successors to pursue a more contemporary and relevant Asia–Pacific

80 This pattern refutes David Kang’s argument that a Chinese hierarchy over East Asia is gradually materialising and also counters Robert Ross’s scenario of the US and China cutting a deal over the control of the continental and maritime parts of the region.
security framework and one that will better serve US global strategy. The precondition for accommodating and nurturing this condition is for Washington to project less restrictive forms of bilateralism towards its ally and coalition partners.

Indeed, perhaps without fully grasping its strategic implications, the US is encouraging independent alliance relationships within the framework of the SFS and the cultivation of new security ties between selected SFS members and other Western alliance networks. For example, Australia and the Philippines have recently upgraded their counterterrorism cooperation by conducting joint military training exercises and strengthening their bilateral intelligence cooperation.81 Australia has also entered into a comprehensive bilateral security agreement with Thailand (in 2004) that covers counterterrorism, joint anti-WMD measures and collaboration against transnational crime.82 Both Japan and Australia have recently embarked on stronger bilateral defence ties with Britain.83

As alliance mutuality evolves to more advance stages, it can be applied to what we label a convergent security strategy. By ‘convergent security’ we mean a ‘managed transition from a regional security system based predominantly on exclusivist bilateral security arrangements to one based predominantly on multilateral security arrangements.’84 It is not designed to reinforce balancing or hegemonic strategies along traditional lines of alliance politics but to integrate longstanding bilateral security ties with emerging but increasingly viable multilateral security architectures. It is also aimed to encourage US alliance networks to identify and implement cooperative security mechanisms with other powers outside the traditional alliance network. As already noted above, the Bush administration has pushed for closer Pacific allied collaboration with NATO.

84 Adapted from Tow, Asia-Pacific Strategic Relations, p. 9.
The strategy of convergent security rests on the notion that US allies are sufficiently mature states capable of managing independent politico-economic ties with China, Russia and India without compromising irreparably their security arrangements with the US. Pre-conditions for shifting toward a convergent security posture are already evident. Evolving South Korean and to some extent Australian relations toward China are illustrative.

Japan too maintains immense economic ties with the Chinese even as its politico-security ties with China are in a bad state. In Southeast Asia, Thailand is ‘bending with the [Chinese economic] wind’ while the Philippines has put its territorial [Spratly Islands] grievances with China on hold after the 2002 Declaration on a Code of Conduct while it develops economic links with China.

Convergent security describes the shift of America’s Asian alliances towards greater inclusiveness. The principle of inclusiveness is clearly evident in the gradual transformation of the hub and spokes SFS into a more complex and more inclusive network. In April–May 2001, the US PACOM conducted the *Team Challenge* umbrella exercise to combine ongoing bilateral US exercises with Thailand (*Cobra Gold*), with the Philippines (*Balikatan*) and Australia (*Tandem Thrust*). It had a multilateral focus on developing joint coordination on regional peacekeeping and humanitarian relief. Singapore also participated while Japan, France, Malaysia and China were among other countries invited to observe the manoeuvres (the latter declined when the EP-3 spy plane incident unfolded in Hainan). Convergent security describes the shift of America’s Asian alliances towards greater inclusiveness. The principle of inclusiveness is clearly evident in the gradual transformation of the hub and spokes SFS into a more complex and more inclusive network. In April–May 2001, the US PACOM conducted the *Team Challenge* umbrella exercise to combine ongoing bilateral US exercises with Thailand (*Cobra Gold*), with the Philippines (*Balikatan*) and Australia (*Tandem Thrust*). It had a multilateral focus on developing joint coordination on regional peacekeeping and humanitarian relief. Singapore also participated while Japan, France, Malaysia and China were among other countries invited to observe the manoeuvres (the latter declined when the EP-3 spy plane incident unfolded in Hainan). Convergent security describes the shift of America’s Asian alliances towards greater inclusiveness. The principle of inclusiveness is clearly evident in the gradual transformation of the hub and spokes SFS into a more complex and more inclusive network. In April–May 2001, the US PACOM conducted the *Team Challenge* umbrella exercise to combine ongoing bilateral US exercises with Thailand (*Cobra Gold*), with the Philippines (*Balikatan*) and Australia (*Tandem Thrust*). It had a multilateral focus on developing joint coordination on regional peacekeeping and humanitarian relief. Singapore also participated while Japan, France, Malaysia and China were among other countries invited to observe the manoeuvres (the latter declined when the EP-3 spy plane incident unfolded in Hainan). Convergent security describes the shift of America’s Asian alliances towards greater inclusiveness. The principle of inclusiveness is clearly evident in the gradual transformation of the hub and spokes SFS into a more complex and more inclusive network. In April–May 2001, the US PACOM conducted the *Team Challenge* umbrella exercise to combine ongoing bilateral US exercises with Thailand (*Cobra Gold*), with the Philippines (*Balikatan*) and Australia (*Tandem Thrust*). It had a multilateral focus on developing joint coordination on regional peacekeeping and humanitarian relief. Singapore also participated while Japan, France, Malaysia and China were among other countries invited to observe the manoeuvres (the latter declined when the EP-3 spy plane incident unfolded in Hainan). The Pentagon’s 2006 *QDR*, however, has called for ‘boosted military integration’ with Pacific allies to deter against emerging and major powers and to ‘complicate any adversary’s efforts to decouple them’. In March 2005, Adm. William Fallon, head of PACOM, announced that


periodic US–Japan–South Korea military consultations would be upgraded
to shape joint strategy for responding to Korean peninsula contingencies, to
indications of growing Chinese power (but not to contain China) and to
regional terrorist threats. Two months later, the creation of a similar,
ministerial level, the ‘Trilateral Strategic Dialogue’, involving US, Japanese
and Australian officials, was announced.87 The Pacific Command’s Joint
Interagency Group for Counter-Terrorism and its Theater Security
Cooperation Program are both designed to enhance US-allied military
operability against a wide range of unconventional security challenges and
provide momentum for multilateral training and coordination within the US
Pacific alliance framework.88

US regional allies are no longer relying exclusively upon Washington to
build linkages. Intra-alliance dialogues between Australia and Japan, and
between those two countries and various ASEAN states, illustrate the
‘bilateralism-plus’ process that underscores the SFS’s current relevance only
as a complement to the region’s growing number of multilateral security
initiatives. Japanese security analyst Akiko Fukushima has characterised
this development as ‘a new trend of spokes talking to each other …
develop(ing) into … a wheel of spokes’.89 This more fluid infrastructure
can lead to greater alliance dissonance. However, annual bilateral summits
between the US and its Asian allies continue because of their mutual need to

87 See US Department of State, ‘Remarks with Australian foreign minister Alexander Downer after
the House Armed Services Committee, United States House of Representatives, ‘Regarding US
housearmedsvcscomm.shtml>; and Sheldon W. Simon, Theater Security Cooperation in the US
Pacific Command: An Assessment and Projection (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research,
2003). Simon correctly notes that Thailand and the Philippines still prefer bilateral exercises with US
forces because of sensitivities over sovereign prerogatives and their fear that multilateral exercises
may dilute US attention to facilitating the improvement of their own military weaknesses.
Momentum toward multilateral exercising, however, has continued. This is due, in part, to American
strategic preoccupation with Iraq and Central Asia siphoning resources away from maintaining
extensive ‘country-specific’ commitments.
89 Cited in Akiko Fukushima, ‘Between bilateralism and community: US–Japan security relations in a
changing East Asia: Seminar 1 – Japanese approaches to international institutions: Beyond
bilateralism?’, Symposium sponsored by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and the East–West Center,
confer on and coordinate regarding regional security problems within what we will argue below is a loose, selective US regional balancing framework.

These trends should not, however, be overstated. To be sure, convergent security does not imply the end of alliances per se. If any of these states miscalculate, they can always fall back on the existing US bilateral alliance as an ‘insurance’ policy.90 Australia has already had to do this once in early 2005 when it rejected a Chinese call for Australia to ‘reinterpret’ ANZUS to not incorporate a Taiwan contingency after Beijing passed an anti-secession law on Taiwan.91 South Korea has its own ‘history dispute’ with China over the ancient kingdom of ‘Goguryeo’. 92 The US–Republic of Korea Strategic Implementation Agreement in January 2006 cannot be directly attributed to this specific dispute but the Goguryeo incident served notice to the architects of South Korea’s increasingly independent foreign policy that limits and risks accompanied opportunities in forging closer ties to Beijing.

Yet the US insurance policy, which some have described as a form of ‘hedging’ behaviour on the part of the allies, only goes so far.93 Witness the US refusal to incorporate the Philippines’ territorial claims to part of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea into the US–Republic of the Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty a few years ago (it works the other way too; note Thailand’s refusal of US pre-positioning requests after the 1991 Gulf War). Over time, if and when it becomes clear China will not invade Taiwan after the Olympics and that North Korea will not actually use its rudimentary ballistic missile force to conduct nuclear strikes against anyone, the tacit ‘understandings’ or ‘rules’ that make manoeuvring within the alliance mutuality framework possible will become sufficiently acknowledged or explicit as to become ‘de facto’ norms to fundamentally

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90 The authors are grateful to Tomohiko Satake for raising the idea of ‘alliance insurance policy’ with them during discussions at a Department of International Relations, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies seminar in June 2006. His presentation, ‘Political roles of alliances: Why has the US alliance system in the Asia-Pacific region still continued?’ is in the author’s (Tow’s) hands.

91 ‘China warns Australia on Taiwan stance,’ Age (Melbourne), 8 March 2005.


transform the SFS. Even if one of these contingencies does unexpectedly occur, long-term order-building in the Asia–Pacific cannot be predicated on enduring security dilemmas alone and the SFS will eventually need to be adjusted to more address more contemporary geopolitical realities.

We are not going as far as John Ikenberry in representing the US alliance system in Asia as a front for American-led liberal organisation and solidarity. But it is clear that Bush and his national security team have attempted to calibrate only a minimal brand of qualified or ‘a la carte’ multilateralism while strengthening US bilateral alliances in Asia. Initially defined by Richard Haas, who became Director of the US State Department’s Office of Policy Planning during Bush’s first term of office, this ‘hybrid’ of bilateralism and multilateralism contrasts with the exclusivism approaches that were emphasised during the Clinton administration. Bush administration officials have, although extending public support to the ARF’s security dialogue’s contribution to regional transparency and understanding, never entertained high expectations for the ‘top-down’ multilateralism that they view as less effective than bilateral alliances in managing US regional security interests. They support only those multilateral initiatives that appear to be necessary to realising those interests. These have included initiatives to pull North Korea into multilateral negotiations with South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the US concerning the elimination of that country’s nuclear weapons program, and the promotion of counterterrorism initiatives within both the ASEAN and APEC group.

To Washington’s current policy establishment, integrating bilateralism and multilateralism really means sustaining American power and influence by preserving its asymmetrical system of regional security alliances. It does

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95 Background is provided by Tow, Asia-Pacific Strategic Relations, pp. 186–7.


not mean relinquishing the United States’ dominant strategic position in the Asia–Pacific by acquiescing to power sharing arrangements with China or other regional actors. Nor does it mean extending unqualified blessings to regionally indigenous economic initiatives such as the ASEAN+3 (ASEAN plus China, Japan and South Korea) or the ‘East Asia Summit’ that could develop into autonomous and competitive mechanisms able to challenge American market access or economic predominance. It does, however, mean that the US is apparently prepared to transform outdated forms of Cold War containment strategy inappropriate to meet contemporary regional security challenges. By emphasising interests and values over threats, current US bilateral security postures inherently encourage allies within the SFS to undertake consensus-building with other regional security actors.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY AND REGIONAL ORDER**

Certainly a unique set of historical conditions sustained the US bilateral system in the Asia–Pacific during the Cold War—but they are now less relevant. Instruments of early postwar trade discrimination that comprised the ‘economic–security bargain’ between the US and its regional allies have given way to globalisation and open regionalism. Nationalism is strengthening in all of the allied states, save possibly Australia, rendering hosting US military forces or exclusively procuring American weapons systems more difficult. As discussed below, nascent signs of multilateralism are emerging to challenge the traditional asymmetrical or hierarchical characteristics of the hub and spokes system. All these factors should work to erode the SFS’s logic and durability. Collectively, however, they have thus far hardly made a dent. US extended deterrence and power balancing strategies are still deemed essential in an Asia–Pacific region where fundamental antagonisms remain.

Nevertheless, 15 years after the Soviet Union’s demise, bilateral alliance politics in the Asia–Pacific can no longer be predicated on universally

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98 In this context, it is notable that the Bush administration has rejected the arguments of those containment advocates who were influential advisors during his first presidential campaign in 2000. An example of such an advisor is Robert D. Blackwill, ‘An action agenda to strengthen America’s alliances in the Asia–Pacific region’, in Robert D. Blackwill and Paul Dibb (eds), *America’s Asian Alliances* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 111–34. Although originally viewed as a member of the Republican Party’s ‘inner circle’ of its foreign policy establishment, Blackwill was subsequently appointed by Bush to be US Ambassador to India.
shared threat perceptions. Australia, South Korea and Thailand are unprepared to perceive China as a replication of the Cold War Soviet threat. Anti-terrorism lacks the overwhelmingly compelling urgency in Northeast Asia to unite Japanese and South Korean threat perceptions with those of Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore where counter-insurgency and counterterrorism priorities are more central. Indeed, South Koreans share deep concerns with their Chinese counterparts about Japan’s future security identity. They view an American strategic presence in their sub-region as a ‘cap on the bottle’ to prevent Japanese military expansion, to be as vital to South Korean security as any future Japanese–South Korean coordination against a North Korean military threat.

The Cold War political bargain of the US shielding Pacific allies’ economic development and political stability through asset specificity can be extended only until ASEAN democracies (including those in the Philippines and Thailand) mature to greater levels of self-confidence, China’s internal political system becomes more liberalised, and higher levels of regional cooperative security can be achieved. Until these conditions are met, a modified SFS will still play an important role. Such modification—initially, alliance mutuality maturing into convergent security—would not be the demise of bilateralism but its gradual transformation away from exclusivism.

The SFS can no longer remain a group of exclusive alliances. Accommodating allied interests in an increasingly interdependent regional security environment represents one of the major challenges for contemporary US security planners.

When the Bush administration assumed office in January 2001, it appeared ready to implement the findings of Asia–Pacific interest-oriented criteria embodied in such studies as _Asia 2025_ in shaping its security outlooks and alliance policies in the Asia–Pacific.99 These criteria were designed to address structural factors in the region that work against regional stability such as regional flashpoints (i.e. the Korean peninsula, Taiwan), the rise of China, various economic conditions and underdeveloped political systems increasingly susceptible to terrorism.

However, the administration’s insistence, in the aftermath of 11 September, on emphasising the formation of ‘coalitions of the willing’ at the expense of restricting multilateralism’s growth in the region, except under the most controlled circumstances, has arguably played into the hands of those determined to erode American regional power and influence in the Asia–Pacific. A judicious application of alliance mutuality, we argue, will go far to overcome this liability.

Alliance mutuality and convergent security offer a promising compromise between those who insist that the SFS’s future viability can only be guaranteed if it conforms to traditional, threat-based alliance criteria and those who argue the system represents nothing more than an outdated form of containment strategy inappropriate to meeting contemporary regional security challenges. They represent a strategy of bilateralism/multilateralism dynamics that promotes the judicious and simultaneous utilisation of normative forces and security concerns to encourage effective bilateralism, rather than just one or the other. By emphasising interests over threats, alliance mutuality encourages allies within the SFS to mutually undertake consensus-building with other regional security actors. Alliance mutuality and convergent security require a shared vision by and consensus among alliance participants on how regional security crises can be defused and strategic reassurance can be encouraged. In support of such an approach, recent disclosures by the Commander, PACOM, to Congress included a stated conviction that ‘getting the balance right’ between maintaining ‘long-standing bilateral alliances’ and ‘nurturing multinational efforts that support the region’s mutual interests’ is a critical precondition for the US to forge and pursue credible regional security postures in the Asia–Pacific.100

Nowhere is the need to strike such a balance more in evidence than on the Korean peninsula where any ‘balanced’ US posture has been sharply tested by a growing incompatibility of intra-alliance perceptions. As noted above, South Korea’s current leadership has challenged American positions. Consensus regarding defence strategy and consolidation of crisis management strategy between the US and South Korea must be achieved if

regional stability is to be retained in Northeast Asia. Such consensus is an integral component of viable alliance mutuality.

Accommodating ‘junior ally’ interests with each other in an increasingly interdependent Asia–Pacific security environment represents one of the major challenges for US policy managers. The SFS is clearly transforming from a hub and spokes arrangement of exclusive bilateralism, exclusively supported by American power, into a more fluid set of dyadic alliances in which what occurs in each alliance has a clear impact upon the others. Continued tensions on the Korean peninsula, for example, have spurred the Japanese government to pass three wartime preparedness bills (in May 2003), to launch its own satellite surveillance system and to move toward greater collaboration with the US on missile defence research and development. In February 2003, Japanese Defence Minister Shigeru Ishida warned that his country would consider adopting its own version of a military pre-emption doctrine against North Korea if Japan believed a North Korean attack against its own cities or bases becomes imminent.\(^{101}\) Although still within the parameters of ‘self-defence’, even limited Japanese rearmament along such lines would be regarded as more threatening than constructive to regional stability and would compel Australia and the other American allies within ASEAN to reassess their own strategic thinking in response to a ‘Japan growing strong’, and to reassess their alliance relations with each other and with the US.

Given such prospects, the US must promote alliance mutuality within the SFS by working with its Pacific allies to convert that network from one of exclusive bilateralism into one based increasingly on building norm consensus.\(^{102}\) Bilateral alliances still play a key role in such a transitory framework, as US policy officials interact with their allied counterparts in annual consultations and American military units continue to engage in military exercises, intelligence exchanges and other traditional defence activities with their allied counterparts.

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102 This approach has been labeled ‘extended bilateralism’ and has been developed by Tow, Asia–Pacific Strategic Relations, p. 222; and by Brian Job, ‘Bilateral and multilateral security options’, paper prepared for the fourth workshop on the Bilateral System of Alliances in the Changing Environment of the Asia–Pacific, Tokyo, 10–12 June 1996.
In adopting such an approach, Washington will be required to work with allies from a less hierarchical and more egalitarian vantage-point. The US PACOM’s Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) Plan constitutes a good start in this direction. It emphasises increasing interoperability of allied military contingents with forward-deployed US forces and encourages the integration of doctrinal planning. The 2006 QDR takes this even further:

Moreover, it calls for the application of ‘unified statecraft … in concert with allies and international partners’ to create ‘(a)uthorities that permit nimble and adaptive policies, processes and institutions … (that) are essential adjuncts to the military capability needed to address the rapidly evolving security challenges around the globe.’ The philosophy of flexibility and ‘jointness’ (hence less hierarchy a la the ‘hub and spokes’ system) in US security relationships is limited not just to the ‘new partner states’ which are not formal members of the SFS (such as Singapore and India), but also to Washington’s five formal treaty allies in the Pacific.

To be sure, part of the rationale for such cooperation involving allies and partners is hedging against China. The 2006 QDR mentions keeping ‘hedge against the possibility that a major or emerging power could choose a hostile path in the future’. It also warns that ‘shaping the choices of major and emerging powers requires a balanced approach, one that seeks cooperation but also creates prudent hedges against the possibility that cooperative approaches by themselves may fail to preclude future conflict’. But if the Chinese counter this with positive diplomacy such as the New Security Concept and increase their influence at US expense in this way, the relevance of such threat-centric thinking may be questionable.

103 See Fargo testimony, 13 March 2003, pp. 29–30.
105 Ibid., p. 92.
106 Ibid., p. 28.
107 Ibid., p. 30.
A more multilateral US posture underwritten by alliance mutuality, moreover, may generate more allied resonance with US strategies such as international counterterrorism. Washington’s focus on counterterrorism has provided the Bush administration with an opportunity to pursue an egalitarian approach to bilateralism in the Asia–Pacific. The US approach must incorporate a genuine American sensitivity to the unique insurgency and terrorist threats facing each regional ally and a determination that a regionally integrated counterterrorism strategy takes into account the distinctly national derivatives of these threats.

Implementing true regional security cooperation through alliance also necessitates the US encouragement of regional allies to exercise intellectual leadership within the alliance framework, including leadership by ‘middle powers’ such as Australia and South Korea. Australia’s history of interacting with Indonesia, its long-standing commitment to WMD disarmament and its legacy of promoting open regionalism in the economic arena all qualify it to work with the US to shape policy agendas that could be reviewed and endorsed by other US regional allies. South Korea’s activism in generating regional dialogues in both the economic and security sectors, and its obvious interest in achieving conflict avoidance in Northeast Asia, nominate that country as a logical catalyst in the institutionalisation of the sub-region’s security politics. Both of these middle powers entertain cordial bilateral relationships with China and could work systematically in that policy sector to gain Beijing’s support for allied rather than US initiatives.

Alliance mutuality now is of that stage in Asia–Pacific order-building where it can begin to shape that region’s environment. The major precondition is that the US will have to acknowledge explicitly that hub and spokes is dead and that conventional bilateralism must be replaced by an agenda leading to convergent security via alliance mutuality. Reaching the preferred regional security ‘end-game’ will mean embracing several key principles. First, China and the US will need to work sufficiently in the security arena to avoid general war. Second, the US will need to allow the
cultivation of regional multilateral frameworks without insisting that it assume a dominant role. This can be acceptable to US policy planners as long as such frameworks are ‘inclusive’ oriented rather than ‘exclusive’ oriented toward US influence and power. In turn, we believe that the Chinese are going to have to come to terms with this and accept the US as a permanent player in the region. Third, transnational security threats—terrorism, pandemic diseases, natural disasters, drugs, and so on—will need to be confronted collectively, with a combination of Asian (including Chinese) and Western forces. Military operations to deal with such threats will take place outside the formal US alliance structure. Fourth, greater regional cooperation for peacekeeping and joint humanitarian operations will need to be reached. The 2006 QDR is already anticipating a more fluid global strategic environment where the US can launch longer-range military interventions/strikes quickly and decisively with meaningful allied support, such as from Japan, Australia, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. But countries without formal ally status such as Singapore and India would be partners as well, and US forces may not always lead such missions, but leave it to the formal and informal allies. Finally, more incidents of regional arms control negotiations involving China and the US will need to materialise. Illustrative of such processes would be capping the US theater missile defense program in return for limited Chinese missile capabilities in the East China Sea and ballistic missile forces with longer ranges as well.

CONCLUSION
We have argued here that, contrary to the Bush administration’s apparent policy posture, US bilateral alliances in the Pacific can no longer function only as agents of US power projection or balancing in the Asia-Pacific. They must instead undergo a historic transformation from threat-centric alliances to alliances that can encourage new forms of order-building in that region’s security environment. We have also argued that a major reason this transformation is beginning is because America’s Pacific allies are becoming more independent and discriminate security actors with each other and within the overall region. That does not mean that their bilateral alliances with the US are at a terminal stage. It does strongly suggest that such alliances must be conceptualised and used by US policymakers in ways markedly different than in traditional containment or deterrence modes.

This structural transition—from hub and spokes to convergent security via alliance mutuality—is not incompatible with American policy objectives
or even intermittent US policy behaviour, in the Asia–Pacific region. Post-Cold War Asia–Pacific security politics has featured the United States’ determination to exercise what it views as a form of benign hegemony for managing and controlling its bilateral alliances in that region. Throughout the Cold War, Washington elected to pursue this strategy as opposed to reducing its forward presence and acting as an ‘offshore balancer’ in a multipolar regional balance of power, or investing in strengthening regionally indigenous economic and security institutions. During the past decade, the Clinton administration sought to incorporate an uncharacteristically multilateral approach to seek Asia–Pacific security through community-building. The Bush administration initially reverted to the traditional hub and spokes strategy but, following 11 September, has shifted to a posture more attuned to integrating US global and regional security interests. By doing so, it has effectively buried alliance exclusivism as the basis for sustaining the San Francisco System.

Bilateralism will prevail as the dominant US-allied security mechanism in the Asia–Pacific region for some time to come. It is, however, shifting from an immediate post-Cold War balancing strategy to one which will ensure structural continuity in a regional security order shaped by both material and normative challenges. Its treaty alliances provide the US with a means to control the levels and intensity of what forward deployed American military power will remain in Asia to confront regional flashpoints at a time of increasing US resource scarcity. But American bilateral military strategy must apply maximum lethality to future regional confrontations in the quickest possible ways. The 2006 QDR reflects this policy evolution by calling for more flexible US conventional deterrence capabilities, hardening and expanding command and control components and both increasing the number of special forces available for Asia–Pacific operations and maintaining force superiority for both conventional and nuclear conflict environments. Such US force capabilities will be supplemented with a substantial American economic presence designed to advance liberal economic policies and the processes of democratisation in Asian states. The rapidly changing nature of interests and threats in the


region is working to transform the SFS into a potentially viable instrument for more effective regional order-building.

Backing Washington’s global war on terrorism is a necessary precondition for weaker Asian allies, such as the Philippines, to command the levels of American interest and support needed to fend off sub-state threats contesting the legitimacy of these states’ central governments, and for other allies to guarantee their defence against regional hegemony. The loyalty requirement for survival is imposed by an American president who has little tolerance for those who do not endorse his own nation’s interests and causes—a characteristic strongly in evidence during the latest Iraq war. America’s Asian allies fell into line with that American posture and will likely endorse whatever policy changes emanate from the Bush administration’s ongoing global posture review. However, the exclusivism that has traditionally underwritten bilateral alliance rationales will become a weaker force in today’s Asia–Pacific alliance politics. The increasing inter-relationships between regional flashpoints, and differing allied policies as to how such potential crises should be addressed, makes exclusivism less effective, if not infeasible. As the US becomes increasingly accustomed to projecting a more sophisticated alliance strategy that accommodates intensifying multilateral forces in the region, the need for bilateralism remains a major component of security organisation and behaviour in the region. Nevertheless, such bilateralism, through alliance mutuality, must evolve into a more interdependent, multilateral tool for regional stability. US regional allies must be granted—and must exercise—more responsible roles in shaping Washington’s security policies if the San Francisco System is to harvest bilateralism’s full potential to serve its members’ collective strategic interests.