Obama's legacy in US–ASEAN relations: Promises and perils

Prashanth Parameswaran

Introduction

Southeast Asia has traditionally occupied a marginal role in US foreign policy in general and US Asia policy in particular, and American commitment to the region has remained quite ambivalent since the end of the Cold War. But during his time in office, US President Barack Obama raised the level of US attention given to Southeast Asia and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to a level not seen since the end of the Vietnam War.¹ Seeing Southeast Asia and ASEAN as vital to preserving what it referred to as the rules-based international order, the Obama administration made the region and the regional grouping a vital part of its so-called “Rebalance” to the Asia Pacific and took measures to concretise this across countries and realms.

Yet as this chapter will show, by the end of his second term, Obama's legacy in US–ASEAN relations in fact remained quite mixed. On the one hand, the administration achieved some notable success in increasing and institutionalising a higher level of attention to Southeast Asia, committing Washington to Asia's multilateral diplomatic framework, and improving relations with Southeast Asia's people. But on the other hand, it faced challenges in confronting the reality of China's growing influence in Southeast Asia, crafting an economic approach for the region, and articulating a clear and comprehensive approach to dealing with democracy and human rights questions. The Trump administration added another layer of complexity to assessing Obama's legacy in this respect, because while it continued or built on some aspects, it also departed from, and in some cases undermined, others as well.

The legacy of US–Southeast Asia relations

Southeast Asia has traditionally occupied a marginal role in US foreign policy in general and US Asia policy in particular, unlike China or Japan, which both

loomed much larger and much earlier. Even though there was some level of US involvement in some Southeast Asian states previously, the region really first rose to prominence in the context of threats to the United States and to its European and Asian allies and partners during the Second World War and then the Cold War.² That prominence was followed by a pattern of waxing and waning of US commitment after the end of the Vietnam War and continued from the end of the Cold War and thereafter, which some characterise as various forms of neglect.³

As a result, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, a clear gap had emerged where Southeast Asia's importance as a region had grown significantly, but US policy had not become correspondingly focused on the region. Despite ongoing challenges ranging from human rights to underdevelopment, economic growth among the original ASEAN Five (of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand), Southeast Asia's centrality in addressing challenges from maritime security to China's rise, and ASEAN's transformation from an anti-communist bloc to a forum for major powers to engage made the region's importance clear. Yet US attention tended to be in reaction to particular crises rather than a focus on the region for its own sake, be it the Asian financial crisis of 1997 or the war on terrorism in the early 2000s. Though this pattern had long been evident, it also prevented the rise of a more strategic, region-wide, and balanced approach to Southeast Asia.

Despite the traditional interpretation of being consumed by distractions in the Middle East and sceptical about multilateralism, the George W. Bush years actually saw some movement in the direction of more robust engagement with Southeast Asia. Some of this was evident in the usual building block work that tends to make up the continuity between administrations, be it expanding the scope of security cooperation with partners or contributing to the development of multi-lateral institutions in the ASEAN-led diplomatic framework.⁴ But there were also initiatives that were to serve as precursors to some of the Obama administration's priorities, including the appointment in 2008 of the first resident US ambassador to ASEAN,⁵ and joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP, then known as the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership).⁶ Yet, at the same time, it was not until the Obama administration that we saw the true development of a clear and comprehensive approach to engaging Southeast Asia more specifically articulated.

Obama's approach to ASEAN and Southeast Asia

From the outset, the Obama administration made clear that the basis for its approach to engagement with Southeast Asia and ASEAN was that it saw a greater investment in the region as being a vital part of preserving what it had referred to as the rules-based international order. As a result, it is no surprise that his administration made the region a vital part of its Rebalance to the Asia Pacific and

undertook a series of initiatives to try to make that happen across the economic, security, and people-to-people realms of the relationship.

The Obama administration saw Southeast Asia and ASEAN as key to the preservation of the rules-based international order, which was emphasised as an enduring US national interest from the outset.⁷ From the administration's perspective, if Washington wanted to preserve the post-Second World War US-led international order that would promote peace and prosperity, engaging emerging regions and regional institutions would be critical to solving collective action problems.⁸ Southeast Asia and ASEAN served as a good example in this respect: the region, for all its limitations, and in contrast to other parts of the world, had emerged as peaceful and prosperous since ASEAN's founding in 1967 despite its tremendous diversity.⁹

The administration's thinking reflected the realities it faced in Asia as well. Within the Asia Pacific, Washington's attempts to preserve a rules-based international order – from advancing freedom of navigation to promoting economic openness and competitiveness to advancing the rule of law, good governance, and human rights and democracy – would largely play out in Southeast Asia.¹⁰ The region was the hub of multilateralism in the Asia Pacific, comprising a diverse array of states at various levels of political and economic development, and was at the centre of Chinese attempts to undermine aspects of the rules-based international order.¹¹ As Obama himself put it during his last year of office, 'engagement with Southeast Asia and ASEAN ... is central to the region's peace and prosperity, and to our shared goal of building a regional order where all nations play by the same rules'.¹²

Therefore, it is no surprise that Southeast Asia and ASEAN was a centrepiece of the Rebalance to the Asia Pacific. Even in early articulations of the Rebalance, administration officials admitted privately that arguably the most significant part of the administration's Rebalance was the greater share of attention devoted to Southeast Asia as a region and ASEAN as a multilateral grouping within US Asia policy, the so-called "Rebalance within the Rebalance". Officials also referred to ASEAN as a fulcrum of the region's emerging architecture, reflecting what Hillary Clinton during her time as secretary of state referred to as the grouping's 'indispensable' role on a host of political, economic and strategic issues.¹³

The administration's approach to Southeast Asia and ASEAN itself was centred on four aspects: strengthening security alliances and partnerships; investing in multilateral institutions; advancing economic engagement; and promoting democracy and human rights. Though these general objectives were of course not new to US Asia policy, there were distinguishing features in each of these that were reflective of the Obama administration's approach.

First, the Obama administration focused on strengthening alliances and partnerships. While this had long been a key part of advancing US policy, the Obama administration took a much more comprehensive view, focusing not only

on treaty allies such as Thailand and the Philippines, but inking a series of strategic and comprehensive partnerships with key Southeast Asian states such as Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia and opening up new partnerships with countries like Myanmar.¹⁴ The content of these partnerships was significant too in that they reflected the administration's comprehensive approach – security realms of these alliances and partnerships, for example, were focused not just on terrorism or maritime security, but more broadly on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, as well as climate change.

Second, the administration invested significantly in multilateral institutions in addition to bilateral partnerships. This was evident in a series of steps undertaken during its tenure, including ratifying the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation; becoming the first non-ASEAN country to appoint a resident ambassador to ASEAN in 2011; joining the East Asia Summit (EAS); institutionalising annual US–ASEAN summits, inking a strategic partnership with ASEAN; and even holding the first ever US–ASEAN summit on US soil at Sunnylands. Taken together, this investment in multilateralism was particularly notable for a US Asia bureaucracy that had long been largely dominated by North East Asian concerns. These were also steps that the Bush administration did not take during its time in office.

Third, the Obama administration sought to boost US economic engagement in the region. This occurred for example through US-led efforts such as the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) and ones in partnership with regional states like Singapore such as the Third Country Training Program, whereby the Obama administration demonstrated a commitment to building the capacity of lesser developed regional states.¹⁵ The administration also rolled out the region-wide US–ASEAN Connect Initiative which sought to better coordinate existing US government programmes in the region around business, energy, innovation and policy.¹⁶ And while not a solely Southeast Asia-based initiative, the TPP comprised four ASEAN countries – Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam. With several other Southeast Asian countries that had considered joining as well, the TPP was pitched by the administration as representative of the kind of rules that Southeast Asian states should aspire to.¹⁷

Fourth and lastly, the administration sought to advance democracy and human rights. Part of this was accomplished indirectly through attempts to address rule of law challenges in Southeast Asian states, through such efforts as the Open Government Partnership to promote good governance and transparency, and democracy programmes in individual Southeast Asian states such as the Philippines and Myanmar.¹⁸ An important element of this strategy was investment in the young people of Southeast Asia, which Obama himself saw as part of the growth and dynamism in Southeast Asia and a source of change in the future. The signature investment in this realm was in the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI), launched in 2013, to strengthen partnerships with emerging leaders in the region.¹⁹

Assessing Obama's approach

An evaluation of the Obama administration's approach suggests that the legacy is in fact quite a mixed one. On some counts, the administration's approach was a success. First and most clearly, the Obama administration raised, sustained and institutionalised a high level of attention to Southeast Asia after years of ambivalence.²⁰ Following decades of ebbs and flows in US attention to Southeast Asia, the Obama years saw a sustained effort to increase the focus on the region across countries and realms, led not only by bureaucracies or high-level officials but by Obama himself, who visited Southeast Asia eight times during his time in office – more than two times the number of any sitting US president – and held the first US-ASEAN Summit on US soil.

As it intensified the focus on Southeast Asia, and mindful of the episodic attention it had previously been afforded in Washington, the Obama administration worked assiduously to institutionalise the growing momentum with the region. In the administration's view this would help ensure lock-in that would be difficult to reverse by any subsequent administrations.²¹ In that sense, though often a lot of the media attention was placed on flashier initiatives like the Sunnylands Summit, it was measures such as the formulation of new strategic and comprehensive partnerships or the establishment of a new Office of Multilateral Affairs at the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, that were the more significant initiatives because they helped produce the lock-in effect that the administration sought.

Second, the Obama administration firmly committed the United States to the ASEAN multilateral framework and clearly articulated the bipartisan case for US investment in the regional grouping. While US ambivalence to multilateral institutions in Asia had long been evident, the George W. Bush years had seen a clear trend where Washington's lukewarm attitude stood in marked contrast to ASEAN's enhanced role in the regional order and the attention it received from other powers. As ASEAN's role in the regional security architecture had increased significantly with the emergence of forums such as the EAS in 2005 and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, major powers in the Asia Pacific such as China, Japan and India had moved to solidify their ties with the regional grouping even as the United States remained ambivalent about its own commitment for various reasons.²² By firmly committing the United States to the ASEAN multilateral framework, the Obama administration effectively resolved a long debate about the extent to which the region should commit to the multilateral framework.

As it went forward with that commitment, the Obama administration also clearly articulated why investing in ASEAN was directly related to US national interests. Previous administrations had advanced various reasons why Washington ought to be *indirectly* engaged in the ASEAN multilateral framework, whether to back an anti-communist bloc against the Cold War Soviet Union or support Asian prosperity in the early to mid-1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Yet the Obama

administration specifically tied ASEAN to the fate of the rules-based order and the US role in preserving and shaping that order in Asia. As Michael Fuchs, Obama's former deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, has put it, the administration's commitment to ASEAN was rooted not only in recognising the grouping's centrality, but its commitment to the norms of the liberal international order and ensuring that Washington would be at the table in discussions where the future shape of those norms would be debated in the region.²³

Third, the Obama years saw an improvement in perceptions of the United States among Southeast Asia's population. Though opinion polls tend to be quite fickle and cannot tell the whole story, and while the trend was less evident during Obama's second term, polls revealed a clear increase in positive views of the United States even in countries where levels of anti-Americanism had previously been quite high, such as Indonesia and Malaysia.²⁴ While some of this is owed to positive perceptions of Obama himself, the administration's policies as well as initiatives such as YSEALI no doubt also contributed to more benign perceptions of the United States. This was particularly notable relative to the initial years of the Bush administration, where issues such as US foreign policy in the Middle East and an overemphasis on the terrorism threat had led to initial negative perceptions in some regional states.

Administration officials, including Obama himself, repeatedly and publicly emphasised the importance of improving America's image among Southeast Asia's populations as a key part of its engagement with the region. Part of this rested in the oft-cited fact that this represented a long-term investment, since the younger generation would become the region's future leaders. But the additional reality that the Obama administration understood was that in order for Southeast Asian governments to have the right environment to expand ties with Washington, they needed the support of their populations. Some of these governments still recall periods where negative perceptions of US foreign policy had led to diminished popular support for the United States, restricting the ability for policy makers to publicly support Washington's initiatives.

But the Obama administration's approach also confronted several major challenges. The first and clearest was managing relations with a rising China, whose influence was increasing in Southeast Asia and becoming manifested in ways detrimental to US interests and those of some regional states. Despite being cognizant of this trend and its manifestations, the administration's desire to ease Beijing's insecurities and collaborate on issues, ranging from addressing global climate change to managing the Iran nuclear issue, repeatedly trumped the necessity to confront China on aspects of its assertive behaviour, leading to greater anxieties in the region as well as on the broader question of the reliability of the United States.²⁵

There are several cases that illustrate this point, but nowhere was this clearer than in the South China Sea. Though the South China Sea disputes themselves are long-standing and chiefly among China and four Southeast Asian claimants – the

Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei – the issue had nonetheless come to be viewed as a test of US and Chinese resolve; Beijing's assertive and at times unlawful moves, including seizing geographical features, harassing vessels, and constructing artificial islands directly threatened the rules-based order the Obama administration sought to defend.²⁶ Yet while the administration continued to rhetorically emphasise the importance of the South China Sea in this context and tried to ward off more aggressive forms of Chinese behaviour, it did not take the more forward-leaning measures that would have clearly deterred Beijing. 'The net result,' concludes one regional observer, 'is a sense of a shifting power balance in Southeast Asia and a feeling of a China on the march forward as the US has looked weak and was in disarray, whatever the objective economic and military facts of the region may be.'²⁷

Second, and turning to the economic realm, the Obama administration ultimately failed to engage the region in a manner which accommodated the diversity of Southeast Asian economies. The elephant in the room here is the fact that the TPP, repeatedly framed by Obama administration officials and observers as not just having economic benefits but able to catalyse a "race to the top" among Southeast Asian states, via the provision of common, high-level standards, was left unratified.²⁸ Though there were several reasons behind this, including legislative opposition and popular discontent, the administration shares the blame for not spending more of its political capital sooner to overcome the obstacles to see it through.

Beyond the TPP, other initiatives were articulated but not adequately resourced or sufficiently fleshed out before the administration's end in early 2017. Capacity-building efforts like the LMI continued, but faced immense resourcing difficulties even as new initiatives from China such as the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation developed later but gained steam more quickly.²⁹ Other initiatives were considered and had begun to be articulated in areas like infrastructure, innovation and entrepreneurship, but were not advanced by the end of Obama's second term. Even though officials had indicated that concerns behind some of these initiatives, like inadequate staffing and resources, may have been addressed had there been more continuity within administrations, the underdevelopment of initiatives during Obama's time in office means that even a generous grading of his legacy would register as an incomplete.³⁰

Third and finally, the administration failed to articulate a clear and comprehensive vision for democracy and human rights in the region even as it saw growing challenges on this front. Officials were correct when they argued that US policy had to depart from the lecturing of Southeast Asian states seen in the past, including during the Clinton and Bush years, and that such an approach may be less effective relative to privately conveying concerns to individual countries. But despite repeated requests and complaints by rights groups and critics, the administration did not present a coherent policy for balancing interests and values.³¹ Administration officials instead repeatedly cited the merits of treating

each country on a case-by-case basis and making distinctions accordingly, such as between democracy and good governance or private and public forms of concern.

The restrictions brought by the lack of a clear vision in this area were illustrated when democratic backsliding in the region began to take hold during the Obama administration's later years, particularly with the military coup in Thailand in 2014 and the election of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016. Though the administration dealt with the issues on a case-by-case basis and continued to advance other elements of its people-to-people engagement, like YSEALI, the lack of a comprehensive approach in this realm gave way to the perception that this was not a major priority relative to other US interests.

What Trump means for Obama's legacy in Southeast Asia

It is important to emphasise that, irrespective of who was to take office after Obama, questions surrounded the durability of his legacy in Southeast Asia even before he departed.³² Part of that rested on the uniqueness of Obama's personal commitment to Southeast Asia and ASEAN, including his experience of living in Indonesia. Indeed, with the exception of Hillary Clinton – the first secretary of state to visit all ten ASEAN countries – there was no guarantee that any of the other American presidential candidates would demonstrate the same regard for the region. On top of that, there was a sense that with the next US president having to face a divided country at home and a more tumultuous and fractured world, there was a risk that Washington may have much less patience for multilateralism and may engage selectively with individual ASEAN states rather than the region as a whole.

After two years in office by early 2019, the US administration of President Donald Trump had not clearly articulated a discernible approach towards Southeast Asia. This is not uncommon to see, even in more conventional administrations: for instance, it took the Obama administration more than two years to begin to publicly and actively roll out its Rebalance policy for the Asia Pacific.³³ Nonetheless, the general tendencies evident so far under Trump suggest a mix of continuity from elements of Obama's legacy, and change that may either tackle issues that went unaddressed or undermine progress already made.

The elements of continuity are most evident in the organising principle the Trump administration articulated for the region, as well as in the security and diplomatic realms of its engagement. Thus for example, though the Trump administration has been reluctant to employ the Obama administration's "Rebalance" term, which is fairly common for new administrations to do, administration officials have nonetheless referred to the rules-based order and similar notions with different concepts, most prominently the 'free and open Indo-Pacific'.³⁴ Such visions are rooted in essentially the same organising principle, dating back to the rules-based international order the United States helped build and lead after the

end of the Second World War with allies and partners to advance peace, prosperity and freedom and looking ahead to how Washington can work to address the current strains in that order.³⁵

In the realm of security, continuity can be seen in the vision mentioned by Defense Secretary James Mattis and others. The insistence that the United States, together with allies and partners, will focus not only on individual threats like terrorism and North Korea, but also the broader challenge that authoritarian states, chiefly China, pose to the rules-based international order such as in the South China Sea, sounds much like the 'principled security network' that Mattis' predecessor Ash Carter had indicated previously.³⁶ Further, the Trump administration to date has either continued or reinforced existing attempts over multiple administrations to solidify defence ties with Southeast Asian allies and partners like Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

Of course, there appear to be limits to that continuity in other related areas. There is a harder edge to the administration's line on China's role in the regional security environment at the outset relative to the Obama years. And while this may change further down the line, the early perception among Southeast Asian states has been of the Trump administration attempting to address a narrower list of security concerns, such as North Korea and counterterrorism rather than taking a broader and more comprehensive approach as the Obama administration did. On the more positive side of the ledger, the Trump administration's commitment to raise defence spending has been welcomed in Southeast Asian capitals as evidence that Washington is overcoming budgetary challenges that dogged the Obama era, even as concerns remain about how that military power will be deployed.

Some continuity is also evident on the diplomatic side. Though the new US administration has not been as embracing in its rhetoric about multilateralism compared to its predecessor, Trump did show that he is personally willing to attend Asian summitry by showing up at his first round in the Philippines, even though he did depart early from the EAS. While it is unclear how Trump's attendance record will play out for the remainder of his term, the openness to attending the meetings, which was announced well in advance of the trip itself and largely followed through on despite other priorities, was nonetheless clear. Beyond that episode itself, the characterisation of Trump's attendance as a 'test' for US commitment is itself testament to the importance of the Obama administration's institutionalising of presidential-level travel to Southeast Asia and the enduring power of these binding commitments.³⁷

The major discontinuities lie in the economic, rights, and people-to-people dimensions of US engagement with the region. On economics, though the Obama administration had its own issues with realising new economic opportunities for US policy towards the region, the Trump administration compounded Southeast Asian anxieties by taking a strong protectionist and transactional stance in his first two years in charge. Trump's decision to withdraw from the TPP was seen

by Southeast Asian member states as being not just a missed opportunity for US leadership on trade, but a reflection of trends that could take years to reverse.³⁸ Though the administration could reverse or at least moderate its course later on, the discontinuity was quite clear at the outset.

On the human rights front, the Trump administration itself has so far evinced little interest in the advancement of American ideals and instead appears focused more on advancing narrow US interests in a transactional way. The Obama administration was similarly focused more on interests rather than values, and other institutions like the State Department and Congress continue to exercise their role on issues such as the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar. Trump has been less averse to working with Asian strongmen than Obama, as evidenced by the White House visits granted to Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha during his first year in office. And as the scholar Thomas Carothers has noted, Trump's personal record on rights has also complicated things, from his mocking of the United States as a democratic exemplar, to engaging in the tactics of strongmen leaders such as personally attacking journalists.³⁹

Discontinuity is evident in the people-to-people realm as well. There have been basic elements of continuity, such as in the bureaucratic work of running important outreach initiatives that tends to continue across administrations, to Trump's commitment thus far to preserve some Obama-era initiatives like the YSEALI programme. But other developments suggest that change or even reversal is underway. On public opinion for instance, there is early evidence of Southeast Asian discontent with the image of the United States in the world, the extent of American commitment to the region, and with some of the Trump administration's "America First" policies.⁴⁰ This was matched by realities on the ground in some Southeast Asian countries, where policies ranging from the travel ban to the decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem sparked anti-American sentiment and protest.

Conclusions

As this chapter has shown, the Obama administration's legacy in Southeast Asia is a mixed one. The administration achieved some notable successes, including increasing and institutionalising a higher level of attention to Southeast Asia, committing Washington to Asia's multilateral diplomatic framework, and improving relations with Southeast Asia's people. But on the other hand, it also failed to manage some challenges that continue to bedevil the Trump administration, most notably confronting the reality of China's growing influence in Southeast Asia, crafting an economic approach for the subregion, and articulating a clear and comprehensive approach to dealing with democracy and human rights questions.

Though this mixed record is far from surprising, it nonetheless speaks to the more enduring difficulties that US policy makers have always faced in crafting a

policy towards the region. Indeed, perhaps the most sobering lesson of Obama's legacy in Southeast Asia and ASEAN is the fact that even with such a high level of presidential commitment and sustained attention by the administration, overcoming some of the key challenges that have long dogged US policy towards the region proved extremely difficult. Those which remain for Washington include fashioning an economic agenda for such a diverse array of states despite resource constraints, and maintaining a regional focus amidst wider threats and challenges in other parts of Asia and the wider world.

At a more granular level, Obama's record also speaks to the question of relative durability of policy. Though Obama's engagement with Southeast Asia's young people was the element of his legacy which attracted most headlines, popular perception is also among the least durable aspects of US policy relative to more underappreciated parts of his legacy such as the institutionalisation of meetings or binding Washington to Southeast Asia's multilateral diplomatic framework. Relatedly, Trump's time in office to early 2019 further underlined the fact that the durability of a president's legacy can be shaped to a significant degree by not just his own record, but that of his successor as well. While Obama's failure to finalise the TPP during his time in office was viewed as a failure as he left, Trump's withdrawal from the agreement and subsequent approach to economic policy has made Obama's record on this count seem much more favourable relatively speaking. And depending on how Trump's tougher approach to China plays out, it could either expose the folly of the overly cautious approach to China during the Obama years, or in fact reinforce the necessity of that more careful orientation towards Beijing.

Finally, it speaks to the importance of recalling the interactive nature of the relationship between Southeast Asia and the United States. Though the Obama administration crafted its own approach to Southeast Asia, as might be expected, the success or failure of that policy was contingent not just on what the United States did or how other major powers reacted, but also on how the region's elites and people responded and on the other regional developments simultaneously occurring. American presidents and US administrations are often remembered not so much for their early or instinctive approach, but for how they respond to the events they encounter during their watch. Obama's legacy in Southeast Asia and ASEAN will not be an exception to that, and nor will Trump's.

Notes

- 1 Though Southeast Asia and ASEAN are often employed interchangeably for ease of use, including here, it is important to note the distinction between the two terms. "Southeast Asia" refers to the subregion itself, while "ASEAN" refers to the regional grouping of Southeast Asian states founded in 1967.

- 2 P. Parameswaran, 'Understanding US Policy in Southeast Asia,' Remarks at Georgetown University, Washington, DC (22 March 2017).
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- 4 US Department of State, 'US Engagement in Southeast Asia' (25 September 2008), <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2008/09/110494.htm>, accessed 15 March 2019.
- 5 The Bush administration appointed Scot Marciel as the first US Ambassador to ASEAN, in 2008. The Obama administration is credited with appointing the first *resident* US ambassador to the organisation in Jakarta.
- 6 Office of the US Trade Representative, 'Trans Pacific Partners and United States Launch FTA Negotiations' (22 September 2008), <https://ustr.gov/trans-pacific-partners-and-united-states-launch-fta-negotiations>, accessed 13 March 2019.
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- 17 Author conversation with US official, Washington, DC (March 2015).
- 18 White House, 'Fact Sheet: The Open Government Partnership' (20 September 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/20/fact-sheet-open-government-partnership>, accessed 13 March 2019.

- 19 Several administration officials interviewed by the author noted that of all the Southeast Asia-related initiatives in the administration, YSEALI was the initiative that Obama was most personally invested in.
- 20 Mauzy and Job, 'US Policy in Southeast Asia'.
- 21 D. Kritenbrink, 'Remarks at US-ASEAN Business Council Gala Dinner', Washington, DC (October 2016).
- 22 For the roots of this ambivalence, see: V. Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016). For the Bush administration's approach, see: M. Green, *By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia-Pacific Since 1783* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).
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- 33 The official public rollout of the administration's Rebalance policy is often said to have begun with Hillary Clinton's *Foreign Policy* article. See H. Clinton, 'Americas

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- 34 Though new administrations are fond of changing these conceptions, the first time that a departure from the Rebalance was publicly signaled during the Trump administration came from Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Susan Thornton in March 2017. See: US Department of State, 'A Preview of Secretary Tillerson's Upcoming Travel to Asia' (13 March 2017), <https://fpc.state.gov/268444.htm>, accessed 14 March 2019. For an initial articulation of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept, see: White House, 'Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit' (10 November 2017), www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 35 P. Parameswaran, 'Trump's Indo-Pacific Strategy Challenge', *The Diplomat* (27 October 2017), <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/trumps-indo-pacific-strategy-challenge/>, accessed 13 March 2019.
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