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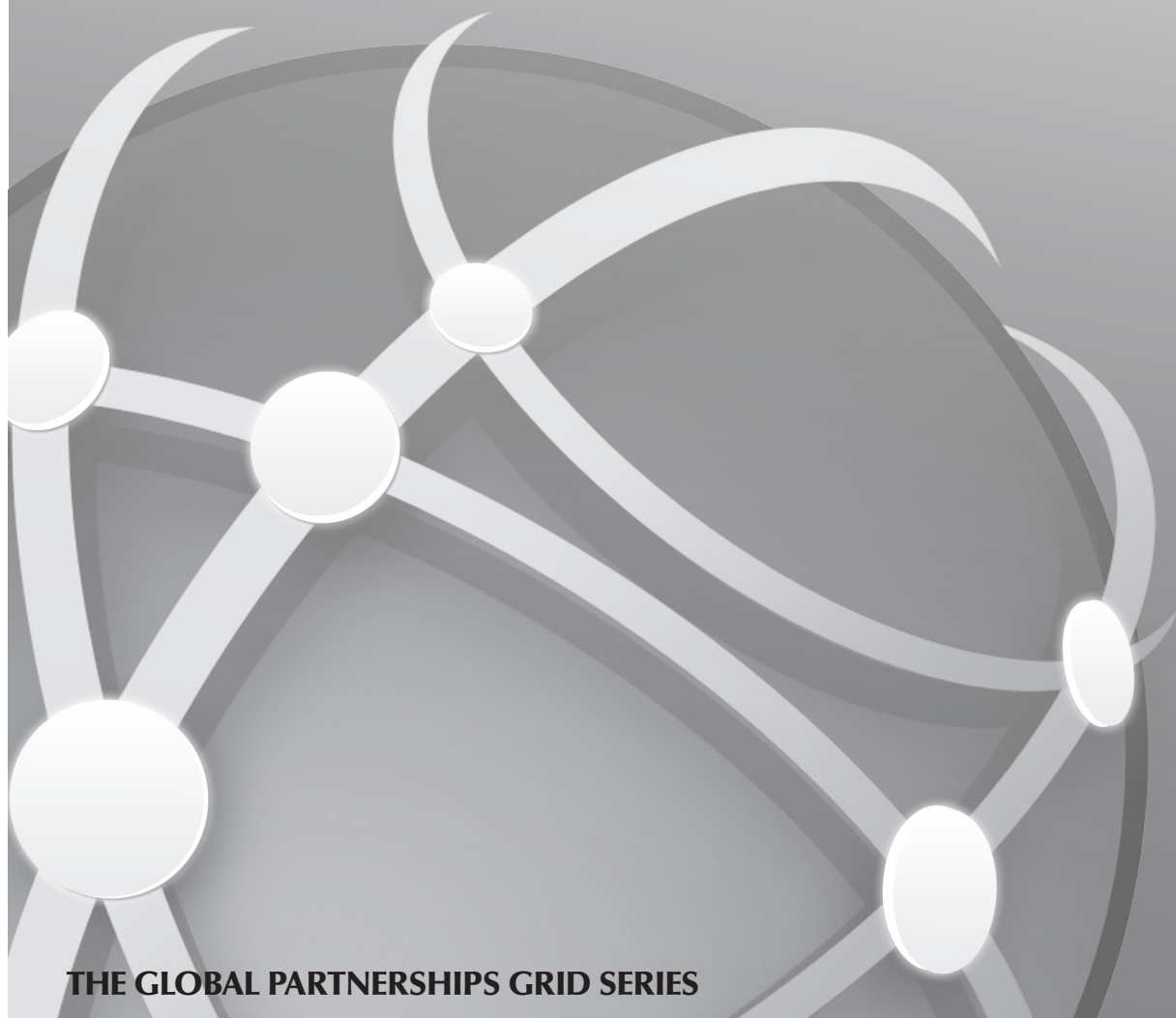
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The American Way of Partnership

DANIEL S. HAMILTON



THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS GRID SERIES

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The American Way of Partnership

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The Global Partnerships Grid

Partnerships are an important vector of engagement in a polycentric world. Across the globe, many governments have devised a number of ‘special relationships’ in the framing of their foreign policy, with neighbouring and distant countries, as well as with some multilateral organisations. Whereas the European Union (EU) has established 10 so-called strategic partnerships, India has more than 20 and China close to 50. The proliferation of partnerships over the last two decades exposes both the relevance of this trend and the great heterogeneity, and uneven value, of these relationships.

The European Strategic Partnerships Observatory (ESPO) was set up in 2012 to provide information, analysis and debate on the EU’s relations with a selected range of key global and regional partners.

With the Global Partnerships Grid series, ESPO aims to contribute to a better understanding of the practice of partnerships in current international politics. How do partnerships fit the foreign policy of major countries? What are the goals of these partnerships and what is their output? What are the main features of strategic partnerships?

With a view to addressing these questions, we asked senior scholars and analysts to explore the making of strategic partnerships in their respective countries, in what is in most cases the first analysis of this topic. They outline the objectives and functioning of these partnerships, based on official documents, interviews, and existing scholarly work.

ESPO is very grateful to the Brussels office of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) for its important support to this project. We would also like to thank the authors of this series for their valuable contribution.

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» **The United States (US) has forged formal bilateral ‘strategic partnerships’ and developed strategic dialogues with scores of partners around the globe.** Some are outgrowths of historical alliances, such as those with NATO members or non-NATO allies such as Israel, Egypt, Australia or the Philippines. Others include Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Brazil and Indonesia. The US has used ‘strategic partnerships’ to further Euro-Atlantic integration, such as with Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia and Ukraine; and to build a ‘regional architecture’ of supportive ties in East Asia and the Pacific. It has wielded the term ‘strategic dialogue’ to signal its intent to improve relations, as with Nigeria, Angola, South Africa and Vietnam, or to manage difficult ties, as with Russia and China. It has cobbled together a variety of partnership arrangements to deal more effectively with adversaries such as Iran and North Korea. Both ‘strategic partnerships’ and ‘strategic dialogues’ are part and parcel of a differentiated global network of overlapping bilateral and regional relationships designed to advance US values and interests and promote what the US believes would constitute a stable and legitimate international order.

This paper examines the purpose and content of US ‘strategic partnerships’ with other countries worldwide. It analyses the varying motivations driving such partnerships, evaluates their usefulness, and compares and classifies them in terms of substantive content and purpose. It offers a typology of US relationships, and explores the relative balance among different elements of ‘strategic partnership’, from political and military cooperation to economic coordination and ties with non-state actors.

The US and the evolution of ‘strategic partnerships’

During the Cold War, the US forged an extensive system of treaty-based alliances with countries in East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the Americas. These security pacts served as the connective sinews of a vast and sprawling web of relationships bound to the United States – an American-centered political order that John Ikenberry has called the ‘American system’.¹ The United States created regularised means that involved its European and Asian allies, to varying degrees, in decision-making; provided security protection; and offered access to American markets, technology, and supplies within an open world economy. In turn, its allies, to varying degrees, provided diplomatic, economic and logistical support as the US sought to contain the Soviet Union, confront communism, and lead the ‘Free World’.

Since the end of the Cold War US officials across different administrations have progressively, although not particularly systematically, sought to extend the American system, while adjusting its modalities to the new and different challenges of the evolving international order. Formal

¹ J.G. Ikenberry, *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

treaty-based alliances have been maintained, and some have been expanded. They have also been supplemented by a whole series of 'strategic partnerships', short of formal alliance, that nevertheless are intended to enable the US to engage with a host of new and rising powers in ways that can leverage US influence and offer others incentives to work with, rather than against, the United States.

During the Cold War, references were made to 'strategic partnerships', but the US built its relationships primarily within the framework of its treaty-based alliances. Beginning in the 1970s, Washington started to employ the term 'strategic dialogue' with both Moscow and Beijing as a mechanism to balance competition with cautious engagement across the Cold War divide.

As the Cold War ended, US officials began to use both 'partnership' and 'strategic dialogue' as part of a new diplomatic vocabulary. Together with allies, the George H.W. Bush Administration initiated a 'strategic dialogue' between NATO and the Warsaw Pact and created the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in December 1991, a consultation forum initially between NATO and nine central and east European countries. The Clinton Administration took this concept further, proposing the creation of the Partnership for Peace in 1993. Under Clinton's policies of 'enlargement and engagement', the US underscored the need for 'durable relationships with allies and other friendly nations'² as part of an overall strategy that sought to engage a whole new tier of countries – from those emerging from the collapse of the Soviet empire to post-apartheid South Africa, budding democracies in Latin America, and rising countries in East Asia and the Pacific – in new types of cooperative arrangements, such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, the US-EU New Transatlantic Agenda, the Summit of the Americas, and also via the enlargement of NATO, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and other groupings.

While the Clinton Administration did not purposefully employ the term 'strategic partnerships', President Clinton did on occasion use the phrase 'new partnerships' to explain America's turn from Cold War structures. His administration announced that it was 'embarking on a period of construction to build new frameworks, partnerships and institutions – and adapt existing ones – that strengthen America's security and prosperity'.³ The 'new partnerships' framework was premised on the assumption of continued US global leadership; a post-Cold War definition of threats that ranged beyond narrow military/security issues to encompass economic, environmental and societal challenges; and a strong sense that democracy, human rights and the rule of law were ascendant values that should be promoted and, wherever possible, anchored by cooperative and supportive structures and initiatives.⁴ New partnerships were viewed as a means not only to sustain and enhance US global leadership, but also to harness the combined assets of a wider community of nations to tackle a range of issues that no country, not even a superpower, could tackle effectively alone.

While the George W. Bush Administration was far more inclined to the unilateral use of American power, after 11 September it realised that it would need partners in what it called the Global War on Terror. 'Strategic Partnership Agreements' were signed with the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to enable the establishment of US bases and transit corridors to aid US forces in Afghanistan. The demands of large-scale, multi-year operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq necessitated the creation of a whole set of partnerships. The Bush Administration used 'strategic partnerships' and 'strategic dialogues' as important elements of US statecraft, particularly

² White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 1994).

³ White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 1997).

⁴ J.A. Edwards and J.M. Valenzano III, 'Bill Clinton's "new partnership" anecdote. Toward a post-Cold War foreign policy rhetoric', *Journal of Language and Politics*, 6:3, 303–25, 2007.

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in its campaign against terrorism and as a tool of great power management.⁵ One rationale for such partnerships was to build the capacity of other states to 'inoculate' them against terrorist infiltration, which required the US to work just as closely with interior ministers of partner countries as with ministers of defence and foreign affairs.⁶

While the administration was heavily focused on counter-terrorism, it also used the vocabulary of 'strategic partnerships' to continue the Clinton Administration's efforts to sustain and enhance the 'American system' and the liberal international order, for instance via continued NATO enlargement, further elaboration of the Partnership for Peace, and continued efforts within the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Summit of the Americas process. It also engineered a particularly dramatic turnaround in relations with India, by compromising with New Delhi on India's nuclear status and anchoring its new approach within a broad bilateral 'strategic partnership'.

The Obama Administration has been even more explicit and more active in using the vocabulary of 'strategic partnerships' to advance its vision of what former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called a 'multi-partner world'.⁷ While the administration has maintained the counter-terrorism-driven rationale for partnership offered by its predecessor, it has embedded this element in a far wider approach to partnership in which the need for collective action in the service of common interests is taken as a given. In fact, the worldview expressed in the administration's core documents – the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG); the 2014 and 2010 Quadrennial Defense Reviews (QDR); the 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR); and the 2010 National Security Strategy – is premised on the belief that shared norms help shape outcomes in the international system, and if the United States can foster shared norms through more effective partnerships, those norms in turn can shape choices by other international actors in ways conducive to American values and interests.⁸

The 2010 QDR points to an international system 'in which the United States will remain the most powerful actor but must increasingly cooperate with key allies and partners if it is to sustain stability and peace [...] The ability of the United States to build the security and governance capacity of key partners and allies will be central to meeting 21st century challenges [...] and [...] can help reduce the need for large and enduring deployments of US forces in conflict zones'.

This approach not only reflects the view that many transnational challenges are not susceptible to unilateral action; it is also a reaction to the costly legacy of two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the protracted impact of the Great Recession on the US economy. In an age of austerity, the administration views partnership mechanisms as a potentially more effective and efficient means to leverage constrained resources.⁹

In other words, strategic partnerships promise to give the US more bang for the buck. A related premise – tested thus far with mixed results – is that key partners will also be prepared to shoulder greater burdens as defined largely by Washington.

⁵ C.L. Powell, 'A Strategy of Partnerships', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2004.

⁶ US Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review*, Washington, DC, 2006; and C. Dale, 'In Brief: Clarifying the Concept of "Partnership" in National Security', Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 4 May 2012.

⁷ H.R. Clinton, 'Leading Through Civilian Power', *Foreign Affairs*, 89:6, 2010.

⁸ Dale 2012, op. cit.

⁹ M. Flournoy and J. Davidson, 'Obama's New Global Posture', *Foreign Affairs*, 91:4, 2012; US Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review*, Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014; US Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2012; and H.R. Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century', Remarks delivered at the East-West Center, Honolulu, HI, 10 November 2011.

Other trends have prompted Washington to expand its array of partnership mechanisms. One trend, noted among others by Joseph Nye,¹⁰ is the transition of power underway among states. Other countries are growing in influence and power relative to the United States. While the US remains predominant and able to employ a broad spectrum of power resources as no other, there is no question that a host of emerging states is asserting new influence. In response, the US has sought to sustain and enhance existing alliances and strategic partnerships with Europe and Japan; forge new ones with the rising democracies of Brazil and India; complement progress in strategic arms control with efforts to establish a broader-based relationship with Russia; and upgrade and broaden its strategic dialogue with China.

These efforts have been buttressed by a complementary effort to use strategic partnerships, alliances and related instruments with a whole tier of secondary powers to build regional architectures of cooperation, to leverage US presence and influence in all major areas of the world.

For example, throughout East Asia and the Pacific the United States is actively engaged in invigorating traditional alliances, developing new approaches to military presence and posture, and working to forge a new set of 'strategic partnerships' and 'strategic dialogues' with Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Pacific Island countries. Washington has supplemented the political and security elements of its regional architecture with an overlapping network of economic partnerships, including bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) with Australia, the Republic of Korea, and Singapore; and membership in APEC and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP),¹¹ a pathfinder arrangement for the proposed Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP), an APEC initiative. The goal is to forge a new, multi-layered 'regional architecture' intended to anchor the US presence in the region, offer mechanisms of reassurance and voice to allies and partners, as well as provide soft balancing mechanisms with regard to China, even as Washington engages in its most comprehensive strategic dialogue mechanism with Beijing.

A second trend, as Nye notes, is the diffusion of power away from all states towards non-state actors. The Obama Administration has been energetic in its efforts to deal with this phenomenon in part by turning to 'strategic partnership' mechanisms that go beyond traditional government-to-government engagement to reach foreign citizens directly. 'Strategic dialogues' involving US and foreign civil society actors are increasingly an element in Washington's formal strategic partnerships. Secretary Clinton made good on that approach in her travels by spending as much time meeting with students, civil society activists and regular citizens as she did meeting with government ministers. She initiated a 'civil society strategic dialogue' engaging a wide variety of public-private working groups from over 20 countries on issues ranging from women's rights, corruption and religious freedom to democracy and human rights, declaring that such a dialogue 'is just as important as anything we do with governments'.¹² She appointed the first US Special Representative for Global Partnerships to focus on building broad public-private partnerships in the US and around the world, and made it a priority to use new social network technologies to engage citizens with regularity and depth. Under Secretary of State John Kerry, the United States has initiated a 'comprehensive partnership' with Malaysia, a strategic partnership with Vietnam, and strategic dialogues with countries such as Tunisia and Liberia.

¹⁰ J.S. Nye, Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

¹¹ As of this writing, the TPP includes Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam. The Republic of Korea has signaled interest; the US and its TPP partners have indicated that all APEC members are eligible to join.

¹² Clinton 2010, op. cit.; M. Hirsch, 'The Clinton Legacy', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June.2013; S. Kaufman, 'Clinton Opens "Strategic Dialogue" with Civil Society Groups', 16 February 2011, available at: <http://ipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/article/2011/02/20110216144149nehpets0.3929254.html#ixzz1vdePSqjN>; and W.J. Burns, 'The Practice of Partnership: The 2009 Cyril Foster Lecture Speech', Oxford University, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2009a, available at: <http://www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2009a/133268.htm>

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Finally, the administration has sought to employ ‘strategic partnership’ mechanisms to cope with what former State Department Planning Director Anne-Marie Slaughter¹³ has termed the ‘disaggregated state’, meaning that governments increasingly engage the world not only through traditional state-to-state diplomacy administered by foreign ministries, but also via a host of other government agencies, each of which tends to pursue its own agenda, forge its own networks with foreign partners, and is reluctant to submit to the authority of the State Department.¹⁴ When it comes to specific elements of a ‘strategic partnership agenda’ with another country or set of countries, the administration has sought to move beyond such agency ‘stovepipes’ and to be more systematic about the respective roles and responsibilities – and thus disposition of resources and authority – of particular agencies and departments in the US government. The premise is that such a ‘whole-of-government’ approach can prevent confusion, mitigate inter-agency friction, discipline bureaucracies, and enable agencies to align or even integrate their efforts more effectively, leveraging both hard and soft power and facilitating linkages and trade-offs that would be unavailable if single agencies were left to pursue their own agendas. The US strategic dialogue with Pakistan, for instance, involves 10 working groups bringing together cabinet secretaries and experts from a range of agencies in both governments. The US dialogue with India engages 22 different agencies and the one with China 30 agencies.

The 2010 National Security Strategy made whole-of-government approaches a central part of US strategy for partnerships, declaring that ‘we must update, balance, and integrate all the tools of American power’. Former US National Security Advisor James L. Jones, an important architect of this effort, argues that such an approach plays to US strengths: ‘Despite the so-called rise of peer competitors only the United States has the capability to accomplish this new type of global engagement and this will be true for the foreseeable future [...] The integration of our capabilities [...] will keep our relevance unchallenged for many years to come’.¹⁵

The American way of partnership: a typology

The United States takes an eclectic approach to partnerships. ‘Partnership takes many different forms, all of which bring their own benefits’, notes US Deputy Secretary of State William Burns. ‘There is no one-size-fits-all approach to partnership’.¹⁶

Relations that the US has designated as ‘strategic partnerships’ must be understood within the broader context of the post-Cold War ‘American system’, which consists of a pantheon of relationships that include treaty-based multilateral and bilateral alliances, ‘major non-NATO allies’, ‘comprehensive partnerships’, bi-national ‘commissions’, ‘strategic dialogues’ and ‘regional architectures’. These categories are not mutually exclusive and often overlap. The US has forged ‘strategic partnerships’ with both treaty and non-treaty allies. It holds ‘strategic dialogues’ with ‘strategic partners’ as well as with countries not defined as such.

¹³ A.M. Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Individual US government agencies often create their own functional ‘strategic partnerships’. One example is the 2009 ‘strategic partnership agreement’ between USAID and the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED) to increase regional capacity, share best practices and develop joint approaches to critical water issues in the Middle East and North Africa. A relatively little-noticed but high impact effort is the 63 partnerships the US National Guard has established with 69 different countries. Individual US states even sign ‘strategic partnerships’ with other countries. The state of Maryland, for instance, has a ‘strategic partnership’ with Montenegro.

¹⁵ J.L. Jones, ‘Message to the Next Administration -- An Unasked For Response’, 6 September 2012, available at: <http://www.acus.org/news/general-james-l-jones-delivers-speech-national-security-priorities-next-president>

¹⁶ W.J. Burns, ‘Remarks at DEPLU Press Conference’, US Department of State, Borobudur Hotel, Jakarta, 11 December 2009b, available at: http://jakarta.usembassy.gov/pr_11192011_11.html

During the post-Cold War period the United States has sought to employ the full range of such flexible partnership instruments to fashion a network of global and regional relationships that can enable optimal use of the full spectrum of US resources – ranging from military and economic power to such soft power resources as the openness and dynamism of US civil society – to advance US values and interests.

Taken together, these differentiated relationships are intended to bind other major democratic countries to the United States; open new arenas for engagement with rising powers; and enhance US ability to deal with adversaries. As Ikenberry notes, they serve to both extend American influence and render it more durable while providing incentives for other countries to voice concerns and thus engage rather than work against American power. Some represent US efforts to shape preferences and set agendas. Others embody a form of soft balancing against other powers as well as a means to forestall efforts by others to balance against the United States.¹⁷

Treaty allies

Treaty-based alliances remain the foundation for US strategic engagement in a number of regions. The US has treaty-based alliances with a number of countries around the world. The NATO alliance binding the US with Canada and 26 European countries is a premier example. But the US also has long-standing treaty-based alliances with a range of other countries, including Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, and Australia.

Many US alliances were forged during the Cold War and thus offer easy fodder for occasional critics, most of who tend to make the rather superficial argument that alliances are formed exclusively as a response to a common external threat, and so are unlikely to remain viable once such threat has ended. Yet such criticisms underestimate the degree to which alliances may fulfil other goals.

NATO, for instance, was not only created to face the perceived threat posed by the Soviet Union; it organised Western European countries into a common security community – a revolutionary development, given Europe's history. US security reassurances to its European allies helped these countries overcome insecurity – and potential strategic rivalry – among themselves, reduced their need to build their security against their neighbours and provided them with an opportunity to pool their resources and draw their militaries together in new ways. NATO offered an umbrella of reassurance in which Western Europeans could build what has become the European Union.¹⁸ Since the Cold War, NATO has provided a framework in which new democracies emerging from the Soviet fold could find the security they required to develop their own societies and integrate more fully into the European mainstream. It has also dealt with a range of unanticipated crises and threats, including in the Balkans, in Afghanistan, and in Libya.

In the Pacific, China's rising assertiveness, unresolved territorial issues, and a host of unsettled relationships and regional challenges have drawn many treaty allies closer to the US in recent years. For many allies in many parts of the world, the role of the US as offshore balancer offers a reassuring – yet comfortably distant – presence. In short, US alliances continue to play an important role in advancing common efforts, offering reassurance, and hedging against uncertainty.

¹⁷ J.S. Nye, Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); J.S Nye, Jr., 'The Future of American Power', *Foreign Affairs*, 89:6, 2010; and S. Kay, 'What is a Strategic Partnership?', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 47:3, 15-24, 2000).

¹⁸ D.S. Hamilton et. al., *Alliance Reborn: An Atlantic Compact for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: The Washington NATO Project, 2009); G.H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

Major non-NATO allies

Some categories of relationships are determined as much by US domestic political considerations as by particular assessments of other countries. For instance, alliances based on treaties must pass muster with a two-thirds majority in the US Senate, a high threshold that the US executive branch is often reluctant to seek. For some in the US Senate, treaty-based alliances may be seen as entangling the US in ways that limit US sovereignty and commit the US in ways that could turn out to be problematic. Despite this hurdle, administrations led by each major party have shown that in the post-Cold War period they are willing and able to secure Senate ratification of treaty-based alliances with new countries, as in the case of successive waves of NATO enlargement, and are thus prepared to extend US commitments to the security of additional countries via the mutual defence clause of the North Atlantic Treaty. But the executive branch often seeks to avoid this avenue by advancing other means of partnership and alliance.

One alternative approach is to designate a country as a 'Major Non-NATO Ally' (MNNA). MNNA status does not include a mutual defence pact with the US, but it does confer a variety of military and financial advantages that otherwise are not available to non-NATO allies. MNNA status was first created in 1989 via the Nunn Amendment, which stipulates that cooperative research and development agreements may be enacted with non-NATO allies by the Secretary of Defence with the concurrence of the Secretary of State. Initial MNNAs were Australia, Egypt,¹⁹ Israel, Japan and the Republic of Korea. In 1996, the law was again amended to provide MNNAs many of the same exemptions from the Arms Control Export Act that are enjoyed by NATO members. The Clinton Administration designated Argentina as a MNNA in 1998. The George W. Bush Administration subsequently accorded MNNA status to Bahrain (2001), the Philippines (2003), Thailand (2003), Kuwait (2004), Morocco (2004) and Pakistan (2004).²⁰

Major non-NATO allies may also be 'strategic partners' of the US; the terms are not mutually exclusive. Such non-NATO allies as Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco and Australia are also considered 'strategic partners' and engage with Washington in 'strategic dialogues' and institutionalised working groups covering issues from counter-terrorism and energy, economic and financial affairs to education, exchange and human development. In 2012 President Obama designated Afghanistan as a major non-NATO ally as part of the US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement.

Strategic partnerships

Successive US administrations have recognised that alliances rooted in military defence are insufficient to cope with a range of broad challenges facing the US and many other countries. 'Armed forces will remain a central pillar of U.S. national security portfolio', notes Jones, 'but they must be part of a more sophisticated tool kit'.²¹ For these reasons the US has initiated a number of 'strategic partnership dialogues' with long-standing allies, such as Turkey, the Philippines and New Zealand, to defuse bilateral tensions and address a range of broader economic, environmental and societal

¹⁹ Egypt has been the second-largest non-NATO recipient of US military aid after Israel and ranks among the leading recipients of US economic assistance. Following the Egyptian military's coup against President Morsi in summer 2013, Washington curtailed significant elements of its military assistance, yet did not abrogate Egypt's MNNA status. In April 2014, Secretary of State John Kerry certified the continuance of the US strategic partnership with Egypt.

²⁰ In 2012, the Obama Administration designated the entire Gulf Cooperation Council as an international entity eligible to buy US defense articles and services, even though it did not use the MNNA term.

²¹ Jones 2012, op. cit.

challenges. Washington is also aware that some countries with which the US might be seeking some type of rapprochement may be wary of any suggestion of new 'alliances' or an inordinate focus on the military dimension of bilateral relations. As a result, the US has actively sought to supplement core alliances with a whole tier of 'strategic partnerships' and 'strategic dialogues'.

Formal strategic partnerships are usually aimed at advancing various goals simultaneously, ranging from immediate, concrete results to longer-term, less tangible outcomes such as enabling partners to do specific things (domestically, bilaterally, and together vis-à-vis third issues); giving the United States better situational understanding; ensuring US access; shaping partners' perceptions and decision-making; and engaging on broader regional and global issues. They may include specific goals to be achieved by both parties, but more often than not they are framed around a set of thematic areas in which both parties commit to exchange views, either with an eye to identifying specific areas in which each, or both together, can advance common interests or values; or to enable cross-cutting linkages and trade-offs to be made among various goals and issues. A strategic partnership is 'more than just a grandiose phrase, and it is not merely an abstraction', former US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott noted in Bucharest in 1998 when signing the US-Romanian Strategic Partnership. 'Rather, the strategic partnership refers to a systematic pattern of joint effort on behalf of shared goals'.²²

US interactions with neighbouring Mexico and with its Canadian and European allies are so dense and varied that they transcend formalistic designations such as 'strategic partnership', although officials routinely describe US relations with these countries as 'strategic partnerships'.

In this regard perhaps the most unique US strategic partnership is not with another country but with the European Union. The US-EU partnership is among the most complex and multi-layered economic, diplomatic, societal and security relationship that either partner has, especially if it is seen to encompass the relationships the US maintains with the EU's 28 member states as well as its Brussels-based institutions. In terms of values and interests, economic interactions and human bonds, the EU and the US are closer to one another than either is to any other major international actor. A vast range of operational dialogues, institutionalised exchanges and stakeholder networks reach deeply into each other's societies. Yet while US officials increasingly work directly with EU institutions, their experience has been that the Treaty of Lisbon and other EU innovations have done little to reduce the EU's institutional complexity or render the EU a united or coherent actor on many issues within or beyond Europe. They are acutely aware that despite continual institutional rejiggering in Brussels, at the end of the day all policy-making in the EU still depends on the consent of member states, which remain sovereign, and that the US continues to need strong bilateral relationships with individual EU member states. As a result, US officials advance their agenda directly in Brussels as well as in national capitals. Similarly, individual EU member states often try to use their 'strategic' or 'privileged' bilateral relations with the US to get Washington to influence inner-EU debates.

The overall consequence is that while the US-EU relationship is arguably more 'strategic' than many other so-called 'strategic partnerships', it has acquired a reputation as a technocratic exercise marked by an overabundance of process disproportionate to actual output, producing laundry lists of deliverables that fail to fire political or popular imagination. Despite efforts to generate collective action and strategic purpose from stovepiped governmental structures, the relationship too often degenerates into a grab bag of issues dealt with in rather ad hoc fashion by a range of disparate

²² S. Talbott, 'The United States and Romania: A Strategic Partnership', US Department of State, Address at Bucharest University, Romania, 19 March 1998.

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agencies, with little sense of urgency or overall direction. In fact, as Secretary Clinton has noted to her European colleagues, 'the system is designed so we can't have a strategic dialogue'.²³ Priorities are often mismatched, with the US looking for efficiency and concrete outcomes, and the EU seeking legitimacy and symbolic US validation of the ongoing process of European integration.

The US and the EU have sought to address these deficits in part by launching negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which is intended to include free trade in goods across the North Atlantic, but to go beyond traditional agreements to encompass services, investment, alignment of regulatory differences, and to create a 'living agreement' by which the two partners can work more effectively in the future. The State Department describes the TTIP as 'building on our economic and strategic partnership'.²⁴

The US has also forged formal 'strategic partnerships' with non-allied countries. Prominent examples include India, Ukraine, Brazil and Indonesia. No uniform criteria are applied when gauging whether to engage a country as a 'strategic partner'. A whole host of calculations comes into play; decisions are based on the particular nature of the bilateral relationship. Often the exact term to describe such a partnership is tailored to reflect a particular partner's own preferences or to highlight specific aspects of the bilateral relationship. For instance, the US and Indonesia have a Comprehensive Partnership, the US and Nigeria have a Bi-national Commission, and the US and Brazil have a Global Partnership Dialogue. Yet in each of these cases, US officials use the terms 'strategic partners' or 'strategic partnership' to characterise the bilateral relationship.

Like MNNA designation, formal 'strategic partnership' agreements do not require Senate ratification. The 2012 US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement, for instance, is a legally-binding executive agreement, intended to define the nature of the bilateral relationship after the drawdown of US forces. But it does not create a treaty-based alliance. The Afghans reportedly were looking for a full-fledged mutual defence treaty that would have obligated the US to treat an attack on Afghanistan as an attack on itself. Instead, the Strategic Partnership Agreement designates Afghanistan as a major non-NATO ally and communicates a relatively strong US commitment to Afghan security, including to seek annual funding from Congress to support the Afghan National Security Forces as well as social and economic assistance. In return, Afghanistan commits to provide US personnel use of Afghan facilities through 2014 and beyond, and to negotiate a Bilateral Security Agreement to supersede the current Status of Forces Agreement.

US intention to inaugurate a 'strategic partnership' can signal Washington's interest in elevating the status of a particular relationship. For some countries, it offers a prominent alternative to a relationship rooted in a treaty-based alliance, to which either side may not want to commit or do not believe they can achieve at a particular time. Two prominent examples of 'strategic partnerships' launched as a signal of US interest in an upgraded relationship other than a treaty-based alliance status are those with Brazil and India.

While the US engages with Latin American states via such mechanisms as the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the Summit of the Americas process, and has designated Argentina as a major non-NATO ally, the Obama Administration has focused its 'strategic partnership' efforts on Brazil. Brazil and the US share many interests, but bilateral ties have often been strained. The two

²³ D.S. Hamilton (ed.), *Shoulder to Shoulder -- Forging a U.S.-EU Strategic Partnership* (Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2010).

²⁴ US Department of State, 'The United States and the European Union: Building on Our Economic and Strategic Partnership', Washington, DC, 24 June 2013.

countries elevated their Global Partnership Dialogue to presidential level during President Obama's visit to Brazil in March 2011, and a series of cabinet-level dialogues were created or reinvigorated, including the Economic and Financial Dialogue; the Strategic Energy Dialogue; and the Defence Cooperation Dialogue. These formal inter-governmental dialogues involve multiple agencies on each side, reporting to both presidents. Some successes have emerged, including a variety of new bilateral agreements; an ambitious Defence Cooperation Agreement; trilateral counter-narcotics efforts in Bolivia; bilateral cooperation on development and health issues in Central America, the Caribbean and Lusophone Africa; exchange of development personnel; and settlement of an eight-year trade dispute over US subsidies to cotton growers. Yet the two sides have been unable to coordinate on other issues, including testy exchanges over how to contain Iran's nuclear programme. Revelations of US National Security Agency surveillance activities in Brazil prompted Brazilian President Rousseff to cancel her planned 2013 visit to Washington, making additional progress difficult. A team of seasoned observers of the relationship brought together by the Council on Foreign Relations concluded that despite the new framework, 'for a variety of reasons, including competing priorities and domestic politics in each country, neither government has been able to weave the disparate threads of their joint ventures into the fabric of a cohesive strategic project'.²⁵

The United States has also invested in a long-term strategic partnership with India, in the words of the 2012 DSG, 'to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region'. Former Defence Secretary Leon Panetta termed India the 'linchpin' of Washington's strategic pivot toward Asia. Both parties conduct a broad-based Strategic Dialogue covering a wide range of bilateral, regional and global issues – from maritime security and diabetes research to capacity building and governance training in third countries – that US officials have described as 'our primary vehicle to drive forward this partnership'.²⁶ They have increased counter-terrorism cooperation, intelligence sharing, law enforcement exchanges, defence cooperation, scientific, space, and technology collaboration, and cooperation on clean energy, non-proliferation and export controls. More than 100,000 Indian students study in the US, and India is by a wide margin the world's largest recipient of H-1B²⁷ and L-1²⁸ visas. India conducts more joint military exercises with the US than with any other country. President Obama has declared his support for a permanent Indian seat at the UN Security Council. The two countries still have considerable ground to cover to form a more substantive partnership, however. India remains concerned with what it perceives to be lackluster and inconsistent US support on terrorism, Kashmir, and a bundle of issues related to Pakistan. It is ambivalent about playing a leading role in Washington's 'rebalancing' act toward Asia. The US continues to press for India's accession to global non-proliferation regimes, is disappointed in the lack of progress in civil nuclear cooperation and closer defence cooperation, and with India's continuing engagement with Iran.

The US has also sought to engage Pakistan in a strategic partnership, but the relationship continues to be quite difficult. President George W. Bush sought to enlist Pakistani help with regard to Afghanistan, designating Pakistan a MNNA in 2004. Pakistan receives more than \$2 billion in US aid a year. The Obama Administration upgraded the bilateral Strategic Dialogue, and working groups engage on issues ranging from counter-terrorism and regional security to agriculture, economic development, energy and water. Yet these efforts are overshadowed by persistent irritations in bilateral relations related both to Afghanistan and to India. While both countries have a shared interest in fighting al-

²⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, 'Global Brazil and U.S.-Brazil Relations', Independent Task Force Report No. 66, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2011.

²⁶ G. Pyatt, 'U.S.-India Strategic Partnership: A Way Forward', US Department of State, Remarks to the U.S.-India Business Council, Menlo Park, CA, 27 April 2012.

²⁷ The H-1B is a non-immigrant visa in the United States, which allows US employers to temporarily employ foreign workers in specialty occupations.

²⁸ An L-1 visa is a working, non-immigrant visa, and is valid for a relatively short amount of time. With extensions, the maximum stay is seven years.

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Qaeda and Pakistan has lost thousands of people in its fight against armed Islamist groups within its borders, Islamabad's powerful intelligence service is less interested in seeing a weakened Taliban, a major American goal.

For countries seeking closer bonds with the US, a strategic partnership can also offer some reassurances about their security. The strategic partnership agreements with Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Georgia and others offer security assurances against 'external threats' or similar formulations. The US and Romania agreed on a 'strategic partnership' in the late 1990s as a means of intensifying the bilateral relationship and signalling continued US engagement in working with Romania to facilitate its eventual entry into NATO. Romania did eventually join NATO, but the strategic partnership continues even though Romania is now a treaty-based ally.²⁹

In 1996 the US and Ukraine launched a strategic partnership based on what Sean Kay³⁰ has called a diplomatic bargain in which Kyiv gave up its nuclear weapons capability in return for economic assistance and reassurance from Washington about its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The partnership was energised in the wake of the Orange Revolution; in December 2008 both sides signed a US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership outlining enhanced cooperation in the areas of defence, security, economics and trade, energy security, democracy, and cultural exchanges, and annual meetings of a bilateral Strategic Partnership Commission. While the partnership made some marginal progress, it failed to stem a deterioration in bilateral ties following Victor Yanukovich's accession to power, amidst considerable US concern about human rights and the state of democracy in Ukraine. After Yanukovich fled Ukraine and a new government took office in Kyiv, the US announced that it would resume the work of the Commission.

In cases such as Ukraine the strategic partnership framework offers the US a means to press its 'partner' to make progress on the commitments agreed. For instance, while the George W. Bush Administration signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement with Uzbekistan, largely because Washington was interested in facilitating the logistical arrangements related to US engagement in Afghanistan, the agreement includes Uzbek commitments on human rights and other areas of civil society. Relations cooled following US demands for an independent, international investigation into the May 2005 Andijon violence and as the Uzbek government sought to limit the influence of US and other foreign non-governmental organisations working on political reform and human rights inside the country. Most interaction nowadays consists of the US pressing Uzbekistan to live up to the terms of the agreement.

In short, formal strategic partnerships involving multiple government agencies serve a variety of purposes, yet they also have their limits. When it comes to more classic challenges of foreign policy and national security, some of Washington's more substantive strategic partnerships are not to be found in institutionalised bureaucratic arrangements but in more informal efforts cobbled together for specific purposes. These arrangements are not labelled as formal 'strategic partnerships', yet they arguably have been more important to strategic purpose than many institutionalised structures. Examples include the Contact Group for the Balkans in the 1990s; the informal 'Quad' mechanisms among the US, UK, France and Germany for harnessing and directing Western power vis-à-vis a wide range of international issues; the Quartet of US, EU, Russia and the UN with regard to Middle East peace; the six-party framework for addressing North Korea's nuclear ambitions; or the P5+1 format (five UN permanent Security Council members plus Germany) with regard to Iran.

²⁹ The US-Baltic Charter, also signed in 1998, essentially fulfilled a similar function, as did the 2003 Adriatic Charter among the US, Albania, Croatia and the Republic of Macedonia, and the US-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, signed in 2009, one year after the Russian-Georgian war.

³⁰ Kay 2000, op. cit.

Difficulties with Iran highlight a related purpose of US strategic partnerships, i.e. dealing with opponents. 'Strategies for partnership also require strategies for dealing firmly and creatively with adversaries', Burns notes.³¹ 'The wider purpose of engagement with an adversary, like Iran, is to help cement partnership with others who share our concerns. By participating actively and energetically in direct talks with Iran in the so-called "P5+1", we strip away the argument that our unwillingness to engage is the core problem, rather than Iran's own reluctance to make an agreement. On Iran, as on North Korea, engagement with adversaries is an investment in partnership with key international players, whose support we will need to build the leverage that is essential to successful diplomacy'.

Strategic dialogues

The US also uses an instrument it terms 'strategic dialogue'. The term emerged during the Cold War period of détente in the 1970s as a means for Washington to engage both the Soviet Union and China. The 'strategic dialogue' between Washington and Moscow combined bilateral strategic nuclear-arms reduction talks with broader 'East-West dialogue' on a range of other issues. 'Strategic dialogue' also offered Washington and Beijing a means to engage, however hesitantly and minimally, on defence issues. The dialogue fell apart over Taiwan, but resumed again in the Reagan Administration. The Reagan Administration also sought to open a strategic dialogue with Iran, but this deteriorated into a scandalous arms-for-hostages deal.

Taiya Smith, who coordinated the US-China Strategic Dialogue during the George W. Bush Administration, describes a strategic dialogue as:

A process led by experienced and high-level officials who see the breadth of bilateral activities and ensure that the two countries do not change course without understanding the broader implications to their relationship. Perhaps most importantly, the dialogue helps plan for the future, develops emergency response mechanisms for crises, and sets the two countries on a path toward cooperation and strategic alignment [...] To build a healthy dynamic relationship, the two powers must have appropriate mechanisms in place to manage the different facets of their association from a strategic perspective while dealing with the 'hot' issues of the day [...] While the concept is simple, the reality of managing such a dialogue and ensuring that it is durable and effective is not something that comes naturally to bureaucratic systems.³²

The US conducts scores of 'strategic dialogues' with allies and 'strategic partners' such as the Czech Republic, Israel, Indonesia, and the Republic of Korea to advance its whole-of-government approach and to engage on issues beyond the day-to-day bilateral relationship. Washington conducts a 'strategic dialogue' with Pakistan – a nuclear-armed, MNNA, yet an extremely difficult 'partner' for Washington – and with Pakistan's neighbour and rival India, also a nuclear-armed 'strategic partner' of the United States. It also carries out specialised dialogues, such as the US-Poland 'Strategic Dialogue on Democracy', which coordinates projects in support of democratic reforms in Eastern Europe, Northern Africa and Asia.

For non-allies and those not yet deemed to be 'partners', a 'strategic dialogue' is used as a relationship-building exercise, a means to regularise contacts through a formal mechanism for sustained high-level

³¹ Burns 2009a, op. cit.

³² T.M. Smith, 'Why Go Strategic? The Value of a Truly Strategic Dialogue Between the United States and China', *Policy Outlook*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 July 2010.

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dialogue that enables each side to gain a better understanding of the other's perspectives.³³ For example, the Obama Administration has sought to use multi-agency 'strategic dialogues' to upgrade and broaden the scope of bilateral relations with three key African countries – Nigeria, South Africa and Angola.

Smith says that one key goal of strategic dialogue is 'Figuring out how to present a bilateral agenda in a way that the other country's officials understand [...] Strategic thinking requires both an understanding of the current dynamics and the ability to project how they will change over the long term. This is much harder than just coming up with a solution to a current problem [...] strategic dialogue requires a process that enables people of different cultures to think together over the long term. This can only be done if the process allows the participants to address both the modalities of the relationship and the long-term issues'.³⁴

The US also uses 'strategic dialogue' with some countries to signal its interest in moving the relationship towards a more formal 'strategic partnership'. For instance, when the Obama Administration came into office it indicated its interest in forging a 'true strategic partnership' with Russia, building on potential common ground on issues from strategic arms reduction to Afghanistan and Iran. Burns noted early in the administration's tenure that 'We can't say that this is truly a strategic partnership, in the sense of a neat coincidence of values and interests [...] but it certainly can be a partnership on key strategic issues. Of course, we have significant differences, on questions ranging from Russia's neighbourhood to human rights. And of course our relationship is a combination of cooperation and competition. But that does not mean that we cannot work better together on some crucial fronts'.³⁵

The administration took a page from the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission created during the Clinton Administration to create a Presidential Commission headed by President Obama and then Russian President Medvedev, including 20 working groups on a wide range of issues, involving over 60 official agencies. A new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) was signed and ratified, as were agreements for the transit of troops and material across Russia in support of the mission in Afghanistan and for enhanced US-Russian civilian nuclear cooperation. Russia joined in tougher sanctions on Iran; did not veto the UN Security Council resolution authorising military intervention in Libya; deepened bilateral counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics cooperation, and worked with the US to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles. The administration worked with Congress to support Russia's entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Despite these efforts, the relationship has deteriorated. The US was criticised for offering relatively mild criticism of beatings of demonstrators, other human rights violations, and pervasive corruption in Russia. Vladimir Putin's decisions to oust the US Agency for International Development from Russia; to end the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction programme to dismantle nuclear and chemical weapons; to stop US adoptions of Russian children in retaliation for the US Magnitsky Act sanctioning Russian officials deemed to have perpetrated 'gross violations of human rights'; to block US efforts to forge connections with civil society groups; Moscow's 2008 war with Georgia; its illegal annexation of the Crimean region of Ukraine; and its active efforts to foment separatist activity and violence in eastern Ukraine have all led the US to abandon its 'reset' policy, including suspension of Commission working group projects.

³³ As Elizabeth Dickinson comments, 'It's a long journey from U.S. enemy to ally, but for the last half-century, there has been one sure-fire sign that things are moving in the right direction: holding a "strategic dialogue" in Washington. Think of it as the foreign-policy equivalent of a meeting of mafia dons: There's no love lost, but there's mutual advantage to be won from breaking bread together'. See E. Dickinson, 'Strategic Dialogue', *Foreign Policy*, September-October 2010.

³⁴ Smith 2010, op. cit.

³⁵ Burns 2009a, op. cit.

The US had somewhat more success in its Strategic Dialogue with Vietnam, signaling to Hanoi that it would like to elevate the bilateral relationship to a true strategic partnership. In 2010, the Strategic Dialogue facilitated an effort by the two countries to mobilise a multinational response to Chinese attempts to boost claims to disputed waters and islands in the South China Sea. Both parties have also worked together on issues of maritime freedom and security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Nonetheless, differences over human rights continue to limit the relationship. 'We have made it clear to Vietnam that if we are to develop a strategic partnership, as both nations desire, Vietnam must do more to respect and protect its citizens' rights', Secretary Clinton noted.³⁶ Yet Vietnamese leaders showed little inclination to change their treatment of dissenters or minority groups in order to more rapidly advance strategic relations with the United States. Given these differences, the two sides opted in 2013 to create a 'Comprehensive Partnership' instead of the fuller relationship signified by the term 'strategic partnership'. While the US-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership continues work already underway, it did create a new political and diplomatic dialogue mechanism at ministerial level.

There are a range of countries with which the US engages in structured 'strategic dialogue', but with whom there has been no signal or intent to use such 'dialogue' to move to a 'strategic partnership'. The US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue and their Strategic Security Dialogue are by far the most prominent examples. Neither country appears ready to declare the other a 'strategic partner', yet both recognise they must manage their relationship. Their strategic dialogue, with antecedents reaching into the 1970s, and elevated notably by the Bush Administration, has been transformed by the Obama Administration into an institutionalised mechanism to manage their interdependence, suggesting that both countries might prefer a relationship oriented to common interests and a better understanding of each other's objectives, rather than one rooted in antagonistic rivalry.³⁷ Smith explains that 'While having a strategic conversation seems easy, it is not a natural act [...] This is especially true for the United States and China, which have very different understandings of what is actually meant by 'strategic issues'.³⁸

Under these dialogues, high-level representatives of both countries and their delegations meet annually in capitals alternating between the two countries on a wide range of bilateral, regional and global issues of both immediate and longer-term strategic and economic interest. The dialogue has produced agreements on issues ranging from innovation policies and clean energy to nuclear safety, but officials on each side have indicated that the most useful part of the dialogues has been that they were able to spend time discussing a broad range of issues, deepening each side's appreciation of the other side's positions and perspectives.

Even as China and the US engage in their own high-level dialogues, they each use such mechanisms as a form of 'soft balancing' in their respective efforts to engage third countries. US efforts in Africa and in the Asia-Pacific region, for instance, may be understood in part in terms of 'soft balancing' with China. China has become just as active; over the past decade Beijing has opened 'strategic dialogues' with at least 15 countries, as well as with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and in 2010 elevated its bilateral dialogue with South Africa to a 'comprehensive strategic partnership'. According to Feng Zhongping and Huang Jing, writing in this series, China has established strategic partnerships with almost 50 countries and three international organisations.

³⁶ Clinton 2011, op. cit.

³⁷ J.J. Ghez, *Alliances in the 21st Century. Implications for the US-European partnership* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2011).

³⁸ Smith 2010, op. cit.

Conclusion: do strategic partnerships matter?

The US uses the terms ‘strategic partnership’ and ‘strategic dialogue’ in a variety of ways to achieve a number of different goals with a wide range of partners, as part of an overall ‘American system’ of relationships that is geared both to the preservation and extension of US influence and power as well as to the maintenance of a stable and legitimate international order. Successive post-Cold War administrations have sought to extend this system by using a wide range of differentiated partnership mechanisms.

From an academic perspective, these terms seem to be used in so many different ways, and so inconsistently and indiscriminately that it would be tempting to declare them essentially meaningless. Burns acknowledged as much when discussing the US-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership: ‘Comprehensive Partnership, how is this different from strategic partnership or this partnership or that partnership? [...] Is this partnership really something real, or is it just [that] diplomats are known sometimes for making up very nice titles to relationships without substance’.³⁹

Burns’ comment underscores the reality that a simple declaration of ‘strategic partnership’ does not necessarily render a partnership strategic. Some relationships that are formally characterised as a ‘strategic partnership’ are neither strategic nor a partnership. A number are simply talk shops. On the other hand, some of Washington’s most important and effective strategic partnerships are not formally labelled as such. US ties with Sweden and Finland, for instance, are exceedingly close, and yet the partners have not felt the need to characterise their relationship as ‘strategic’, although they are part of the so-called Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (EPINE), among the United States and 8 Nordic-Baltic countries.

In many cases, efforts to use ‘strategic partnership’ mechanisms to prod disparate bureaucracies into purposeful action have proven exceedingly difficult. The proclamations and machinations that tend to accompany US ‘strategic partnerships’ have not overcome US-EU differences over climate change or data privacy; have not stopped narcotics and guns from flowing across the US-Mexican border; have not resolved US-Brazilian differences over the Law of the Sea; did not halt Ukraine’s slide to autocracy; and have not alleviated US-Pakistan tensions over Afghanistan or US-India strains over Iran. Efforts at strategic dialogue did not prevent Moscow from ending US assistance programmes or annexing Crimea; change Beijing’s currency or trade policies; or prevent Hanoi from cracking down on dissidents.

Such benchmarks of success, however, set the bar too high; many differences between countries can reflect competing national interests or are so rooted in intense domestic politics that are unlikely to be reconciled by bureaucratic working groups and commissions. From a practitioner’s viewpoint, the ability to deploy a diverse set of instruments with overlapping purpose may offer a greater array of options and potential sources of leverage. As Sean Kay has noted, it is the concept’s very lack of clarity that makes it attractive; sometimes diplomats simply need ‘a rhetorical device [...] to help them around the rough edges of shifting global politics’.⁴⁰ It may not be neat conceptually, but it can be handy practically. Moreover, as we have seen, a significant number of US strategic partnerships, particularly but not only with treaty allies, do offer considerable substance and depth.

In the end, the issue is less what a particular partnership may be called and more whether those involved perceive it to have relative value. After all, partnership, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

³⁹ Burns 2009b, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Kay 2000, op. cit.

Appendix. US bilateral alliances, strategic partnerships and strategic dialogues

	TREATY-BASED ALLY	MAJOR NON-NATO ALLY	FORMAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP	FORMAL STRATEGIC DIALOGUE
North America				
Canada	X		*	X
Mexico			X	X
Europe				
Albania	X		*	
Belgium	X		*	
Bulgaria	X			
Croatia	X			
Czech Republic	X		*	X
Denmark	X		*	
Estonia	X		*	
European Union			X	X
France	X		*	
Germany	X		*	
Georgia			X	
Greece	X		*	
Hungary	X		*	
Iceland	X		*	
Italy	X		*	
Latvia	X		*	
Lithuania	X		*	
Luxembourg	X		*	
Netherlands	X		*	
Norway	X		*	
Poland	X		*X	X
Portugal	X		*	
Romania	X		*X	X
Russia				X
Slovakia	X		*	
Slovenia	X		*	
Spain	X		*	
Turkey	X		*X	
Ukraine			X	
United Kingdom	X		*	
Middle East and North Africa				
Algeria				X
Bahrain		X	X	X
Egypt		X	X	X
Iraq			X	X
Israel		X	X	X
Jordan		X	X	X

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Kuwait		X	X	X
Morocco		X	X	X
Saudi Arabia			X	X
Tunisia				X
United Arab Emirates			X	
Yemen				X
Sub-Saharan Africa				
Angola			Strategic Partnership Dialogue	X
Djibouti			X	X
Kenya			X	
Liberia				X
Nigeria			Binational Commission	X
South Africa				X
Asia-Pacific				
Afghanistan		X	X	X
Australia	X	X	X	X
Azerbaijan			X	
Bangladesh				X
Brunei Darussalam			X	X
China				X
India			X	X
Indonesia			Comprehensive Partnership	X
Japan	X	X	*	X
Kazakhstan			X	X
Kyrgyzstan			X	
Malaysia			Comprehensive Partnership	
New Zealand		X	X	X
Pakistan		X	X	X
Philippines	X	X	*	X
Republic of Korea	X	X	*	X
Singapore			Strategic Framework Agreement	X
Thailand	X	X	*	X
Uzbekistan			X	
Vietnam			Comprehensive Partnership	X
South America				
Argentina		X		
Brazil			Global Partnership Dialogue	X
Chile			X	
Colombia			X	X
Peru			X	

*US officials routinely refer to treaty-based allies as 'strategic partners'. This usually translates into close and regular consultations. It does not necessarily translate into sustained, regular, and formal inter-agency 'strategic partnership' meetings. For those allies with which the US does engage in such regular inter-agency meetings, an X has been added to the asterisk.

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