

Hedging for Maximum Flexibility: Singapore's Pragmatic Approach to Security Relations with the US and China

by CPT Cai Dexian

Abstract:

The rise of China is one of the defining trends of the early 21st century. Its steadily increasing political, economic and military power, coupled with uncertainty regarding its intentions, has far-reaching implications for Singapore's strategic interests and prospects. This essay will begin with an overview of Singapore's strategic relationship with the US and describe her evolving bilateral and multilateral ties with China. It will then critically examine the viability of balancing and bandwagoning as strategies for Singapore to adopt *vis-à-vis* China. Finally, this essay will argue for the importance of enmeshing both the US and China in Southeast Asia and how regional institutions will be critical to ensuring a sustainable relationship between the two powers.

Keywords: Hedging; Bilateral Ties; Security; US-China Relations

INTRODUCTION: THEORY AND INTERESTS

The rise of China is one of the defining trends of the early 21st century. Its steadily increasing political, economic and military power, coupled with uncertainty regarding its intentions, has far-reaching implications for Singapore's strategic interests and prospects. China's rise must also be understood in the context of an evolving regional architecture in Southeast Asia, with the United States as its preponderant power.

To address the question of how states respond to rising and potentially hegemonic powers, international relations theorists have argued that states will either balance against or bandwagon with the rising power. The "balancers" believe that states, especially small ones, will perceive rising powers as threats that must be checked by forming alliances (external balancing) and military modernization (internal balancing).¹ The "bandwagoners," in contrast, believe that states may accept a subordinate role under the rising power and leverage on that power as a source of

strength for them to advance their own interests.² Beyond these two pure formulations, the concept of "hedging" has been proposed as a third way whereby states pursue engagement and integration while continuing to emphasise realist-style security cooperation and armament.³ Ba has argued that hedging may be the only viable option for smaller states as their strategic relations with the great powers are focused on mitigating their respective vulnerabilities and dependencies.⁴



USS Theodore Roosevelt Deployed at Sea

Before we examine the suitability of these options, we must first clarify Singapore's strategic interests to understand the considerations that will govern policy decisions. Above all else, Singapore's key interests are to survive and prosper as a nation. To achieve these objectives, Singapore pursues two main strategies. First, Singapore works to ensure regional stability. Lee Kuan Yew said that Singapore would progress "only if there is international order, regional peace and stability, and growth instead of wars and conflicts."⁵ This stability is necessary for Singapore to attract foreign trade and investment, which are in turn vital prerequisites for her continued economic development. Given Singapore's small size and limited strategic weight, she has been forced to "base its balance-of-power strategy principally on borrowing political and military strength from extra-regional powers,"⁶ utilising free trade agreements and military-to-military cooperation to maintain her relevance today. Singapore's second strategy is to maintain maximum freedom of diplomatic manoeuvre by ensuring that while she strives to make herself useful to the great powers, she also tries to be perceived as fair and objective in her role as an intermediary "between the 'Asian way' and the 'western style' of diplomacy."⁷ This translates into a pragmatic foreign policy that treads carefully between competitive and cooperative strategies that while realist and self-reliant on one hand, simultaneously recognises that cooperation is necessary in fostering a liberal international trading regime.⁸

This essay will begin with an overview of Singapore's strategic relationship with the US and describe her evolving bilateral and multilateral ties with China. It will then critically examine the

viability of balancing and bandwagoning as strategies for Singapore to adopt *vis-à-vis* China. We will seek to prove that both strategies in their pure form are undesirable for Singapore, primarily because they constrain Singapore's strategic freedom and contravene her key interest in maintaining regional stability. Singapore's strategy towards China is perhaps too nuanced to fit neatly into any theoretical conception, and this essay will therefore seek to outline the ways in which Singapore has utilised pragmatic hedging with respect to China, and propose reasons for why she will continue to do so.

China's rise must also be understood in the context of an evolving regional architecture in Southeast Asia, with the United States as its preponderant power.

Hedging may be conceived of as a range of policy options between balancing and bandwagoning, and Singapore is likely to pursue as wide a range as possible to maximise her room for manoeuvre. Finally, this essay will argue for the importance of enmeshing both

the US and China in Southeast Asia and how regional institutions will be critical to ensuring a sustainable relationship between the two powers.

THE EVOLUTION OF SINGAPORE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US AND CHINA

Singapore has made great efforts to ensure a strong US presence in the region, viewing it as a "reassuring and stabilising force" in Southeast Asia and a "determining reason for the peace and stability Asia enjoys today."⁹ Singapore is the only port in Southeast Asia capable of providing logistic support and berthing facilities to the US Seventh Fleet.¹⁰ Since 2000, Changi Naval Base has allowed the US Navy to berth its aircraft carriers there.¹¹ Singapore is also one of America's closest partners in terms of technology transfer. Singapore has acquired F-16 and F-15 fighter jets, Apache attack helicopters and HIMARS rocket launchers from the US and is the only state in Southeast Asia to operate these

systems. Singapore is also the only Asian state that participates in the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) programme,¹² a sign of her extremely privileged access to cutting edge research and development. Beyond the physical equipment, Singapore also enjoys access to expensive training and basing facilities in the US, which are vital to operationalising new capabilities (Table 1 summarises Singapore's key bases and training exercises in the US).¹³ Given Singapore's dependence on advanced technology to provide her military edge, her relationship with the US has been instrumental in enabling the SAF's rapid advancement thus far.

Notwithstanding the preponderance of the US in Southeast Asia and its strategic relationship with Singapore, China's presence in the region has steadily grown. China sees the region as an important piece of its periphery critical to safeguarding its own development. The China-ASEAN free trade area came into effect in 2010, creating the largest free trade area in the world by population, with a market of two billion people.¹⁴ It would appear that China has utilised its growing economic influence as an engine to fuel its diplomatic and strategic aims. Although it has become increasingly assertive in recent years, one cannot yet conclude that its intentions are definitely hegemonic.

Bilaterally, the China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (CSFTA) took effect in 2009 and was the first comprehensive FTA that China had signed with

another Asian country.¹⁵ Singapore has been China's largest trading partner in ASEAN for some time, while China was Singapore's third largest trading partner in 2008.¹⁶ At the diplomatic and political level, however, Singapore engages China warily and tends to do so under the framework of ASEAN-based regionalism. Singapore avoids any discourse that might paint China as a threat, but must remain uncertain about Chinese motives and therefore goes to great lengths to preserve her reputation as an independent state.¹⁷ Militarily, Singapore only recently began to conduct an annual bilateral counter-terrorism exercise with China from 2009, preferring to engage the PLA in multilateral security exercises.

THEORIES UNSATISFACTORY IN PRACTICE: WHY SINGAPORE HAS NOT AND WILL NOT PRACTICE BALANCING AND BANDWAGONING

At first glance, Singapore's close strategic relationship with the US appears to be evidence of balancing, given her uncertainty regarding China's intentions and future behaviour. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the closeness of US-Singapore relations pre-dates the rise of China, suggesting that its roots extend to its stabilising influence, independent of any rising or competing powers. Furthermore, there is no evidence of an acceleration in Singapore's military transformation efforts in response to China's rise, indicating that the SAF's

Platform	Detachments / Exercises
F-15SG	Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho (Peace Carvin V)
F-16C/D	Luke Air Force Base, Arizona (Peace Carvin II)
AH-64D Apache	Marana, Arizona (Peace Vanguard) Exercise Daring Warrior (Fort Sill, Oklahoma)
CH-47 Chinook	Grand Prairie, Texas (Peace Prairie)
S-70B Sikorsky Seahawk	USN Maritime Strike Weapons School, California (Peace Triton)
HIMARS	Exercise Daring Warrior (Fort Sill, Oklahoma)

Table 1: Key SAF Capabilities Acquired from the US

steady development is not solely predicated on the need to deter the rising power.¹⁸ At the diplomatic level, instead of purely siding with the US on regional issues, Singapore has made it a point to work on engaging China through ASEAN's "informal, non-confrontational, open-ended and mutual" style that enables China to involve itself in the region in a positive manner,¹⁹ for example through the signing of the aforementioned treaties and FTA. More significantly, perhaps, there have been instances where Singapore deferred to China on contentious issues rather than confronted it, as balancing theory would suggest. Following the Chinese outcry over Lee Hsien Loong's 2004 visit to Taiwan, Singapore made "politic displays of contrition and repeated endorsements of the 'One China' principle."²⁰ Despite her long-standing relations with Taiwan, Singapore's pragmatically cautious approach to this relationship *vis-à-vis* rising China suggest that she does not simply pursue a balancing strategy.

Although Singapore has not exhibited pure balancing behaviour with respect to China, could balancing be a viable strategy in future? This essay believes not, for two reasons that relate directly to Singapore's core strategic interests. First, Singapore will not want to prematurely and unnecessarily antagonise China. China has not demonstrated overtly hegemonic intentions in Southeast Asia and may never do so, if it accepts the perpetuation of American regional preponderance there. Perhaps more importantly, "the dual absence of geographical propinquity to China and territorial disputes with China means the PRC does not pose a direct threat to Singapore."²¹ Singapore must be careful not to instigate hostility because China's growing military and economic power suggest that it may someday

possess the ability to prescribe its agenda to Southeast Asian countries, and even threaten the use of force, (eg. Taiwan Straits in 1996). China is more likely to be antagonised under a situation of high-intensity balancing and perceive that it has to act aggressively to get anything done. However, these actions could be destabilising and hinder the flow of trade and investment which would in turn hurt countries like Singapore. For example, Singapore may view with concern the increasing reach of China's South Sea Fleet and the potential for territorial conflict to adversely affect the safety of sea lanes of communication in the South China Sea.²²

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The second reason for not pursuing pure balancing is the potential loss of economic benefits that Singapore could derive from engaging China. Intra-regional trade in East Asia increased by 304% between 1991 and 2001 while China's share of East Asian exports grew from 8 to 21% between 1980 and 2002.²³ The growing importance of the Chinese market for Southeast Asian intermediate and final goods means that it could potentially become a lever for China to exert pressure on Singapore, should it perceive that the latter were balancing against it. Furthermore, the renminbi is likely to gain in importance in the region, especially if China further eases restrictions on its use.²⁴ Coupled with the relative decline of the US dollar, it is not inconceivable that the renminbi could one day become the reserve currency of Southeast Asia. During the 1997 Asian financial crisis, China offered contributions to the IMF's recovery programme as well as to individual states. It also refrained from devaluing its currency during that period, despite the potential gains it could have made by begging its neighbours.²⁵ This means that China could one day use its currency as a lever for coercion.



Ex-Soviet carrier Varyag, now Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning

Having rejected the feasibility of a pure balancing strategy, let us examine the bandwagoning theory. This was most strongly propounded by Kang, who argued that Asian states had opted to bandwagon as vassal states once did under imperial China.²⁶ Although Singapore has certainly expanded her economic linkages with China and engaged it in multilateral fora, these do not constitute a pure bandwagoning strategy because politically and militarily, it remains closer to the US. The clearest example of how Singapore has maintained her political independence is her close relationship with Taiwan, despite Chinese displeasure. Notwithstanding her adherence to the “One-China” policy and her non-establishment of formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, Singapore continues her friendly and mutually beneficial relations in the defence and economic spheres. While Singapore has at times deferred to China over the Taiwan issue (eg. voting in favour of China’s admission to the UN in 1971, as opposed to Taiwan), she nevertheless continues to display a remarkable degree of independence. For example, Singapore has declined China’s offer of Hainan Island as a training ground to replace Taiwan,²⁷ demonstrating loyalty to an old friend.

We also believe that Singapore will not pursue pure bandwagoning in future. First, because it severely limits Singapore’s policy options as she may lose privileged access to American technology.

If Singapore were to bandwagon with China, she would almost certainly lose her position as a trusted regional ally and would no longer enjoy the same kind of preferential technology, training and basing access. To the extent that the US remains the world’s most advanced military power, the SAF’s capability and credibility as a deterrent could suffer significantly in the near to medium term.

Second, Singapore would be adversely affected if Southeast Asian unity were to suffer without the stabilising presence of the US. Khong argues that one of the key reasons for ASEAN’s establishment of the ARF was to “enmesh” the US in regional institutions so as to strengthen US commitment to the region, which in turn was viewed as a vital determinant of regional stability.²⁸ The general acceptance by Southeast Asian states of US preponderance and the resultant economic and diplomatic benefits have made this arrangement relatively stable and durable. If Singapore were to band with China, there is also no certainty that China would be as ideologically accommodating as the US, nor that regional states would agree to band with China. The implications of a rising China differ among the ASEAN states: while “the more developed may see less of economic competition in a rising China but more opportunities; countries that have territorial disputes with China may view Beijing’s policies more suspiciously.”²⁹ Given that Singapore has leveraged on a relatively cohesive ASEAN in engaging the great powers and providing a stable framework within which to prosper and grow, a bandwagoning strategy with China could fracture this cohesion and make it significantly more difficult to keep these powers engaged productively in the region.

Third, bandwagoning with China could severely exacerbate bilateral tensions with Malaysia and Indonesia and destabilise Singapore’s immediate

neighbourhood, at the same time also risking domestic discontent. Singapore’s situation between two larger Malay-Muslim neighbours has made it extremely sensitive to how her relations with China are perceived. She has worked hard to shake off the label of a “Chinese island in a Malay sea” to avoid negative attention distracting it from its strategic objectives.³⁰ For example, Singapore took regional sensitivities into account when she held off normalising ties with China until November 1990, after Indonesia had done so in August 1990.³¹ Internally, Singapore must also take into account the sentiments of her non-Chinese constituencies. If she were to adopt bandwagoning and come under Chinese hegemony, the minority races might fear that their prospects would be marginalised, thus undermining Singapore’s multi-racial, multi-ethnic social fabric.

HEDGING: A RANGE OF OPTIONS FOR MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY

Singapore has always taken great pride in her pragmatic, non-ideological approach to foreign policy, adhering to Lord Palmerston’s (British PM 1855-1865) invocation that “we have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.”³² Singapore has not and will not adopt pure balancing or bandwagoning strategies, because neither fulfils her core interests

of survival and prosperity through regional stability and freedom of manoeuvre. Instead, Singapore must find ways to position herself *via-à-vis* the great powers in a way that will maximise her interests while minimising risk, and therefore should take up a “hedging” approach. Hedging is defined as the “behaviour in which a country seeks to offset risks by pursuing multiple policy options that are intended to produce mutual counteracting effects, under a situation of high uncertainties and high stakes.”³³ In essence, Singapore must undertake a range of policy decisions with varying degrees of acceptance (bandwagoning) and rejection (balancing) of China (see Table 2). The five components of hedging as proposed by Kuik are: indirect balancing, dominance denial, economic pragmatism, binding engagement and limited bandwagoning (see Table 3).³⁴ We shall examine Singapore’s policy options for a balanced portfolio across the first four components, and why she is unlikely to pursue the fifth.

First, Singapore will continue her policy of indirect balancing through her continued military cooperation with the US and the SAF’s own transformation efforts, without explicitly perceiving China as a threat. As aforementioned, Singapore’s strategic relationship with the US and its military modernisation began before China’s rise in Southeast Asia, and is likely to

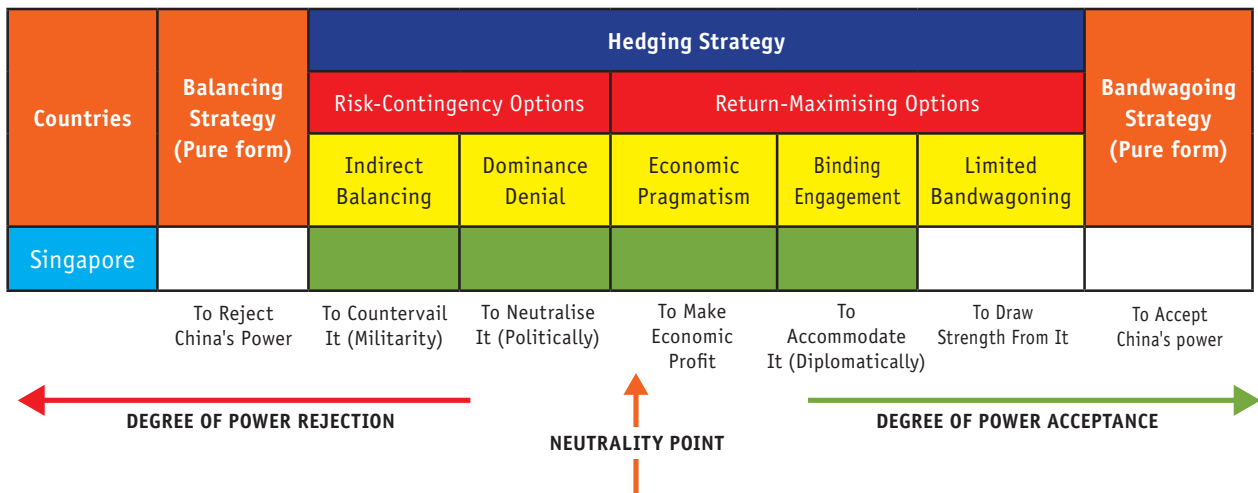


Table 2: Spectrum of Policy Options towards China³⁵

	FUNCTIONS	MODUS OPERANDI / INDICATORS
<p>BANDWAGONING (Pure form)</p> <p>“Profit First”</p>	To reap present or future rewards from a big power	Forging a military alliance with the big power, coordinating key foreign and defence policies
<p>LIMITED BANDWAGONING*</p> <p>“Grasp the Opportunity for Profit, But Cautiously”</p>	To reap present or future foreign policy rewards from a big power, but taking care to avoid the loss of its autonomy and any erosion of its existing relationship with another dominant power	Forming a political partnership with the power, coordinating external policies in selected areas, as well as giving deference to the dominant power on a voluntary basis
<p>BINDING-ENGAGEMENT</p> <p>“Socialisation Matters”</p>	To bind a big power in institutions, to increase voice opportunities and to socialise the power with the established norms, with the ultimate goal of encouraging it to behave in a responsible and restrained way	Creating and maintaining regularised institutional links with the big power through bilateral and multilateral diplomatic platforms
<p>ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM</p> <p>“Business First”</p>	To maximise economic benefits from its direct trade and investment links with the big power, regardless of any political differences	Establishing and maintaining direct trade and investment links with the big power, as well as entering into bilateral and regional economic cooperation (such as an Free Trade Agreement) with that power
<p>DOMINANCE DENIAL</p> <p>“Ascendancy is Okay, But Not Dominance”</p>	To deny and prevent the emergence of a dominant power who might display a tendency of dictating hegemonic terms to smaller states	Making use of other powers' balancing efforts to offset the growing clout of the big power, by ensuring the involvement of other powers in regional affairs, and by giving political support to others' alliances and armaments
<p>INDIRECT BALANCING</p> <p>“Just in Case”</p>	To prepare for diffuse and uncertain strategic contingencies	Maintaining military ties (either a formal alliance or informal military cooperation) with another power, and modernising its own military, without explicitly identifying any specific target of its military efforts
<p>BALANCING (Pure form)</p> <p>“Security First”</p>	To check and counter-balance the growing capability of a specific power	Entering into a military alliance with a third power and upgrading its own armament programme, for the purpose of containing against a specific threat

*Limited bandwagoning (LB) is different from pure bandwagoning (PB) in three aspects. Firstly, PB often takes the form of military alignment or security alliance, where as LB mainly involves political collaboration on selective issues. Secondly, PB signifies a zero-sum scenario for big powers, that is, when a state bandwagons with one power, it simultaneously distance itself from another power. PB often occurs when there is an intense rivalry between two big powers, and smaller states are forced to take sides between the competing powers. In LB, on the other hand, a smaller state bandwagons with a rising power while maintaining its traditional relations with the preponderant power. Finally, PB implies an acceptance of a superior-subordinate relationship between a big power and a smaller partner, where as in LB, the smaller state tries to avoid the loss of its autonomy and to avoid becoming over-dependent on the big power. Simply put, PB is hierarchy-acceptance while LB is hierarchy-avoidance.

Table 3: Description of Small State Policy Responses to Power Asymmetry³⁶

continue independently of China's rise. Following the 9/11 attacks and the discovery of Islamic terrorist cells in Singapore and Indonesia, Singapore-US cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts arguably acts as "stronger glue for the strategic relationship than the China challenge."³⁷ Regarding her military transformation, Singapore's focus on continually maintaining a marked edge in the region for credible deterrence, coupled with the SAF's *raison d'être* of securing a swift and decisive victory over the aggressor, has justified her continual development and vigilance, quite apart from China's rise. In fact, it is widely believed that Singapore's primary threats, and consequently the objectives of her military transformation, come from her immediate neighbours, particularly Malaysia.³⁸ Nevertheless, Singapore must continue to take into account the risks of an increasingly powerful and potentially aggressive China, and should therefore continue to engage the US as a strategic ally. Former Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong stated in 2003 that "many in the region would feel more assured if East Asia remains in balance as China grows. In fact, maintaining balance is the over-arching strategic objective in East Asia currently, and only with the help of the US can East Asia achieve this."³⁹

The second policy component is dominance denial, which Singapore will undertake as part of ASEAN's collective efforts to involve the US in regional affairs and thereby prevent the emergence of China as a hegemonic power in Southeast Asia. This option may be understood as seeking a balance of political power, in which China is induced to continue constructive engagement with Singapore and ASEAN because of the US presence in the region. Singapore is perhaps the "classic anticipatory state,"⁴⁰ in that she tries to anticipate strategic risks and prepare "fall-back positions" for contingencies.⁴¹ In particular, Singapore is concerned about the nature of China's

rise and whether the latter will disrupt regional stability and constrain her freedom of manoeuvre. If the US were to withdraw from Southeast Asia, not only might China be tempted to exert more aggressive influence in the region, but the cohesiveness of ASEAN would probably come under severe strain as each state attempts to optimise its position in the resulting vacuum. To hedge against this, Singapore constantly seeks ways to keep the US engaged and involved in Southeast Asia to deter any attempts at Chinese hegemony. Shortly after it appeared that the US might have to close its military bases in the Philippines in 1989, Singapore announced that she would offer the Americans access to her facilities. Since 9/11, American security relationships with all the ASEAN states except Myanmar have strengthened and continue to "dwarf China," and the designation of Singapore as a Major Security Cooperation Partner is perhaps the best example of this.⁴²

While the first two policy options are geared towards minimising the risks of a hegemonic China, the latter three seek to maximise the benefits of China's rise, especially economically. Under economic pragmatism, this essay has already discussed how Singapore has established and cultivated direct trade and investment links with China, as well as entered into bilateral and regional economic cooperation with it. Apart from the aforementioned establishment of the CSFTA in 2009, Singapore's economic engagement with China has involved the transfer of management expertise and investment, for example through the joint Suzhou Industrial Park project.⁴³ Singapore's heavy reliance on an open and liberal international trading regime means her economic linkages with China are likely to remain, if not increase in importance in future.

The fourth available policy option is binding engagement, whereby Singapore binds China to Southeast Asia through its involvement in regional

institutions like the ARF and East Asia Summit (EAS). These engagements are aimed at socialising China to Southeast Asian norms and encouraging it to behave responsibly and uphold the regional status quo. This policy is the more benign flip-side of dominance denial because it seeks to convince China of its vested interest in contributing productively to regional stability.⁴⁴ Given that the effectiveness of this option rests on the cohesiveness of ASEAN as a regional entity, Singapore is likely to be concerned about how the disputing claims over the South China Sea (SCS) will develop in future. Although Singapore is herself not a claimant state, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei are. If these countries were to try to leverage on ASEAN to pursue their claims as a bloc, China could sever its engagement and pursue its claims unilaterally. On the other hand, if these states were to push their individual claims more vocally while the non-claimant states continued to engage China, ASEAN's unity could possibly be fractured.⁴⁵ Singapore will have to negotiate this situation carefully and use her influence to ensure that ASEAN as a group continues to remain neutral with respect to the SCS disputes.

The fifth and final option is limited bandwagoning, which Singapore does not and will not pursue primarily for the reason discussed earlier, that her proximate geopolitical situation and domestic ethnic diversity mean that there is a "self-imposed limit" on the extent to which she will establish political linkages with China.⁴⁶ As long as both these conditions hold true, Singapore is unlikely to pursue this option even in

the future, to avoid any suspicion of being a Chinese vassal.

Having outlined the hedging policy options, it is important to note that their practicability is contingent on three key conditions: first, the absence of an immediate threat that might force a state to ally with a great power for protection; second, the absence of any ideological fault-lines between states; and third, the absence of an all-out great power rivalry which might force states to choose sides. The first condition is likely to hold given Singapore's location and the fact that she is not an immediate Chinese security concern (eg. Taiwan or

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the Korean peninsula). The second condition is likely to remain absent because Singapore's relentlessly pragmatic foreign policy will continue to further Singapore's core interests rather than abide by any strict code of ideological principles. The third condition is the most uncertain and perhaps the hardest to ensure in

future. It is to this issue that we now turn, as we explore how Southeast Asian regionalism can serve the great powers' mutual interests.

ENMESHING THE GREAT POWERS: THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Southeast Asian regionalism is extremely fluid and diverse, ranging from the mature ASEAN and ARF to newer mechanisms like APEC and ASEAN Plus Three (APT).⁴⁷ This diversity is perhaps reflective of the region itself and provides many avenues for cooperation and competition.⁴⁸ In the case of US-China relations, regional institutions can serve as tools to further their strategic interests, along

two key roles. First, they can mitigate the security dilemma by providing diplomatic tools and a flow of information that can dampen potential conflicts and prevent defensive measures from spiraling beyond control. In Southeast Asia's case, the ARF and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) encourage the early notification of military- or security-related actions among members and promote the peaceful resolution of disputes.⁴⁹

Second, at the tactical level, great powers can use regional institutions to convey restraint and leadership. Although China arguably has long regarded multilateral institutions as mechanisms utilised by the US and western states to exercise their influence and constrain Chinese behaviour, it actively participates in regional groupings like the APT, ARF and EAS, using these fora to reassure others of its non-belligerent intentions.⁵⁰ In fact, China has gone beyond defensive goals and actively uses these institutions to promote the perception of its global power status.⁵¹ Goldstein terms this a "neo-Bismarckian" grand strategy whereby China seeks to cooperate on regional issues while the regional states in turn, seek to use institutions and dialogue to make China's rise more predictable and less threatening.⁵² As China becomes more powerful, however, it may want to use its strength to reshape regional institutions and rules to further its interests. Singapore has had to resist attempts by the Chinese to increase the influence of APT as the only truly Asian institution and instead promote more inclusive fora like the EAS and ARF.⁵³ This may lead China to be increasingly perceived as a security threat by Southeast Asian states. How should the US pre-empt and respond to such a scenario?

The American challenge is not to prevent China from participating in the regional order, but rather to embed a rising China in institutions in order to "strike strategic bargains at various moments along the shifting power trajectories and encroaching

geopolitical spheres."⁵⁴ These tactical bargains must be aligned with the larger objective of offering China a position as a regional power in return for Beijing accommodating Washington as a dominant security provider within East Asia.⁵⁵ In the near-to-medium term, ASEAN's interests appear to be aligned with that of the US. Evelyn Goh has argued that in effect, while China is enmeshed as a regional great power, Southeast Asian stability is nevertheless "sustained upon the predominance of US power," with regional states preferring a "moderated and implicit" type of dominance.⁵⁶ To the extent that the US continues to be an accommodating, stabilising superpower, Singapore's interests are likely to be best served under such an implicit hierarchy. Nevertheless, fall-back options apply both ways as Singapore continues to pursue the widest possible range of policy options for maximum freedom of manoeuvre.

CONCLUSION

To broaden the range of policy options and balance benefit-maximisation against risk-minimisation, Singapore is likely to pursue a balanced spectrum of policies broadly termed hedging, as she seeks to maximise her room for manoeuvre and maintain regional stability. Singapore will engage and enmesh China while simultaneously continuing her strategic relationship with the US as well as her own military development. Although Singapore will always attempt to pursue her interests and punch above her weight, she cannot possibly implement hedging all on her own. Southeast Asia's multitude of regional institutions will therefore be useful for keeping the great powers engaged. Ultimately, Singapore must always be pragmatic above all else. While Singapore will remain optimistic and work towards the prospect of a peaceful and responsible China, she must always retain its fall-back options of US involvement and a credible SAF. 🌐

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MAJ Cai Dexian is an Armor Infantry Officer and is currently a staff officer in the Force Plans Branch of G5 Army. MAJ Cai is a recipient of the SAF Overseas Scholarship. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from Stanford University.