

U.S. Economic, Political and Military Expansion in the Asia-Pacific Region

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The U.S. is stepping up efforts to gain more influence in Asia-Pacific through participation in more regional institutions and negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal. U.S. foreign policy seeks to shape the future of the region in an attempt to dominate economic, political and security issues.

There are concerns over the rise of trade agreements in the Asia-Pacific by U.S. competitors that could greatly affect its interests. The TPP is seen by many as a key component of America's trade strategy for further engagement in the region. A [U.S. government fact sheet](#) describes the TPP as a, "potential platform for economic integration across the Asia Pacific region. The United States will engage with an initial group of seven like-minded countries, Singapore, Chile, New Zealand, Brunei, Australia, Peru, and Vietnam, to craft a platform for a high-standard, comprehensive agreement - one that reflects U.S. priorities and values - with these and additional Asia-Pacific partners." The TPP is open to other countries with Canada, Malaysia and the Philippines, among some of the nations that have shown interest in joining. It has been suggested that the U.S. may want the current eight partnership countries to reach an initial high-quality agreement before bringing others into the pact. In an effort to play a more dominant role, the TPP could be a means to address long-standing U.S. economic interests in Asia and be used to counter increasing Chinese trade in the region.

In his article [Obama Pledges U.S. Entry Into Pacific Trade Deal](#), Jim Capo characterized the true nature of the TPP and just how it relates to a world government system. He concluded that, "The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement is the sister agreement to the Trans-Atlantic Agenda. Together with NAFTA and the North American Leaders Summit (new name for the discredited SPP), these deals are building blocks for an integrated system of global governance managed by Western financial interests and their collaborators around the world." Some remain hopeful that the TPP will be the beginning of a new U.S. trade model, but there are fears that it could be another NAFTA. A recent [open letter to U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk](#) signed by a number of activist groups is asking that any negotiated TPP restrict intellectual property provisions. In addition, they are urging that accession or adherence to the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) not be a requirement of the deal. If things are to change, the TPP will also need to include strong environmental and labour protections and exclude harmful NAFTA invest-to-state lawsuit provisions, as well as financial service deregulation.

In June, the [second round of negotiations for the TPP were held in San Francisco](#). Significant progress was made as discussions examined goals for improving and expanding the partnership. This includes clarifying, "the relationship between existing FTAs and the TPP by

agreeing member economies would continue current FTA requirements while adhering to any higher TPP standards. That determination lays the foundation for how TPP economies will precede in future negotiations.” Working groups also addressed a wide range of topics such as agricultural products, business mobility, cross-border services, intellectual property protection, financial services and technical barriers to trade, along with other issues. The next round of talks are scheduled to take place from October 4-9 in Brunei. Since the Obama administration recommitted to the TPP last year, negotiations have gained momentum and an agreement could be signed in 2012. Although the TPP is not technically part of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), it is seen as the potential foundation for creating one of its goals of a region-wide free trade area.

In November 2011, APEC leaders will gather in Hawaii where the U.S. could plot a bolder vision for the forum. According to a [Statement by the Press Secretary](#), “The United States will use the opportunity of chairing APEC in 2011 to highlight the vast potential the Asia-Pacific region holds for American companies and workers, to help shape the future of Asia-Pacific’s regional architecture, and to promote APEC’s core mission of spurring mutually beneficial regional economic integration.” This year’s APEC Leaders summit will take place in Yokohama, Japan this November. The [Meeting of APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade](#) which was held several months back, commended the work that had been undertaken in key areas of regional economic integration. This includes sectors such as standards and technical regulations, investment, trade facilitation, rules of origin, intellectual property rights, as well as environmental goods and services. They also welcomed progress made to explore possible pathways to achieve a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific.

Earlier this year, Kurt M. Campbell Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs made it clear that the U.S. seeks to play a more prominent role in the region. In a [Statement on Regional Overview of East Asia and the Pacific](#) he emphasized, “In every regard – geopolitically, militarily, diplomatically, and economically – Asia and the Pacific are indispensable to addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities of the 21st century. As the Asia-Pacific century emerges, defining the new international environment, the United States must enhance and deepen its strategic engagement and leadership role in the region.” Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton’s recent [Remarks on U.S. Foreign Policy](#) before the Council on Foreign Relations also lays out America’s strategy. She stated, “the Asia-Pacific currently has few robust institutions to foster effective cooperation and reduce the friction of competition, so we began building a more coherent regional architecture with the United States deeply involved.” Clinton also added, “the Asia-Pacific region will grow in importance and developing these institutions will establish habits of cooperation that will be vital to stability and prosperity.”

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has become one of the main vehicles for integration in the region. In a [Statement By President Obama at the Opening Of the U.S.-ASEAN Leaders Meeting](#) which took place in New York on September 24, he acknowledged that, “Through APEC and initiatives like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, we’re pursuing trade relationships that benefit all our countries. And we will continue to support ASEAN’s goal of creating a more effective and integrated community by 2015.” He went on to say, “We’ll also focus on deepening our political and security cooperation.” ASEAN has become a dominant group and is poised to play a crucial role in the vision for an Asia-Pacific Union. Further engagement in regards to evolving regional architecture is really the struggle for more influence. Gaining more control in Asia-Pacific is important from a geopolitical, economic and military standpoint. As it continues to grow, the U.S. seeks to play an active

role in shaping the region.

During a trip to Asia last year, Obama proclaimed himself to be [America's first Pacific President](#) and noted the importance of, "multilateral organizations (that) can advance the security and prosperity of this region." He also asserted, "As an Asia Pacific nation, the United States expects to be involved in the discussions that shape the future of this region, and to participate fully in appropriate organizations as they are established and evolve." American economic, political and military expansion in Asia-Pacific is being used to counter growing Chinese influence. The U.S. continues to strengthen old alliances and forge new partnerships. Through various joint security exercises, it has increased its military presence in the area. With the U.S. and China vying for more control, this could further escalate tensions and lead to a potential confrontation between the two powers.

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