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**CHINESE SECURITY COOPERATION IN SOUTHEAST
ASIA, 2000-2017: EVIDENCE FROM THAILAND AND
THE PHILIPPINES**

by

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EVIDENCE FROM THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

Since the turn of the 21st century, China has steadily expanded security cooperation in Southeast Asia, reflected in more frequent naval port calls and military exercises and in increased arms sales to states in the region. Why has China been pursuing closer security cooperation in Southeast Asia, and what factors influence the degree to which Southeast Asian states seek, accept, or reject security cooperation with China? This thesis finds that China is primarily motivated to improve security ties in Southeast Asia in order to establish regional preeminence and cement its status as a great power. Related and supporting Chinese objectives include using security cooperation to achieve the following: establish influence within key Southeast Asian states that can be wielded to serve Chinese interests, prevent encirclement by the United States or its allies, and assuage regional anxieties about perceived Chinese aggressiveness. This thesis also finds that factors influencing the degree to which Southeast Asian states seek, accept, or reject security cooperation with China include the level of U.S. security cooperation a state receives, an interest in diversification of security partnerships, the prevalence of illiberalism or human rights abuses, and the presence or absence of a territorial dispute with China.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADMM-Plus	ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus
ADRI	Stratbase Albert Del Rosario Institute for Strategic and International Studies
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
APC	armored personnel carriers
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASM	anti-ship missile
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
DAO	Defense Attaché Office
DSC	Defense and Security Consultation
DND	Department of National Defense
DPD	Defense Policy Dialogue
EAS	East Asia Summit
EDCA	Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
HADR	humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
IMET	International Military Education and Training
JUSMAG	Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group
MBT	main battle tank
MOOTW	military operations other than war
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
RPG	rocket propelled grenade
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
TIV	trend-indicator value

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION AND MAIN FINDINGS

China's strategic interests are arguably greater in Southeast Asia than in any other region of the world.¹ It is no surprise then that the array of tools that China employs in its engagements with Southeast Asian countries is wide-ranging and diverse, to include formal diplomatic exchanges, economic investment and aid, cultural outreach, and security cooperation.² The focus of this thesis will be on this last instrument, which China has increasingly applied in recent years as a key element of its wider diplomatic and geopolitical strategy for the region.³ Since the turn of the 21st century, security cooperation between China and Southeast Asia has deepened markedly, evidenced by the growing visibility and frequency of bilateral and multilateral exercises, naval port calls, and arms sales, and various other forms of military engagement.⁴

This thesis tries to explain this development, specifically posing the following primary question: why has security cooperation between China and Southeast Asia been increasing since the turn of the 21st century? Furthermore, in order to evaluate both sides of the phenomenon, the following sub-questions are addressed:

1. Why is China pursuing closer security cooperation with states in Southeast Asia?

¹ Eric Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," in *China Steps Out: Beijing's Major Power Engagement with the Developing World*, ed. Joshua Eisenman and Eric Heginbotham, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 50.

² Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 57.

³ Evan A. Laksmana, "Regional Order by Other Means? Examining the Rise of Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," *Asian Security* 8, no. 3 (October 2012): 251, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2012.723920>.

⁴ Kenneth Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, and John Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," *China Strategic Perspectives* 11 (July 2017): 44, <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-11.pdf?ver=2017-07-17-153301-093>.

2. What factors influence the degree to which Southeast Asian states seek, accept, or reject Chinese security cooperation?

On the Chinese side of the equation, this thesis finds that China's primary motivation for deepening its security ties in Southeast Asia is to establish regional preeminence and cement its status as a great power. While security cooperation is not the only means with which China is striving achieve this end, it is a key tool. Related and supporting Chinese objectives include using security cooperation to achieve the following: to establish influence within key Southeast Asian states that can be leveraged to serve Chinese interests, to prevent encirclement by the United States or its allies in the region, and to assuage regional anxieties about perceived Chinese aggressive intent. On the Southeast Asian side of the equation, this thesis finds that factors influencing the degree to which Southeast Asian states seek, accept, or reject security cooperation with China include the level of U.S. security cooperation a state receives, an interest in diversification of security partnerships, the prevalence of illiberalism or human rights abuses, and the presence or absence of a territorial dispute with China. More specifically, Southeast Asian states that experience a decreased level of U.S. security cooperation, that prioritize diversification of security partnerships, and that have a pattern of illiberalism or human rights abuses tend to seek or accept more security cooperation with China than states in which these factors are not active. However, states that have a territorial dispute with China tend to reject significant security cooperation with China, or at least conduct it to a lesser extent than states without a territorial dispute, even if all of these other factors are active.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

China's heightened engagement in the field of security cooperation is one key element of the country's continued rise, both in terms of its military capability and reach as well as its influence in the region more broadly. As it persists in cultivating closer security relationships across Southeast Asia, China will not only be able to further hone its military's operational capabilities through more frequent and complex exercises; it will also likely be able to bolster its rapport with states in the region more generally, conceivably leveraging improved relations in certain countries to gain access in the future

to key airfields, ports, or other strategic locations.⁵ If such a potentiality were to occur, China's improved military positioning in Southeast Asia could better enable it to challenge the United States and its allies if China were to one day adopt a more aggressive posture, for example in the event of a Taiwan contingency.⁶ Furthermore, there are implications beyond the military realm. As Chinese security relationships in the region strengthen, China could extend the influence gained therefrom to support non-military objectives, including attempting to use its growing regional sway to modify existing norms in a way that is more conducive to Chinese interests rather than U.S. interests.⁷

An examination of the topic raised in this thesis is relevant to U.S. interests in additional ways beyond the considerations enumerated in the preceding paragraph. Southeast Asia is strategically important to the United States. Thailand and the Philippines are American treaty allies, and the United States also has security relationships at varying, though lesser, degrees of maturity with other nations in the region. Consequently, it is in the U.S. interest to understand the current scope of Chinese relationships in Southeast Asia and to ensure that those relationships do not grow at the expense of existing U.S. ties.⁸ While the United States remains the "security partner of choice" for many countries in the region, this cannot be taken for granted.⁹ Persistent effort will be required in order to retain this status into the future, particularly in light of the concerted Chinese drive to gain greater relevance in the security realm.¹⁰ Among other considerations, regional states will incorporate the perceived level of U.S. commitment in their calculus regarding how to react

⁵ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," 60.

⁶ Bruce Vaughn and Wayne M. Morrison, *China-Southeast Asia Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications for the United States*, CRS Report No. RL32688 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32688.pdf>.

⁷ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," 60.

⁸ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 73.

⁹ Evan S. Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise*, MG-736-AF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG736.html>.

¹⁰ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise*, xxiv.

to China. They may lean closer to China if the United States recedes or becomes comparatively lukewarm in its security engagement.¹¹

Finally, this topic is significant because Sino-Southeast Asian security relationships are likely to continue to expand in the near term.¹² Consequently, this development will only grow in relevance and significance over the next decade, particularly as competition between the United States and China intensifies.¹³ Understanding what is driving the development on the Chinese side and the Southeast Asian side of the equation will better enable the United States to position itself to stay ahead of the trajectory and retain its hard-earned influence in the region. Furthermore, understanding what is driving Chinese security policy in Southeast Asia may be instructive in predicting future policy maneuvers if and when China's reach expands elsewhere. Due to the strategic importance of the region to China, growing trends in Chinese foreign policy are visible in this area of the world first before they manifest in other areas.¹⁴

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is divided into three sections. The first section establishes that security cooperation between China and Southeast Asia has been increasing from the period of 2000 to 2017. Section two examines increased security cooperation from the Chinese perspective and offers leading assessments on why China has been actively pursuing closer security relationships, specifically by identifying what objectives China is seeking to accomplish. Section three of the literature review considers the Southeast Asian perspective, providing prominent assessments of the key factors that influence the degree to which states in the region to seek, accept, or reject closer security cooperation with China.

¹¹ Vaughn and Morrison, *China-Southeast Asia Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications for the United States*, 35.

¹² Li, "The People's Liberation Army and China's Smart Power Quandary in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 3 (March 2015): 365, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2014.1002910>, 365.

¹³ Ian Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," *Asian Security* 8, no. 3 (October 2012): 307, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2012.723928>.

¹⁴ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 47.

1. Deepening Security Cooperation between China and Southeast Asia

In order to address the research question raised in this thesis, it is first imperative to establish that security relationships between China and its neighbors in Southeast Asia have in fact deepened in recent years. First, regarding definitions, the term security cooperation is understood to encompass a wide range of activities: formal defense agreements, visits among senior defense officials, military training exchanges, bilateral or multilateral military exercises, naval port calls, and arms sales or military aid.¹⁵ The term defense diplomacy is more commonly used to describe these activities in Southeast Asia, and the term military diplomacy is more common in China.¹⁶ Second, regarding the timeframe examined, this thesis will examine the trajectory of Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation from 2000 to 2017. The early 2000s mark the key timeframe in which modern Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation began to expand, and 2017 represents the last full calendar year for which data is expected to be available prior to publication. Last, the region of Southeast Asia is understood to include the following eleven countries: Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, East Timor, and the Philippines.

There is wide consensus that security cooperation between China and Southeast Asia has been steadily deepening. This development is generally marked as having begun in the early 2000s.¹⁷ During this time period, China negotiated multiple bilateral and multilateral agreements and began regular exchanges among senior defense officials in order to facilitate further security cooperation going forward.¹⁸ By the year 2000, China signed bilateral joint declarations with eight Southeast Asian states, indicating an intent to

¹⁵ Laksmana, "Regional Order by Other Means? Examining the Rise of Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 253–254.

¹⁶ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 290.

¹⁷ Ibid, 287.

¹⁸ Ibid, 292.

increase security contact.¹⁹ In 2001, China created its first bilateral Defense and Security Consultation (DSC) or Defense Policy Dialogue (DPD) with Thailand and established those mechanisms with five additional Southeast Asian countries by 2012.²⁰ At the multilateral level, China became a proactive participant in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 2000, issued Joint Declarations on security related matters in 2002 and 2003, and established the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus in 2010.²¹ Another tool helping to create more opportunities for cooperation has been exchanges among senior defense officials. China has deployed defense attachés to all ten ASEAN countries and has been holding annual defense consultations with six ASEAN countries to discuss opportunities for further security cooperation.²²

These mechanisms have enabled China to increase security dialogue and cooperation with Southeast Asian states, paving the way for more military exercise activities, naval port calls, and arms sales in the region since the early 2000s. In 2005, China conducted its first military exercise in the region, a single bilateral exercise with one Southeast Asian country, Thailand.²³ That same year, China conducted only one naval port call to the region, and its exported arms to the region were only estimated at 34 million Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) trend-indicator value (TIV).²⁴ Looking at more recent activity reveals a clear elevation in the level of security cooperation activity. In 2017, China participated in three bilateral exercises with three different Southeast Asian countries and in six multilateral exercises in which ten Southeast Asian

¹⁹ Gudrun Wacker, *Security Cooperation in East Asia*, ISSN 1863–1053 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2015), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/security-cooperation-in-east-asia/>.

²⁰ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 68.

²¹ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 291–292.

²² Ibid, 296–297.

²³ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 68.

²⁴ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment and SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (object name TIV-Export-CHI-2000-2017; accessed January 21, 2019), <http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php>.

countries were also participants or observers.²⁵ That same year, China conducted eleven port calls to eight different Southeast Asian states, and its exported arms to the region were valued at 230 million SIPRI TIV.²⁶

These trends, which will be examined in greater detail in subsequent chapters, not only indicate an increase in Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation but also demonstrate that Southeast Asia has become China's priority region for expanding its defense relationships. The majority of China's security overtures in Asia has been directed at Southeast Asian countries. More specifically, approximately 54% of China's recent security cooperation activities have been concentrated among Southeast Asian and Oceanic countries for the period of 2000–2016.²⁷ For comparison, the next most prominent region of focus, South Asia, is far behind, representing only 21% of Chinese security interactions in Asia.²⁸ China's designation of Southeast Asia as a priority region for security cooperation, in combination with a clear pattern of deepening security interactions in over the past several years, suggests that the trend will only continue into the future.

²⁵ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment and Davis, "China holds first joint exercise with Myanmar Navy" and Defenseworld.net, "US-Thai Military Exercise To Have Participation From China" and Ministry of Defense Sri Lanka, "'Exercise - Cormorant Strike VIII 2017' begins" and Montsane News Agency, "'Khaan Quest - 2017' assembles troops from 26 nations" and National Archives of Singapore, "Ex COORES 2017" and Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017* and Open Source Enterprise, "Japanese Report: Singaporean Navy Frigate Docks in China To Engage in Military Exercises" and Open Source Enterprise, "Singapore Frigates Lead Multinational Group Sails for International Maritime Review" and Open Source Enterprise, "Singapore: 'Militaries From 18 Nations in Disaster Relief Exercise'" and Pakistan Today, "Multinational naval exercise AMAN 2017 to start from tomorrow."

²⁶ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database and China Military Online, "China, Brunei hold joint naval drill" and Davis, "China holds first joint exercise with Myanmar Navy" and Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Thailand, "Chinese Naval Fleet Arrived in Thailand for Visit" and Huang, "Chinese hospital ship Peace Ark visits Timor-Leste" and Open Source Enterprise, "Cambodia: PRC's East Sea Fleet Arrives in Sihanoukville Port for Goodwill Visit 30 Sep-3 Oct 2017" and Open Source Enterprise, "Malaysia: Foreign Minister Says Chinese Warship Docking Not Sign of 'Quasi-Alliance' With China" and Open Source Enterprise, "Southeast Asia Snapshot 5 May 2017" and Page and Watts, "Chinese Submarine's Malaysian Port Call Signals Regional Power Shift."

²⁷ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," 48.

²⁸ Ibid.

2. Chinese Objectives for Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia

Across an array of primary sources released over the past two decades, China has consistently identified regional security cooperation as a strategic priority. The emphasis on regional security cooperation in its modern form was first elevated as part of the “new security concept” introduced in the late 1990s.²⁹ Since that time, it has been consistently stressed in white papers or when Chinese defense officials have made public remarks on the subject of security. For example, in a white paper on China’s national defense in 2010, China specifically highlighted the building of “cooperative military relations” and the holding of “military exchanges and cooperation” with neighboring countries as among the “goals and tasks of China’s national defense.”³⁰ The same document also identified “joint military exercises and training with other countries” as a demonstration of China’s security role in the region and the world, specifically mentioning joint maritime exercises with Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam. In China’s most recent white paper on military strategy, published in 2015, a spokesman for the Ministry of National Defense again emphasized regional security cooperation explicitly, stating an intent to “actively expand military and security cooperation” and “deepen military relations” with neighboring countries.³¹

It is not just the defense community in China that is underscoring the importance of regional defense relationships. In a white paper published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2017, China called for intensifying military cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.³² Specifically, China emphasized the need for the development of a regional multilateral security framework and highlighted the centrality of ASEAN with regard to inculcating closer regional cooperation. China delineated each of its current engagement mechanisms with ASEAN states, including the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ARF, and the

²⁹ Heginbotham, “China’s Strategy in Southeast Asia,” 67.

³⁰ “China’s National Defense in 2010,” State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, March 31, 2011, http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7114675.htm.

³¹ “China’s Military Strategy,” State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, May 2015, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2015-05/26/content_4586805.htm.

³² “China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, January 11, 2017, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1429771.shtml.

ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), and advocated for using each mechanism to further deepen security cooperation. Separately, in remarks after the China-ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting, Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized that improving security relationships with ASEAN states would continue to be a priority moving forward, stating that security cooperation "will be elevated to a higher level" and that the "two sides will further expand defense exchange and security affairs cooperation."³³

There is large degree of consensus on China's overall strategic goal in Southeast Asia. China's primary objective is to establish regional preeminence and thereby contribute to cementing its status as a great power.³⁴ In addition, a review of relevant sources has identified some supporting goals that aid this primary purpose. These include establishing influence within key Southeast Asian states that can be wielded to serve Chinese interests, preventing encirclement by the United States or its allies, and assuaging regional anxieties about perceived Chinese aggressive intent. It should be noted that these objectives are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Additionally, it should also be acknowledged that security cooperation is not the sole means to achieve these objectives. However, the deepening of security ties in Southeast Asia is crucial for China because a dearth of such relationships would be an obstacle to the achievement of its enumerated goals in the region.³⁵

Chief among China's aspirations is to become the most influential country in Southeast Asia and to achieve the "Chinese Dream," as elucidated by President Xi Jinping in 2012, of re-attaining the country's former greatness as a premier power.³⁶ Attaining this

³³ Wang Yi, "Wang Yi's Remarks on the Biggest Highlight and Deliverable of the China-ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting," August 3, 2018, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1582742.shtml.

³⁴ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017), https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017_China_Military_Power_Report.PDF.

³⁵ Li, "The People's Liberation Army and China's Smart Power Quandary in Southeast Asia," 379.

³⁶ Li, "The People's Liberation Army and China's Smart Power Quandary in Southeast Asia," 362 and Zhang Zhixin, "China's International Strategy and its Implications for Southeast Asia," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2016): 55, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/1787062495/fulltext/F072914ACEF34E80PQ/1?accountid=12702>.

dream by gaining regional preeminence and great power status will require China to nourish and leverage its growing strength, including its rapidly developing military.³⁷ Security cooperation with states in Southeast Asia directly contributes to this endeavor. Military exchanges and exercises with states in the region provide China with the opportunity to build confidence in their military strength and increase operational experience and proficiency.³⁸ Furthermore, they offer China a platform to “demonstrate our fine image on the international stage.”³⁹ By showcasing its emergent capabilities during various regional engagements, China is able to contribute to its desired international image as a great power with the requisite military might to match.⁴⁰ China is also contributing to its desired image as a great power by taking a leading role in the effort to build regional security relationships and by showing a willingness to take on a greater level of responsibility. China is demonstrating its awareness that, as the dominant rising power in the region, it should shoulder “greater responsibilities for regional and global security” and provide “more public security services to the Asia-Pacific region and the world at large.”⁴¹

Among China’s other objectives is to gain greater influence in certain Southeast Asian countries that can then be exerted to serve China’s wider policy goals. China has been able to use security cooperation as one of its tools towards achieving this end.⁴² Southeast Asian states in which China has made the most progress in advancing defense relationships to establish influence include Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand.⁴³ For example, since extending military aid and other support to Cambodia, the country has

³⁷ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2017*.

³⁸ Heginbotham, “China’s Strategy in Southeast Asia,” 69 and Wacker, *Security Cooperation in East Asia*.

³⁹ Yang Yujin, “Defense Ministry’s Regular Press Conference on Dec. 25, 2014,” Ministry of National Defense, December 25, 2014, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2014-12/25/content_4560614.htm.

⁴⁰ Storey, “China’s Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia,” 293.

⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation.”

⁴² Allen, Saunders, and Chen, “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” 57.

⁴³ Storey, “China’s Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia,” 288.

supported China on a number of issues, even blocking ASEAN's adoption of statements deemed inimical to China's interests.⁴⁴ China has also made a concerted effort to use security cooperation to establish stronger relations with other states, particularly the largest and most influential states in Southeast Asia.⁴⁵ Notably, China has only established DSCs or DPDs with Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Malaysia, not with smaller or less prominent states like Cambodia and Myanmar, demonstrating a preference based on the size of the state and the amount of influence it wields in the region.⁴⁶

Additionally, China wants to prevent Southeast Asian states aligned with the United States from encircling China and countering its growing prominence. Preventing American preeminence in Southeast Asia is one of China's central priorities in the region.⁴⁷ Security cooperation is one of the means that China has employed towards accomplishing this objective. Since the early 2000s, China has used security cooperation to exploit potential rifts in U.S. defense partnerships, seeking opportunities to bolster its own security relationships and even supplant American ones.⁴⁸ For example, when Philippine relations with the U.S. temporarily soured in 2004 and Thailand experienced a suspension of American military assistance in 2006, China quickly stepped in to offer military aid to both countries.⁴⁹ Additionally, in order to help prevent alignment among Southeast Asian states themselves, China uses diplomatic efforts, including security cooperation, to establish closer ties with certain states, thereby making it more difficult for the region to unite and form an anti-China bloc.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 292 and Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 55.

⁴⁵ Huong Le Thu, "China's Dual Strategy of Coercion and Inducement towards ASEAN," *The Pacific Review* (January 2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1417325> and Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 68–69.

⁴⁶ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 68–69.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 50.

⁴⁸ Ian Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 69.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Huong, "China's Dual Strategy of Coercion and Inducement towards ASEAN," 2.

Lastly, China also aspires to form closer security relationships with Southeast Asian neighbors in order to reinforce its desired narrative of a peaceful rise and to assuage perceptions of its aggressiveness, which could otherwise lead states to act to contain it. Chinese policy makers are aware that some Southeast Asian leaders feel threatened by China's growing military strength.⁵¹ They seek to counteract this impression by inculcating an image of China as a "security partner" and "security provider" rather than a security threat.⁵² Military engagements are a good way to contribute to this image. They enable China to improve mutual trust and deepen cooperation.⁵³ Military exercises generate good will, with multilateral exercises being the most useful as they provide a wider audience for whom to demonstrate peaceful intent.⁵⁴ Positive military relationships strengthen China's narrative that its growing military power is a net gain for the region because it enables China to contribute to regional and global security and peace.⁵⁵

3. Factors Influencing Southeast Asian Receptiveness to Chinese Security Cooperation

A review of a variety of relevant sources demonstrates that there are multiple factors, both at the systemic and domestic levels, that influence the degree to which Southeast Asian countries conduct security cooperation with China. At the systemic level, there is wide consensus that a central factor influencing a state's propensity to seek, accept, or reject closer security cooperation with China stems from the changing power dynamics in the region and the accompanying pressures placed on countries therein. The rise of another great power in the region and vacillating levels of U.S. engagement influences the degree to which Southeast Asian states choose to conduct security cooperation with China. In addition, a review of key sources indicates that there are also number of factors at play

⁵¹ Li, "The People's Liberation Army and China's Smart Power Quandary in Southeast Asia," 360–361.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Yang, "Defense Ministry's Regular Press Conference on Dec. 25, 2014."

⁵⁴ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 69 and Allen, Saunders, and Chen. "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," 30.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation."

at the unit level that influence the degree to which Southeast Asian states conduct security cooperation with China, to include: the presence or absence of an ongoing territorial dispute with China and the occurrence of major domestic political transitions, specifically when they are accompanied by a significant degree of illiberalism or human rights abuses.

In the face of changing great power dynamics in the region caused by the rise of China, Southeast Asian states are under pressure to either bandwagon with China, hedge between China and the United States, or balance against China. Virtually all Southeast Asian states are electing the hedging option.⁵⁶ The calculus driving this strategy is multifaceted. Southeast Asian states are seeking to maintain relationships with both China and the United States because doing so increases the range of support available; it enables them to solicit benefits from two major powers as opposed to just one.⁵⁷ Additionally, most Southeast Asian states are seeking to maintain an equilibrium among their foreign partnerships in order to ensure that they do not become too dependent on one major power.⁵⁸ Dependence on one major power can have drawbacks. Southeast Asian states that align heavily with one partner are at greater risk of being dominated by an external power that could intimidate them into taking actions that run counter to their own sovereign interests.⁵⁹

This hedging approach and reticence to rely too heavily on a single foreign power is evident across the region among both mainland and maritime Southeast Asian states.⁶⁰ For example, both Thailand and the Philippines have implemented this strategy, though to varying degrees. Thailand has become China's closest partner in Southeast Asia on the

⁵⁶ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 299.

⁵⁷ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise*.

⁵⁸ Catharin Dalpino, "The U.S.-Thailand Alliance: Continuity and Change in the 21st Century," in *Strategic Asia 2014–15: U.S. Alliances and Partnerships*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis, Abraham M. Denmark, and Greg Chaffin (Seattle and Washington, DC: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2014), 158.

⁵⁹ Long, "The United States, Southeast Asia, and Asia-Pacific Security," 4.

⁶⁰ Dalpino, "The U.S.-Thailand Alliance: Continuity and Change in the 21st Century," 158.

mainland while also maintaining its primary military relationship with the United States.⁶¹ Though it remains an American treaty ally and regularly conducts major bilateral exercises with U.S. forces, Thailand has been conducting joint exercises with China since 2005, has signed multiple agreements with China to increase defense cooperation, and has elected to purchase a substantial amount of arms from China, including advanced equipment like Main Battle Tanks (MBT) and Yuan submarines.⁶²

While the Philippine strategy has changed over time, a similar hedging dynamic is emerging in the Philippines. President Duterte seems to be seeking a middle ground between his predecessors' approaches, opting for neither President Macapagal-Arroyo's open deference for China nor President Aquino's open defiance for China and preference for the United States.⁶³ While the Philippines remains an American treaty ally, and the United States remains a significantly larger defense partner than China, Duterte has canceled or reduced in scope several exercises with the United States.⁶⁴ Simultaneously, he has acquired Chinese-made weapons for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), and he has suggested that the Philippines and China should consider conducting joint military exercises.⁶⁵

Relatedly, the level of perceived U.S. commitment and engagement in the region can also influence how states choose to interact with China. Due to the prevalence of hedging in the region, one would expect to see Southeast Asian states seek to improve their

⁶¹ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 55 and Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 294.

⁶² Yoshihide Matsuura and Hideo Tomikawa, "Chapter 4 Southeast Asia: ASEAN – Pulled Between China and the United States," National Institute for Defense Studies, 2018, <http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/east-asian/index.html> and Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security*, 295, 303.

⁶³ Aileen Baviera, "President Duterte's Foreign Policy Challenges," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 38, no. 2 (2016): 205.

⁶⁴ Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," *Philippine Political Science Journal* 38, no. 3 (December 2017): 169, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01154451.2017.1412161>.

⁶⁵ Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Foreign Policy: Unraveling the Aquino Administration's Balancing Agenda on an Emergent China," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35, no. 3: 141 and Prasanth Parameswaran, "Are China-Philippines Military Exercises Under Duterte Coming Soon?" *The Diplomat*, July 11, 2017.

security relationship with China during periods when they are cooperating more closely with the United States. Conversely, one would expect to see Southeast Asian states pull back on their security relationship with China during periods when their relations with the United States diminish. This approach would enable Southeast Asian states to maintain the desired equilibrium between the great powers in the region and not allow one power to become too dominant. However, this is not always the pattern that manifests. In some cases, there is an inverse as opposed to a direct correlation between Southeast Asian states' security relations with the United States and China.

During periods in which Southeast Asian states' security relationship with the United States weakened, or when they perceived U.S. commitment to the region to be waning, some states sought or accepted warmer security relations with China. For example, in 2004, during the post-9/11 period in which counter-terrorism became the top U.S. security priority, the Philippine relationship with the United States became strained.⁶⁶ Simultaneously, the Macapagal-Arroyo administration in the Philippines began to succumb to the Chinese charm offensive, entertaining Chinese offers to donate millions of dollars' worth of equipment to the AFP and to conduct bilateral training.⁶⁷ More recently, after the election of President Duterte in 2016, the Philippines began to re-orient away from the United States and towards China due in part to the new president's lack of confidence in the U.S. commitment to his country's defense.⁶⁸ In Cambodia and Thailand, both countries expanded their security relationship with China in the aftermath of a withdrawal of U.S. defense support.⁶⁹ Additional factors were at play in these latter incidents, as will be discussed later in this section, but they also demonstrate a dynamic in which a deterioration of the U.S. security relationship was accompanied simultaneously by an improvement in the Chinese security relationship.

⁶⁶ Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security*, 262.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ann Marie Murphy, "Great Power Rivalries, Domestic Politics and Southeast Asian Foreign Policy: Exploring the Linkages," *Asian Security* 13, no. 3 (August 2017): 174, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2017.1354566>.

⁶⁹ Yoshihide and Hideo, "Chapter 4 Southeast Asia: ASEAN – Pulled Between China and the United States."

While the systemic pressures accompanying China's rise and changing great power dynamics are strong, it should be noted that they do not influence all Southeast Asian states equally. While most states are hedging, there are certain states in Southeast Asia, like Cambodia or Myanmar, that are responding to changing systemic dynamics differently. These states are choosing to maintain closer relations with China rather than to hedge.⁷⁰ In order to understand why Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation varies significantly in intensity across countries despite the entire region witnessing the same change in systemic power dynamics, it is crucial to also consider unit-level factors in determining a state's likelihood to seek, accept, or reject Chinese security cooperation.⁷¹

Firstly, major domestic political changes, such as regime changes or leadership transitions, influence Southeast Asian states' level of security cooperation with China. Political transitions do not always result in warmer security relations with China, so they cannot be considered causal in and of themselves. There must also be certain other conditions at play to explain why major domestic political changes are sometimes accompanied by an expansion of security cooperation with China and sometimes are not. When domestic political shifts in Southeast Asian states are predicated or followed by what major Western security partners would consider to be heightened illiberalism or human rights abuses, then those shifts are often followed by an increase in security cooperation with China. This tends to occur because such abuses limit the availability of support from major security partners like the United States and other Western powers. China, in comparison, stands out as viable partner when support dries up elsewhere because it does not impose the same conditions on its security cooperation.⁷²

Demonstrations of this phenomenon are evident across the region. For example, Myanmar became an "international pariah" in 1990 after the military junta refused to

⁷⁰ Laksmana, "Regional Order by Other Means? Examining the Rise of Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 265.

⁷¹ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 68 and Huong, "China's Dual Strategy of Coercion and Inducement towards ASEAN," 5.

⁷² Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 72–73.

recognize the results of democratic elections in the country.⁷³ Myanmar needed both economic and military aid in order to ensure its regime's survival, but its options were limited due to the international condemnation and sanctions its behavior incurred.⁷⁴ Looking to its northeastern neighbor, Myanmar had a willing partner in China, which was facing similar international isolation after allegations of illiberalism and human rights abuses surrounding the Tiananmen Square incident.⁷⁵ In Cambodia, after a violent coup heralded in new leadership in 1997, the country's security relationship with China strengthened.⁷⁶ China became a reliable alternative to fill any Cambodian defense shortfalls after the United States postponed and reduced military cooperation due to concerns about human rights abuses associated with the coup.⁷⁷ Similarly, after a military coup in 2014 in Thailand in which the National Council for Peace and Order took over the government, the United States reduced military assistance, and the country's security relationship with China became closer.⁷⁸ In the Philippines, U.S. criticism of human rights abuses in the country after the accession of President Duterte in 2016 is one of the central factors that damaged the Philippine relationship with the United States.⁷⁹ The criticism contributed to Duterte's decision to openly express doubt about his country's defense relationship with the United States and to begin accepting new forms of security assistance from China.⁸⁰

Secondly, the presence or absence of an ongoing territorial dispute between a Southeast Asian state and China has also had a significant impact on the degree to which

⁷³ Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security*, 151.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 293 and Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security*, 176.

⁷⁷ Yoshihide and Hideo, "Chapter 4 Southeast Asia: ASEAN – Pulled Between China and the United States."

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

that state will engage in security cooperation with China. Those states that have significant territorial disputes with China have tended to be less receptive to Chinese overtures writ large, including in the security realm.⁸¹ For example, Vietnam and the Philippines have major maritime territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea. These disputes have served as significant irritants constraining the development of close bilateral relations between these Southeast Asian states and China.⁸² China has not yet conducted bilateral exercises with the Philippines or Vietnam, and those countries only started participating in multilateral exercises with China in 2014 and 2015, respectively.⁸³ By contrast, Thailand, a country with which China has no major territorial disputes, is among China's closest bilateral security partners in Southeast Asia, with Thailand often serving as the first country with which China achieves a new security cooperation milestone.⁸⁴ Cambodia is similarly unencumbered by territorial disputes with China, and it is among China's closest partners in Southeast Asia.⁸⁵ Additionally, China's largest arms sales customers in Southeast Asia are states with which China does not have contested territorial claims in the South China Sea: Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia.⁸⁶

Some may point to the Philippines, particularly since 2016 when President Duterte was elected, as having come to represent an exception to the observation that territorial disputes tend to slow Southeast Asian security cooperation with China. However, while President Duterte has made some clear steps towards China in the defense realm, the defense relationship between the two states is still nascent and limited. This is especially apparent in comparison with the Sino-Thai defense relationship or in comparison with the U.S.-Philippine relationship. Further, the fact that Duterte's increasing receptiveness to engaging China in the field security cooperation started in 2016 only serves to reinforce

⁸¹ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 72.

⁸² Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security*, 124.

⁸³ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment.

⁸⁴ Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security*, 124.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 176.

⁸⁶ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 298.

the observation that defense relationships with Southeast Asian states that have major territorial disputes with China tend to develop later than with states that do not have a dispute.

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This thesis highlights four hypotheses as key explanations for the growth in Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation.

- **Hypothesis 1:** Decreased security cooperation with the United States drives Southeast Asian states to seek or accept greater security cooperation with China.
- Southeast Asian states desiring security cooperation with a strong external power turn to China as an alternative means of support during periods in which the United States becomes less active or reliable as a security partner. This option has become more viable for Southeast Asian states in recent years as China has grown in military strength and technical capability and has gained a greater capacity to engage in security cooperation at a level increasingly commensurate with the United States.
- **Hypothesis 2:** A desire to minimize their dependence on a single source of external security support drives Southeast Asian states to engage in greater security cooperation with China.
- Southeast Asian states are wary of the amount of influence that accrues to an external power when they become too dependent on that power as the primary purveyor of external security support. When one major power has primacy in this way, it is able to wield considerable influence on Southeast partner states to the degree that their strategic autonomy becomes infringed upon. In order to temper the influence that any one power can wield, some Southeast Asian states seek to diversify their major defense partners. As

mentioned above, China is an increasingly viable option as a defense partner due to its growth in military power and capability. Consequently, some states are turning to China as an option for diversification.

- **Hypothesis 3:** Major domestic political changes, specifically changes in regime or political leadership, drive Southeast Asian states to seek or accept closer security cooperation with China when the transition is illiberal and/or accompanied by an increase in human rights abuses.
 - Significant changes in domestic politics have often been followed by shifts in the security relationship between Southeast Asian states and China. However, this does not always occur. Consequently, major changes in domestic politics, specifically changes in regime or political leadership, cannot be considered causal factors in and of themselves. Domestic political transitions are accompanied by an increase in Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation when political illiberalism and human rights abuses are apparent. In these cases, Southeast Asian states seek or accept security cooperation from China due to an inability to secure support from other powers.
- **Hypothesis 4:** The presence or absence of major territorial disputes between Southeast Asian states and China significantly impacts the degree to which Southeast Asian states conduct security cooperation with China.
 - Southeast Asian states with which China has a territorial dispute tend to limit their engagement with China in bilateral security activities. Consequently, when there is an active territorial dispute between China and a Southeast Asian state, security cooperation between the countries tends to be lower. Conversely, when there is not an active territorial dispute between China and a Southeast

Asian state, security cooperation between the countries tends to be higher.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

The first major portion of this thesis will focus on establishing the range and scope of Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation from both the Chinese and Southeast Asian sides of the equation. The research design will examine a wide variety of sources, to include interviews with subject matter experts, scholarly articles, primary sources from China and Southeast Asia, and various other sources of data regarding defense sales, military exercises, naval port calls, and other forms of security cooperation. Broadly, these sources will be used to assess the overall level of security cooperation between China and various Southeast Asian states between 2000 and 2017 and to capture the variance in types of security cooperation from one bilateral relationship to another. Additionally, these sources will be used to elaborate upon the objectives that China is seeking to accomplish through regional security cooperation and to explore the range of actions that China has taken to encourage further activity in that realm. Finally, these sources will be used to classify the range of Southeast Asian participation across the region and thereby establish a spectrum along which countries can be placed, ranging from those that have most actively sought Chinese security cooperation and those that have been most reluctant.

The second major portion of this thesis will focus on examining specific Southeast Asian countries and the factors affecting the degree to which they conduct security cooperation with China in greater depth. In order to limit the scope of the project, this thesis will not include a programmatic examination of each Southeast Asian country's security relationship with China. Rather, the thesis will use a case study approach, examining a representative sample of two countries in the region and identifying what factors are most significantly influencing each country's level of security cooperation with China. In order to cover different portions of the spectrum elaborated in the previous section of the thesis, the thesis will examine a country in the region that is among the closest cooperators with China and a country on the other end of the spectrum that has had much more limited and nascent security engagement with China. Respectively, the two countries

are Thailand and the Philippines. Thailand and the Philippines are also selected because they represent the two countries in Southeast Asia in which the United States' strategic security interest is highest.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis will be comprised of five chapters. Chapter I introduces the research question that the project is attempting to answer, provides necessary background information on the subject, specifies hypotheses, and offers an overview of the analysis to follow. Chapter II examines the phenomenon of increased security cooperation between China and Southeast Asia from the Chinese perspective, analyzing the range and scope of Chinese actions to increase security cooperation in the region from 2000 to 2017 and elaborating on the objectives China is seeking to accomplish with such activity, as well as some of the limitations impeding its progress. Chapter III examines the phenomenon from the Southeast Asian perspective, examining the range and scope of Southeast Asian efforts to seek, accept, or reject security cooperation during the same time period. Chapter IV will examine Thailand and the Philippines in greater depth, utilizing a case study approach to identify what factors are influencing each state's determination regarding the level of security cooperation it conducts with China. Chapter V will offer conclusions on the subject of Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation and assess implications for the region and for U.S. policy.

II. SINO-SOUTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY COOPERATION: THE CHINESE SIDE OF THE EQUATION

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyzes increasing Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation during the period of 2000–2017 from the Chinese side of the equation, expanding upon concepts introduced in the literature review of Chapter I in order to fully address the sub-question: Why is China pursuing closer security relationships with states in Southeast Asia? The answer to this question is multifold. China has prioritized deepening Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation in order to serve several strategic objectives: to regain regional preeminence and establish itself as a great power, to assuage perceptions of its aggressiveness, to establish influence in key countries that can be leveraged to serve Chinese interests, and to undercut U.S. encirclement and dominance in the region. While security cooperation alone cannot achieve these objectives, it is among the key tools that China is employing to complement other measures such as economic and diplomatic outreach.

This chapter addresses the sub-question in four subsequent sections. First, it details the overall scale of security cooperation that China has conducted in Southeast Asia for the period of 2000 to 2017. Second, it elaborates upon the four primary objectives that China is seeking to achieve through deeper security cooperation in Southeast Asia, as well introduce some secondary objectives. Then, it addresses some of the factors on the Chinese side that are limiting China's rate of progress in developing closer security relationships in Southeast Asia.

B. SCALE OF CHINESE SECURITY COOPERATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

As indicated in Chapter I, the term security cooperation is understood to encompass a wide range of activities: formal defense agreements, visits among senior defense officials, military training exchanges, bilateral or multilateral military exercises, naval port calls, and

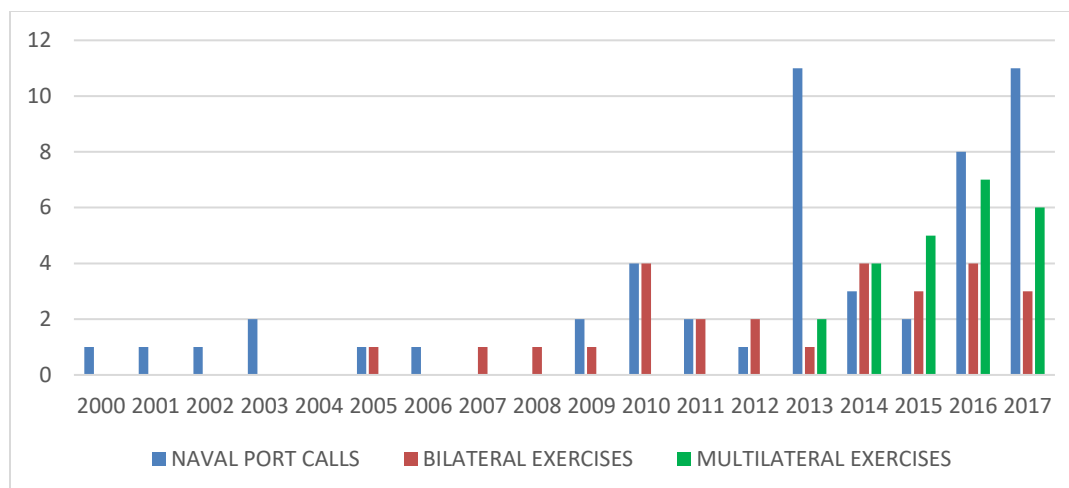
arms sales or military aid.⁸⁷ While acknowledging this full range of activity is necessary to understand the wide breadth of security cooperation activities taking place between China and Southeast Asian counterparts, this and subsequent chapters will focus more specifically on the most visible and easily quantifiable forms of security cooperation for the sake of concision and clarity: naval port visits, bilateral and multilateral exercises, and arms sales. This section will present aggregate totals for these activities in order to capture the scale of China's security cooperation activities in Southeast Asia as a whole. Country specific breakdowns will be provided in Chapter III in order to demonstrate the range and scope of participation among individual Southeast Asian countries.

The early 2000s are generally marked as the period in which Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation began to steadily grow.⁸⁸ An examination of the data on total numbers of naval port calls, bilateral exercises, multilateral exercises, and arms sales supports this generalization, indicating that such activities have been increasing from the early 2000s until 2017, with the steepest increase occurring in the past several years. The data also indicates that there is a pattern of succession in terms of when new forms of security cooperation were introduced and how they increased over time. Chinese naval port calls to the region preceded bilateral exercises, and bilateral exercises preceded multilateral exercises. Over time, as each of these activities was introduced, their frequency tended to increase over subsequent years. Arms sales, while persistent throughout the early 2000s in modest levels, underwent a marked increase in recent years, starting in 2011.⁸⁹ Subsequent sections will examine each of these trends, depicted in Figures 1 and 2, in closer detail.

⁸⁷ Laksmana, "Regional Order by Other Means? Examining the Rise of Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 253–254.

⁸⁸ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 287.

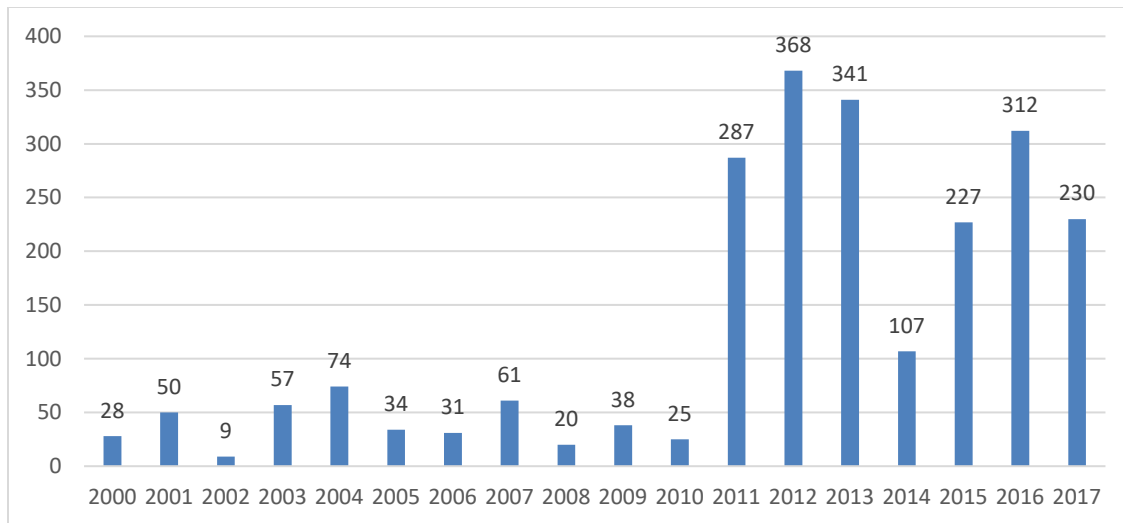
⁸⁹ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.



The figure above indicates the number of naval port calls, bilateral exercises, and multilateral exercises that China has conducted with Southeast Asian countries annually from 2000 to 2017. Naval port calls represent incidents in which People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) ship(s) visited a Southeast Asian port of call. Naval port calls accompanied by drills are not also counted separately as exercises. Bilateral exercises are exercises between China and one Southeast Asian participant. Multilateral exercises are exercises in which China and at least one Southeast Asian state were participants or observers in an exercise involving more than two countries. Exercises do not include joint patrols or police activities. Data for the years 2000–2016 is sourced from Institute for National Strategic Studies' *China Strategic Perspectives* publication, and data for the year 2017 is sourced from Open Source Enterprise and media reporting.

Figure 1. Chinese Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia, 2000–2017:
Naval Port Calls and Military Exercises⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Adapted from Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment and China Military Online, "China, Brunei hold joint naval drill" and Davis, "China holds first joint exercise with Myanmar Navy" and Defenseworld.net, "US-Thai Military Exercise To Have Participation From China" and Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Thailand, "Chinese Naval Fleet Arrived in Thailand for Visit" and Huang, "Chinese hospital ship Peace Ark visits Timor-Leste" and Ministry of Defense Sri Lanka, "'Exercise -Cormorant Strike VIII 2017' begins" and Montsame News Agency, "'Khaan Quest – 2017' assembles troops from 26 nations" and National Archives of Singapore, "Ex COORES 2017" and Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017* and Open Source Enterprise, "Cambodia: PRC's East Sea Fleet Arrives in Sihanoukville Port for Goodwill Visit 30 Sep-3 Oct 2017" and Open Source Enterprise, "Japanese Report: Singaporean Navy Frigate Docks in China To Engage in Military Exercises" and Open Source Enterprise, "Malaysia: Foreign Minister Says Chinese Warship Docking Not Sign of 'Quasi-Alliance' With China" and Open Source Enterprise, "Singapore Frigates Lead Multinational Group Sails for International Maritime Review" and Open Source Enterprise, "Singapore: 'Military From 18 Nations in Disaster Relief Exercise'" and Open Source Enterprise, "Southeast Asia Snapshot 5 May 2017" and Page and Watts, "Chinese Submarine's Malaysian Port Call Signals Regional Power Shift" and Pakistan Today, "Multinational naval exercise AMAN 2017 to start from tomorrow" and Parameswaran, "China, Cambodia to Launch Major Military Exercise 'Golden Dragon'" and ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting, "ADMM-PLUS HADR & MM Ex Was Impressive" and ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting, "Inaugural ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus Maritime Security Field Training Exercise."



This figure depicts the volume of transfers of major conventional weapons from China to Southeast Asia from 2000–2017, reflected in trend-indicator value (TIV), which is based on the unit production costs of the transferred weapons. The TIV represents the transfer of military resources, not the sales price for the arms sales. SIPRI TIVs are expressed in millions.

Figure 2. Chinese Arms Exports to Southeast Asia, 2000–2017⁹¹

1. Naval Port Calls

Chinese naval port calls to Southeast Asia have notably increased in annual number over the examined period, though the spike to their current level has been slow to develop. China averaged only one or two port calls per year between the years 2000 and 2009.⁹² However, there has been a marked increase in recent years, starting with the year 2010, when China conducted four port calls to four separate Southeast Asian states.⁹³ Although the number of port calls dropped again in 2011 and 2012 to two and one, respectively, the number surged to a high point of eleven port calls in 2013 to eight different Southeast Asian countries.⁹⁴ Successive years have featured slightly fewer port calls, but the overall trend suggests that China has assigned greater priority to conducting this activity in recent years.

⁹¹ Adapted from SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

⁹² Allen, Saunders, and Chen, “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” attachment.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

By 2016, with its visit to East Timor, China had conducted naval port calls to all eleven countries in Southeast Asia.⁹⁵

Chinese naval port calls to Southeast Asian countries have not just increased in frequency over the past several years; they have also increased in variety and complexity. All port calls to Southeast Asia for the period of 2000–2009 were considered simple “friendly visits.”⁹⁶ Such visits were primarily diplomatic in purpose and were not accompanied by any significant operational interaction between the Chinese and host nation navies.⁹⁷ However, starting in 2010, China began to conduct other activities in conjunction with port calls, to include replenishment operations, drills with host nation navies, or humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations (HADR).⁹⁸ Among the most visible example of this trend was in 2013, when China conducted its first “harmonious mission” in Southeast Asia with its hospital ship, the *Peace Ark*. That year, the *Peace Ark* conducted HADR operations in conjunction with port calls in four Southeast Asian countries.⁹⁹ While the majority of China’s naval port calls remain friendly, non-operational visits that do not include replenishment, drills, or humanitarian operations, China’s overall increase in these activities has amplified the benefit that China is able to garner from its naval visits in terms of both diplomacy and operational experience.¹⁰⁰

2. Military Exercises

Since the first Sino-Southeast Asian military exercise in 2005, exercises have increased both in terms of overall frequency and in terms of the number of partner countries. After its first exercise in 2005, China resumed military exercises in Southeast Asia in 2007, conducting one annually from 2007 through 2009 with only two Southeast

⁹⁵ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” attachment.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 33.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 35–37.

Asian states.¹⁰¹ Exercise activity increased but remained relatively modest in subsequent years until 2014 when China conducted a total of eight military exercises with five Southeast Asian partners.¹⁰² China would continue to build upon this elevated level of activity with eight bilateral or multilateral exercises in 2015, eleven exercises in 2016, and nine exercises in 2017.¹⁰³ In terms of number of partners during those years, China participated in exercises with eight different Southeast countries in 2015, nine in 2016, and ten in 2017.¹⁰⁴ By 2017, China had participated in at least one military exercise, whether bilateral or multilateral, with every country in Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁵

Sino-Southeast Asian exercises have not just grown in frequency; they have also become increasingly multilateral over time, as opposed to purely bilateral, and they have become increasingly complex, involving multiple services and encompassing a wider range of military activities. The trend towards more multilateral exercises began in 2013 when China conducted its first multilateral exercises with Southeast Asian participants, specifically ADMM-Plus exercises in the areas of HADR, military medicine, and maritime security.¹⁰⁶ Since then, China hit a high point of seven multilateral exercises in 2016, and in some years has even conducted more multilateral than bilateral exercises

¹⁰¹ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” attachment.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ China holds first joint exercise with Myanmar Navy” and Defenseworld.net, “US-Thai Military Exercise To Have Participation From China” and Ministry of Defense Sri Lanka, “‘Exercise -Cormorant Strike VIII 2017’ begins” and Montsame News Agency, “‘Khaan Quest – 2017’ assembles troops from 26 nations” and National Archives of Singapore, “Ex COORES 2017” and Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2017* and Open Source Enterprise, “Japanese Report: Singaporean Navy Frigate Docks in China To Engage in Military Exercises” and Open Source Enterprise, “Singapore Frigates Lead Multinational Group Sails for International Maritime Review” and Open Source Enterprise, “Singapore: ‘Militaries From 18 Nations in Disaster Relief Exercise’” and Pakistan Today, “Multinational naval exercise AMAN 2017 to start from tomorrow” and Parameswaran, “China, Cambodia to Launch Major Military Exercise ‘Golden Dragon.’”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting, “ADMM-PLUS HADR & MM Ex Was Impressive” and ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting, “Inaugural ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus Maritime Security Field Training Exercise.”

overall.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, China's military exercises in Southeast Asia initially focused on nontraditional security activities as opposed to combat operations.¹⁰⁸ From 2005 to 2009, and for part of 2010, all bilateral military exercises were in the areas of military operations other than war (MOOTW), anti-terrorism, or combat support.¹⁰⁹ However, starting in 2010, China also began conducting bilateral combat exercises, for example involving airborne assault or amphibious assault.¹¹⁰ All of China's multilateral exercises in Southeast Asia have been in nontraditional security operations, not combat operations.¹¹¹ Further, while initial Sino-Southeast Asian exercises involved only a single service, typically the Army or the Navy, China has begun to conduct joint operations, albeit to a limited extent. It conducted one joint exercise in 2014 and three joint exercises in 2016.¹¹²

3. Arms Sales

While traditionally being of secondary importance to China, military exports have become a progressively more significant element of its overall engagement policy. China is increasingly using targeted armed sales to entrench or improve its influence in key regions.¹¹³ China is among the world's fastest growing arms exporters. Overall, it has increased its exports of major arms by 38 percent from the period of 2008 to 2012 to the period of 2013 to 2017, and it has increased its share of global exports from two percent during the period of 2003 to 2007 to nearly six percent during the period of 2013 to 2017.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Jon Grevatt, "Conquest through commerce: China's growing industrial global footprint," Jane's by IHS Markit, last modified November 6, 2018, https://janes-ihs-com.libproxy.nps.edu/Janes/Display/FG_1220355-JDW.

¹¹⁴ Grevatt, "Conquest through commerce: China's growing industrial global footprint," and Wezeman et al., "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2017," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, March 2018, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2018/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2017>.

This trend of growing Chinese arms sales is observable in Southeast Asia, especially over the past decade, as the region is one of the target markets in which China has begun to use defense trade as a tool for deepening relations.¹¹⁵ Chinese exports to Southeast Asia have grown markedly in recent years, most notably since 2011.¹¹⁶ In terms of quantity, China's arms exports to Southeast Asia had an average value of 36 million SIPRI TIV from 2000 to 2010. However, in the year 2011, the total increased substantially to 287 million SIPRI TIV.¹¹⁷ Since then, arms export figures have remained comparably elevated, reaching a high point of 368 million SIPRI TIV in 2012.¹¹⁸ It is not just the sheer quantity of exports that has increased but also the number of customers in Southeast Asia. From 2001 to 2005, China only had one to two customer countries in Southeast Asia each year; however, by 2017, China had expanded its customer base significantly, having sold arms to at least seven different Southeast Asian countries by the end of that year.¹¹⁹ It should be noted that these figures represent only exports of major weapons, not more minor weapons and military equipment like small arms, ammunition, support equipment, etc.¹²⁰ So, figures including the full range of transferred equipment are likely higher.

C. CHINESE OBJECTIVES FOR SECURITY COOPERATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

1. Establish Regional Preeminence and Status as a Great Power

The first and primary objective that China is serving through pursuing closer security cooperation in Southeast Asia is its ambition to regain great power status and regional preeminence. In 2012, shortly before becoming the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, President Xi Jinping alluded to these goals when he introduced

¹¹⁵ Gabriel Dominguez, "Turning the tide in the South China Sea," *Jane's* by HIS Markit, last modified February 15, 2017, <https://janes-ihs-com.libproxy.nps.edu/Janes/Display/jdw64656-jdw-2017>.

¹¹⁶ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ "Sources and methods," SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/sources-and-methods/>.

the “Chinese Dream,” which has come to represent China’s central strategic drive to achieve national rejuvenation.¹²¹ While President Xi did not explicitly identify great power status and regional preeminence as his desired end state for China in this and other pronouncements, outside observers have interpreted these two goals to be encapsulated within the strategic vision of national rejuvenation.¹²² The very nature of the word “rejuvenation” is clarifying. In a speech delivered in 2017 at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi Jinping elaborated on the term’s intended meaning. He placed rejuvenation in the context of reviving China’s former glory, directly referencing how China had risen over the course of thousands of years to stand firmly among the “world’s great nations” before foreign aggressors intervened in the 19th century with the first Opium War.¹²³ It should be noted that the period of history that President Xi is venerating harkens back to a world order in which China was not just a great nation; China was the central, superior power to which peripheral nations were expected to submit and pay tribute.¹²⁴ The immediate juxtaposition of President Xi’s allusions to a period of history in which China was “one of the world’s great nations” and regionally dominant with his call for national rejuvenation would seem to indicate that his strategic vision is one in which China is once again a great power and regionally preeminent.

The task of achieving the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation is multifaceted and includes a significant focus on economic initiatives; however, a central element of the dream is also the development of a powerful military fit for a regionally preeminent great power.¹²⁵ Security cooperation is a vital contributor to this undertaking. Military exercises

¹²¹ Zhang, “China’s International Strategy and its Implications for Southeast Asia,” 55.

¹²² Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2017*.

¹²³ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017.

¹²⁴ John W. Garver, *Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992), 11–12.

¹²⁵ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2017*.

assist China in “accelerating the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) modernization.”¹²⁶ They enable China to increase its military’s confidence and operational proficiency through practice and execution of increasingly complex combined operations.¹²⁷ There are clear signs that this strategy is working. As already indicated, China is increasingly conducting multilateral exercises. Such exercises are not only more complicated to organize and execute, but they also draw larger audiences.¹²⁸ A preference for more multilateral exercises is therefore likely indicative of a Chinese military that is more confident in its level of operational proficiency and in its capacity for interoperability, as it is willing to showcase itself tackling more complex tasks even under the pressure of international scrutiny. The shift towards conducting combat related and joint exercises more frequently is also likely an indicator of China’s growing military confidence.

In addition to helping China to become a great power through supporting its military modernization, security cooperation also contributes to the goal of national rejuvenation by enabling China to visibly demonstrate itself as a first-rate power and responsible peer among international leaders. Bilateral and multilateral exercises offer the Chinese military a platform to showcase its desired image on the international stage.¹²⁹ By showing its military strength to an international audience, China’s is able to make a visible argument for its status as a great power.¹³⁰ It is aided in this endeavor by strategic media coverage of its bilateral and multilateral exercises. China’s media coverage of a recent exercise milestone demonstrates this tactic. China’s latest multilateral exercise with Southeast Asian states was the ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise-2018, taking place on October 2018 and representing the first joint maritime exercise among all 10 ASEAN

¹²⁶ State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, “China’s National Defense in 2010.”

¹²⁷ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” 29 and Wacker, *Security Cooperation in East Asia*.

¹²⁸ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” 30.

¹²⁹ Yang, “Defense Ministry’s Regular Press Conference on Dec. 25, 2014.”

¹³⁰ Storey, “China’s Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia,” 293.

countries and China.¹³¹ In publicity surrounding the exercise, state owned Chinese media lauded the event, framing it as a “new milestone” for regional security cooperation and for building China’s desired “community of common destiny” in the region.¹³²

Beyond providing an opportunity to exhibit its growing strength, security cooperation also enables China to showcase that it is taking on new roles and responsibilities in the region commensurate with those of a great power. China’s intent in advancing this narrative of itself as a responsible international power is apparent in its public pronouncements. In the same document in which the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs espoused the “Chinese Dream” of national rejuvenation, China asserted that it is its responsibility to ensure the “prosperity and stability” of the region and to provide “more public security services to the Asia-Pacific region and the world at large.”¹³³ China has observed from existing global leaders like the United States that providing support to weaker states is among the accepted tasks of great powers.¹³⁴

China has increasingly sought opportunities to visibly execute such tasks in recent years. In addition to conducting training or military exercises with weaker, less militarily proficient states in Southeast Asia, China has stepped up its assistance to peripheral countries in the realm of non-traditional security support like HADR. For example, China sent rescue and medical teams to Malaysia and Myanmar in 2015 and 2016 after natural disasters in those countries.¹³⁵ As mentioned previously, China’s hospital ship, the *Peace Ark*, has conducted multiple visits to Southeast Asia to provide humanitarian medical services in the wake of natural disasters or simply to provide assistance to areas whose medical infrastructure is relatively limited. For example, it visited the Philippines after

¹³¹ Li Wenfang. “China, ASEAN begin joint naval drill,” *China Daily*, October 23, 2018.

¹³² Li, “China, ASEAN begin joint naval drill.”

¹³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation.”

¹³⁴ Zhang, “China’s International Strategy and its Implications for Southeast Asia,” 57.

¹³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation.”

Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 and visited Timor-Leste in 2017.¹³⁶ China's participation in such activities is not unlike American interventions to provide non-traditional security support in similar instances. Consequently, and by design, when China conducts such interventions it likens itself to great power countries like the United States.

2. Establish Influence in Key States that Can Be Used to Serve Chinese Interests

Another objective that China is trying to achieve through closer security cooperation in Southeast Asia is its desire to establish influence in key countries that can then be leveraged to serve Chinese interests. By creating positive ties in Southeast Asia through mechanisms like security cooperation, China is building strategic relationships that can be called upon to serve its domestic and international agenda.¹³⁷ China has already used security cooperation to this end in multiple Southeast Asian countries, including Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand.¹³⁸ For example, while the relationship has not been wholly consistent throughout its tenure, China has largely been able to use its relationship with Myanmar to serve domestic interests.¹³⁹ This dynamic began when China first started supplying Myanmar with support, including military equipment, in 1988.¹⁴⁰ Since that time, China has had a substantial amount of influence in Myanmar, gaining access to crucial natural resources needed for China's development and using the country to serve as China's "eyes and ears" within ASEAN.¹⁴¹

Similarly, China has offered substantial support to Cambodia, including military aid, for the express purpose of gaining influence within the country.¹⁴² As with Myanmar,

¹³⁶ Ankit Panda, "Chinese Navy Hospital Ship Visits Timor-Leste, Highlighting Growing Ties," *The Diplomat*, December 18, 2017 and Will Oremus, "China Is Finally Sending Its 'Peace Ark' to the Philippines," *Slate*, November 20, 2013.

¹³⁷ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 50.

¹³⁸ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 292.

¹³⁹ Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security*, 145.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 292.

¹⁴² Ibid.

the strategy has borne fruit. Cambodia has reliably blocked the adoption of measures at ASEAN that China has found to be inimical to its interests, such as a joint statement on the South China Sea in 2012.¹⁴³ Additionally, Cambodia supported China in its rejection of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling on the South China Sea in 2015.¹⁴⁴ While it is not conclusive that China's security support to Cambodia was a leading factor in the latter country's decision to act in accordance with Chinese interests in these instances, China's strong security relationship with Cambodia likely had some influence in the country's calculus. In the same vein, though Thailand's military relationship with the U.S. presents a limiting factor not present in Myanmar or Cambodia, China's hope for Thailand is that it will also be a reliable partner that can help facilitate the more cooperative relationship that China desires in Southeast Asia.¹⁴⁵

There is evidence to suggest that China may be trying to pursue a similar strategy with the Philippines. Sensing an amenable recipient in President Duterte, China has offered to increase its engagement with the Philippines, including in the realm of security cooperation. During the Philippine crisis in Marawi in 2017, China provided weapons to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).¹⁴⁶ China conducted a port visit with three naval warships in the same year, and the Philippines and China also expressed mutual interest in conducting joint military exercises in the future.¹⁴⁷ Concurrently, the Philippines began to make policy changes in the interest of appeasing China.¹⁴⁸ For example, President Duterte has been vocally critical of his country's traditional ally and China's strategic rival, the United States, and he has also significantly reduced the number of regular exercises that

¹⁴³ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 55.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security*, 143.

¹⁴⁶ De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Foreign Policy: Unraveling the Aquino Administration's Balancing Agenda on an Emergent China," 141.

¹⁴⁷ De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Foreign Policy: Unraveling the Aquino Administration's Balancing Agenda on an Emergent China," 141 and Prasanth Parameswaran, "Are China-Philippines Military Exercises under Duterte Coming Soon?"

¹⁴⁸ Richard Heydarian, "Tragedy of Small Power Politics: Duterte and the Shifting Sands of Philippine Foreign Policy," *Asian Security* 13, no. 3 (August 2017): 233.

the Philippines conducts with the United States.¹⁴⁹ There is not a clear causal relationship between China's recent efforts to expand security cooperation with the Philippines and the Philippines' change in policy, as there are certainly other significant factors at play as well. However, it does seem apparent that China's influence in the Philippines is increasing and that security cooperation is one of mechanisms that it can use to continue this trend. In turn, if this influence continues to grow, China could attempt to wield it more decisively to serve China's interests.

3. Undercut U.S. Encirclement and Dominance in the Region

Lastly, China is also pursuing security cooperation in Southeast Asia in the interest of preventing U.S. encirclement and undercutting U.S. dominance in the region. China wants to undermine U.S. presence and influence in the region for multiple reasons. First, as indicated above, China is seeking to achieve regional preeminence as a reemergent great power. Naturally, if the United States retains a dominant security role Southeast Asia, then it presents an obstacle in China's path to preeminence as long as American security relationships in the region remain strong. However, there is another, more deeply seated reason that China seeks to prevent U.S. encirclement. China has a legacy that is informed by a period of its history between 1839 and 1949 in which the country was dominated and subjected to "humiliation" by aggressive and intrusive Western imperialist powers, including the United States.¹⁵⁰ This legacy has a reverberating impact that continues to inform Chinese policy today. In order to correct the injustices of that period of humiliation and to prevent their recurrence, China is determined to prevent any contemporary manifestations of great power encroachment by Western powers like the United States.¹⁵¹

Since 2000, China has repeatedly sought to insert itself into countries in which the United States has an existing security relationship in order to try to undermine or supplant

¹⁴⁹ De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," 169.

¹⁵⁰ Garver, *Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China*, 4.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 8.

extant U.S.-Southeast Asian relationships.¹⁵² China has used security cooperation as one of its tools in executing this strategy. For example, when U.S.-Philippine relations temporarily soured in 2004, China engaged in defense talks with the Philippines and also offered to donate heavy equipment to the country.¹⁵³ More recently, when U.S.-Philippine relations became more strained after the election of President Duterte in 2016, China stood ready to offer assistance. In one specific example, after Duterte curtailed an arms shipment from the U.S. in response to American lawmakers' criticism, China offered the Philippines small arms and patrol boats valuing \$14 million and also offered \$500 million in loans for additional Philippine acquisition of military equipment from China.¹⁵⁴ China acted similarly with regard to Thailand when the United States decreased its security assistance to the country in 2006 following a military coup.¹⁵⁵ Shortly thereafter, China extended \$49 million in military credit to the American ally.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, when another coup in Thailand in 2014 again resulted in a reduction of U.S. security cooperation, China pursued closer security relations with the country and sent more defense delegations to visit.¹⁵⁷ China has been comparably opportunistic with regard to Cambodia. American aid to Cambodia has consistently been subject to reduction or curtailment as a result of Cambodian human rights abuses.¹⁵⁸ Concurrently, China developed a close security relationship with the country, as it repeatedly stepped in to provide the military support needed to make up for the loss of American support.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 288, 299.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 299.

¹⁵⁴ De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," 169.

¹⁵⁵ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 300.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Yoshihide and Hideo, "Chapter 4 Southeast Asia: ASEAN – Pulled Between China and the United States."

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

In addition to opportunistically inserting itself into gaps in U.S. bilateral relationships with Southeast Asian states, China has been advocating a message designed to undermine the legitimacy of the U.S. presence in Asia. While not attacking the U.S. role in the region directly, President Xi Jinping has indirectly indicated publicly that he does not believe that the U.S. should have a dominant security role in Asia. During the 2014 summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), he stated that Asians themselves should resolve security problems in the region.¹⁶⁰ Further, he stated that resolving problems in the region could be achieved through deeper regional cooperation.¹⁶¹ The implication of both of these statements is that outside powers, like the United States, should not be involved.

4. Assuage Perceptions of Chinese Aggressiveness

Another objective that China is trying to achieve through pursuing closer security cooperation in Southeast Asia is its desire to assuage regional perceptions of its aggressiveness. Chinese foreign policymakers are aware that some states in Southeast Asia see China's growing military strength and its increasing use of coercive military power in the South China Sea as a threat and could seek to try to balance against it in response.¹⁶² In order to counteract this perception of threat, and thereby reduce the likelihood that states will seek to balance against its rising strength, China is seeking to create a more benevolent image.¹⁶³ Security cooperation is not the only means that China has at its disposal to inculcate a more positive image in Southeast Asia. China has been increasing its rate of foreign direct investment in the region and has initiated significant diplomatic, political,

¹⁶⁰ Zhang Ming'ai, "Security Stressed at CICA Summit," China.org.cn, last modified May 23, 2014, http://www.china.org.cn/world/2014-05/23/content_32472423.htm.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Li, "The People's Liberation Army and China's Smart Power Quandary in Southeast Asia," 360–361.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

and infrastructural investments under President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative.¹⁶⁴ However, security cooperation is an essential component of the overall effort, as it helps to create a positive impression of Chinese military power rather than a negative one. Positive and non-coercive interactions with the Chinese military through various methods of security cooperation help Southeast Asian states to see China as a "security partner" and a "security provider" intent on providing "positive contributions" to the region rather than as a security threat.¹⁶⁵

China's public emphasis on the peaceful nature of its development also helps to alleviate the perception of China in Southeast Asia as an aggressive power intent upon domination. Chinese representatives have repeatedly stated that China "follows the path of peaceful development."¹⁶⁶ The implication here is that, as China becomes more powerful, it will not seek to dominate and suppress its neighbors by force; rather, it will seek to build "friendship and partnership" with them. China assures its neighbors that a regional security framework would not be a new mechanism through which China would dominate; rather, it would "be based on consensus," serving "all parties' needs" and ensuring that all regional security matters "be decided by all the countries in the region through equal participation."¹⁶⁷ Ultimately, China is eager for regional states to eschew "old thinking" regarding "balance of power, zero-sum games" and instead adopt a "win-win approach" oriented around greater cooperation, including in the security realm.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Narayanan Ganesan, "Chinese infrastructure investments in Southeast Asia and their implications for the region," Blickweschel, May 2018, https://www.eu-china.net/uploads/tx_news/Blickwechsel_Chinese_infrastructure_investments_Ganesan_Mai2018_01.pdf and John Reed, "Who dominates the economies of south-east Asia?" Financial Times, last modified April 30, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/898fa38e-4882-11e8-8ee8-cae73aab7ccb>.

¹⁶⁵ Li, "The People's Liberation Army and China's Smart Power Quandary in Southeast Asia," 360–361.

¹⁶⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation."

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Wang Yi, "Work Together to Build Partnerships and Pursue Peace and Development," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, March 20, 2017, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1448155.shtml.

Further, China has also sought to alleviate concerns about its growing strength by taking pains to explicitly link its rise to the wider prosperity of the region as a whole and to emphasize that its intentions are not self-serving. Instead, China's ascendancy is mutually beneficial, as it "will bring greater opportunities and benefits for development and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region."¹⁶⁹ Rather than being a threat to the region, China's growing strength is a net positive because it enables the entire region to gain influence. China seeks to strengthen regional security partnerships not for the sake of China's individual benefit, but in order to keep Asia as a whole on a "positive trajectory" and to enable it to "play a bigger role on the world stage."¹⁷⁰

5. Secondary Objectives Driving Chinese Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia

In addition to the strategic level objectives indicated above, there are also some secondary, lower priority objectives driving Chinese security cooperation in Southeast Asia. Among these secondary objectives is intelligence collection. Military exercises with regional states represent opportunities to expose the PLA to foreign military tactics, capabilities, doctrine, command and control practices, and equipment.¹⁷¹ This information can be used to not only learn about foreign militaries but also to improve China's own capabilities as its military continues to modernize. It is no coincidence that China often seeks to conduct exercises with military units in Southeast Asia that have received training from the United States.¹⁷² Training with such units enables China to not only glean specific information about American tactics, techniques, and procedures but also enables it to apply that knowledge to develop and improve upon its own doctrine and best practices.¹⁷³ Opportunities for intelligence collection are not just restricted to participation in or observation of military exercises. Senior level defense delegations in which PLA leaders

¹⁶⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation."

¹⁷⁰ Wang, "Work Together to Build Partnerships and Pursue Peace and Development."

¹⁷¹ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 288, 302.

¹⁷² Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 68.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

are able to meet with foreign defense officials are also an opportunity for China to glean personnel related intelligence on foreign political or military leaders or to learn strategic level intelligence regarding a foreign state's internal politics or its intended actions at the international level.¹⁷⁴

D. FACTORS LIMITING SINO-SOUTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY COOPERATION

While China has made significant strides in defense diplomacy in Southeast Asia, and the trajectory suggests an upward trend, there are some factors that threaten to limit China's progress. These include a poor Chinese reputation relative to other great powers regarding its military proficiency and the sophistication level of its military equipment, existing Southeast Asian defense relationships, and territorial sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea. It is possible that these obstacles may be resolved over time, for example through the waning of U.S. defense relationships in the region, through the resolution of territorial disputes, and through the steady increase in China's military proficiency and technical capability. However, these resolutions are unlikely to occur in the short term, so the obstacles should persist in helping to limit the pace at which China can expand its security cooperation in Southeast Asia for now. The impact of the poor reputation of the Chinese military will be examined below, as that is an issue residing largely on the Chinese side of the equation. The impact of latter factors, such as existing Southeast Asian defense relationships and tensions emanating from conflicting sovereignty claims with Southeast Asian states in the South China Sea will be examined from the Southeast Asian perspective in Chapter IV.

Relative to advanced Western powers like the United States, Chinese military proficiency and the quality of its military equipment is considered to be relatively poor. This impression impacts the interest of some Southeast Asian states in seeking or accepting higher levels of security cooperation with China. For example, when it comes to training, Southeast Asian officers attending courses in China have indicated a dissatisfaction with

¹⁷⁴ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," 11.

the quality of the instruction and have expressed a preference for the superior quality of training in Western countries like the United States, Britain, or Australia.¹⁷⁵ While China certainly has a larger and more capable military than Southeast Asian counterparts, reflections such as these indicate that Southeast Asian states still see Western states like the United States as superior military powers better able to provide the instruction and support they need to improve their own capabilities. However, it should be noted that this preference for training from Western powers cannot be taken for granted as a permanent dynamic. If the Chinese military continues to improve its capabilities and professional reputation, then the preference gap may close.

This dissatisfaction extends from training to various military equipment that China sells to the region or offers as military aid. Low-tech Chinese equipment such as vehicles and small arms are generally considered adequate among some customers in Southeast Asia, especially among the least developed countries like Myanmar and Cambodia.¹⁷⁶ Relatively poor countries are attracted to inexpensive Chinese weapons, as their military acquisitions strategy emphasizes quantity over quality, and they value the fact that Chinese weapons tend to carry fewer “political strings” than Western weapons.¹⁷⁷ Additionally, the Chinese weapons systems that these countries are importing tend to operate at a lower technological base than Western weapons do, which is an attractive feature in countries whose militaries have a limited level of technical know-how.¹⁷⁸ Further, some countries are also attracted to Chinese arms because they are “free from political strings,” and often offer flexible repayment schemes.¹⁷⁹

However, while the relatively low cost and quality of Chinese military equipment has been a draw for some customers, these factors have had a significant limiting effect on

¹⁷⁵ Storey, “China’s Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia,” 297.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 300.

¹⁷⁷ Daniel Byman and Roger Cliff, *China’s Arms Sales: Motivations and Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Publishing, 1999), 24.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Guy Anderson, Craig Caffrey, and John Grevatt. “Defence exports in Asia: A focus on China” (Jane’s by IHS Markit Intelligence Briefing, September 6, 2018).

the demand for Chinese arms exports writ large.¹⁸⁰ The Chinese equipment simply cannot compete with modern, high-tech Western equipment due to having a reputation for poor quality, low durability, and a limited level of follow on support after purchase, such as the provision of ordnance, spare parts, or upgrades.¹⁸¹ This reputation has had a limiting effect on sales for even China's closest defense allies in Southeast Asia. For example, in 2010, the Thai Navy indicated reluctance to accept a Chinese offer of secondhand submarines due to concern about the platforms' reliability.¹⁸² It has also had a limiting effect on efforts to expand inroads into countries like the Philippines, whose defense relationship with China is still very limited. While the Philippines has accepted some Chinese military equipment, AFP members largely consider defense acquisitions from China to be unpreferable in comparison to procurements from the United States and impracticable due to concerns about interoperability with existing equipment.¹⁸³ However, as it is likely the case that continued improvements in China's military reputation might increase their desirability as a training partner, it is similarly likely that China's continued advancement in military technology may increase their desirability as a military supplier in the future. As China's weapons quality nears Western standards and its production capabilities advance, it will likely find new buyers and increase its share of the arms market.¹⁸⁴

E. CONCLUSION

In sum, this chapter has demonstrated that China has been expanding its security cooperation in Southeast Asia since the turn of the 21st century, particularly in terms of the number of naval port calls and military exercises it conducts and in the volume of arms it exports to the region, in order to serve multiple strategic objectives. The primary objective is to regain regional preeminence and establish itself as a great power. Supporting

¹⁸⁰ Byman and Cliff, *China's Arms Sales: Motivations and Implications*, 25.

¹⁸¹ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 300.

¹⁸² Ibid, 301.

¹⁸³ De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," 171.

¹⁸⁴ Byman and Cliff, *China's Arms Sales: Motivations and Implications*, 26.

objectives include assuaging perceptions of its aggressiveness, establishing influence in key countries that can be leveraged to serve Chinese interests, and undercutting U.S. encirclement and dominance in the region. While security cooperation is not the only means to achieve these objectives, it is a vital tool that complements diplomatic and economic outreach efforts.

However, this chapter has also demonstrated that, while China's trajectory in this area is generally positive, it is not entirely unimpeded. There are limiting factors that China must address if it does not want to limit the potential of its continued security cooperation efforts, such as a poor Chinese reputation, relative to other great powers, regarding its military proficiency and the sophistication level of its military equipment. While the origin of this issue is internal to China, there are other, external factors that impact China's ability to deepen security cooperation in Southeast Asia. These include existing Southeast Asian defense relationships and territorial sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea. The impact of these and other factors in influencing Southeast Asian states' willingness to engage in security cooperation will be examined in Chapter IV.

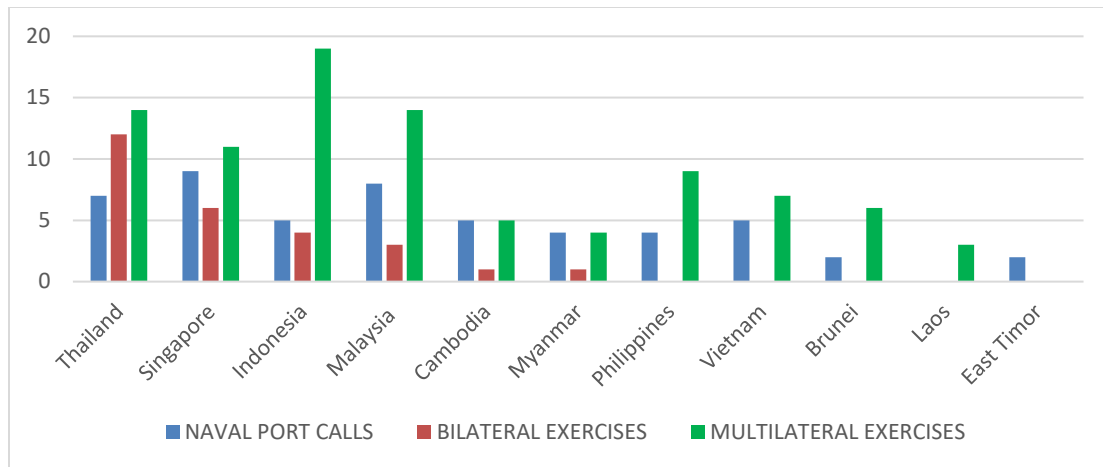
III. ESTABLISHING THE SPECTRUM OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY COOPERATION WITH CHINA AND SELECTING CASE COUNTRIES

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyzes increasing Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation from the Southeast Asian side of the equation, establishing the range of individual Southeast Asian states' efforts to seek, accept, or reject security cooperation with China during the period of 2000–2017. This analysis demonstrates that there is a wide spectrum of Southeast Asian security cooperation with China, along which some states have developed a relatively robust security relationship with China, some have allowed only a very limited security relationship to form, and others have occupied a lukewarm middle ground. This spectrum will be utilized as a tool for the selection of representative case study states that epitomize the range of Southeast Asian security cooperation with China. These states, and the factors impacting their security relationship with China, will be analyzed in greater detail in the subsequent chapter.

B. RANGE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY COOPERATION WITH CHINA

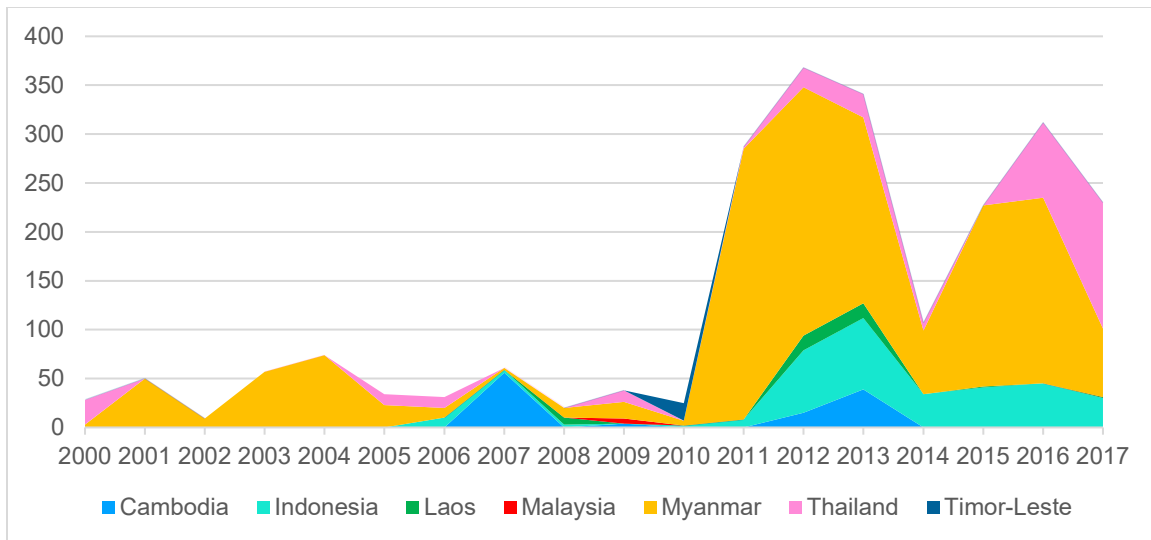
The following sections will elaborate on the level of security cooperation that each Southeast Asian state has engaged in with China during the period of 2000–2017. Consistence with Chapter II, the level of security cooperation will be reflected in terms of the quantity of Chinese naval port calls that each state has hosted, the number and nature of military exercises that each state has participated in with China, and the volume of arms that each state has imported from China. The data, summarized in Figures 3 and 4 below, demonstrates that each country in Southeast Asia has sought or accepted some amount of security cooperation with China over the examined period, though there has been a significant degree of variation in terms of the type of activities conducted, when the activities started, and the total quantity of activities.



The figure above indicates the number of Chinese naval port calls that each Southeast Asian state has hosted and the number of bilateral and multilateral military exercises that each state has conducted with China for the period of 2000–2017. Naval port calls represent incidents in which PLAN ship(s) visited a Southeast Asian port of call. Naval port calls accompanied by drills are not also counted separately as exercises. Bilateral exercises are exercises between China and one Southeast Asian participant. Multilateral exercises are exercises in which China and at least one Southeast Asian state were participants or observers in an exercise involving more than two countries. Exercises do not include joint patrols or police activities. Data for the years 2000–2016 is sourced from Institute for National Strategic Studies’ *China Strategic Perspectives* publication, and data for the year 2017 is sourced from Open Source Enterprise and media reporting.

Figure 3. Southeast Asian States’ Security Cooperation with China, 2000–2017: Naval Port Calls and Exercises¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Adapted from Allen, Saunders, and Chen. “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” attachment and China Military Online, “China, Brunei hold joint naval drill” and Davis, “China holds first joint exercise with Myanmar Navy” and Defenseworld.net, “US-Thai Military Exercise To Have Participation From China” and Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Kingdom of Thailand, “Chinese Naval Fleet Arrived in Thailand for Visit” and Huang, “Chinese hospital ship Peace Ark visits Timor-Leste” and Ministry of Defense Sri Lanka, “Exercise -Cormorant Strike VIII 2017’ begins” and Montsame News Agency, “‘Khaan Quest – 2017’ assembles troops from 26 nations” and Montsame News Agency, “‘Khaan Quest – 2017’ assembles troops from 26 nations” and National Archives of Singapore, “Ex COORES 2017” and Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2017 and Open Source Enterprise, “Cambodia: PRC’s East Sea Fleet Arrives in Sihanoukville Port for Goodwill Visit 30 Sep-3 Oct 2017” and Open Source Enterprise, “Japanese Report: Singaporean Navy Frigate Docks in China To Engage in Military Exercises” and Open Source Enterprise, “Malaysia: Foreign Minister Says Chinese Warship Docking Not Sign of ‘Quasi-Alliance’ With China” and Open Source Enterprise, “Singapore Frigates Lead Multinational Group Sails for International Maritime Review” and Open Source Enterprise, “Singapore: ‘Military From 18 Nations in Disaster Relief Exercise’” and Open Source Enterprise, “Southeast Asia Snapshot 5 May 2017” and Page and Watts, “Chinese Submarine’s Malaysian Port Call Signals Regional Power Shift” and Pakistan Today, “Multinational naval exercise AMAN 2017 to start from tomorrow” and Parameswaran, “China, Cambodia to Launch Major Military Exercise ‘Golden Dragon’” and ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting, “ADMM-PLUS HADR & MM Ex Was Impressive” and ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting, “Inaugural ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus Maritime Security Field Training Exercise.”



The figure above represents the annual volume of Chinese major conventional weapons exports to Southeast Asian states for the period of 2000–2017, reflected in trend-indicator value (TIV), which is based on the unit production costs of the transferred weapons. The TIV represents the transfer of military resources, not the sales price for the arms sales. SIPRI TIVs are expressed in millions.

Figure 4. Chinese Arms Exports to Southeast Asian States, 2000–2017¹⁸⁶

1. Naval Port Calls

Southeast Asian states have varied in terms of when they first hosted a Chinese naval ship for a port call and how frequently they have hosted subsequent port calls. For the examined period, the earliest hosts of Chinese port calls were Malaysia, Vietnam, and Singapore, hosting Chinese ships in 2000, 2001, and 2002, respectively, during a period in which China was only conducting one naval port call annually.¹⁸⁷ Cambodia and East Timor were the latest states during the period to host a Chinese port call, in 2010 and 2016, respectively.¹⁸⁸ Regarding quantity, the average number of total Chinese naval port calls hosted among Southeast Asian states, excluding landlocked Laos, is 5.1 (See Figure 3). While a state obviously cannot hold a partial port call, this number is useful to differentiate between states that have hosted Chinese naval ships at a higher or lower than average rate.

¹⁸⁶ Adapted from SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

¹⁸⁷ Allen, Saunders, and Chen. “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” attachment.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

States falling above the average include Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, with Singapore hosting a total of nine port calls and the latter two countries hosting eight and seven, respectively.¹⁸⁹ The remaining states in Southeast Asia each fall below the average, with the states on the lowest end of the spectrum being Brunei and East Timor, each with only two port calls hosted.¹⁹⁰

2. Military Exercises

Southeast Asian states have also varied with regard to their participation with China in military exercises in terms of when they began conducting exercises, the total number of exercises in which they've participated, and what type of exercises they've conducted. In 2005, Thailand became the first Southeast Asian country to conduct a bilateral military exercise with China, and it remained the only country to conduct such exercises with China until 2009 when Singapore began doing so for the first time.¹⁹¹ On the other end of the spectrum, Cambodia and Myanmar began conducting bilateral military exercises with China in 2016 and 2017, respectively, while others, like the Philippines and Vietnam, continue to abstain from bilateral military exercises with China.¹⁹² Regarding quantity, the average number of bilateral exercises that states have conducted with China for the full examined time period, is about 2.5 (See Figure 3). States falling above the average include Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, and states falling below the average include Cambodia, Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Laos, and East Timor. Thailand has

¹⁸⁹ Allen, Saunders, and Chen. "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment and Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Thailand, "Chinese Naval Fleet Arrived in Thailand for Visit" and Page and Watts, "Chinese Submarine's Malaysian Port Call Signals Regional Power Shift" and Davis, "China holds first joint exercise with Myanmar Navy" and Open Source Enterprise, "Malaysia: Foreign Minister Says Chinese Warship Docking Not Sign of 'Quasi-Alliance' With China."

¹⁹⁰ Allen, Saunders, and Chen. "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment and China Military Online, "China, Brunei hold joint naval drill" and Huang, "Chinese hospital ship Peace Ark visits Timor-Leste."

¹⁹¹ Allen, Saunders, and Chen. "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment.

¹⁹² Allen, Saunders, and Chen. "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment and Davis, "China holds first joint exercise with Myanmar Navy" and Parameswaran, "China, Cambodia to Launch Major Military Exercise 'Golden Dragon.'"

far and away conducted the most bilateral exercises with China, having conducted twelve exercises, which is twice as much as the second highest bilateral exercise participant with China, Singapore. Thailand is also unique in that it has conducted multiple exercises with China that have been focused around combat operations.¹⁹³ Other Southeast Asian states that have conducted multiple bilateral exercises with China have tended to focus primarily on more non-traditional warfare areas, such as antiterrorism, search and rescue, and humanitarian and disaster response operations.¹⁹⁴

More Southeast Asian countries have participated in or observed multilateral exercises in which China was also a participant or observer than have directly participated in bilateral exercises with China, though there is still variance with regard to this kind of activity along the spectrum as well. China began participating in multilateral exercises with Southeast Asian countries in 2013 with inaugural ADMM-Plus exercises.¹⁹⁵ That year, all ten ASEAN members participate in at least one of the exercises in with China, along with other Plus members.¹⁹⁶ Regarding quantity, the average number of multilateral exercises that states have participated in with China for the full examined time period is about 8.3 (See Figure 3). States falling above the average include Indonesia, with the most multilateral exercises with China, followed by Thailand and Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. All other Southeast Asian states fall below the average.

3. Arms Sales

Chinese arms sales are also an area in which there is a broad spectrum of participation among Southeast Asian states, with some states being major customers of China, some purchasing relatively minimal amounts of Chinese arms, and others abstaining

¹⁹³ Allen, Saunders, and Chen. “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” attachment.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting, “ADMM-PLUS HADR & MM Ex Was Impressive” and ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting, “Inaugural ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus Maritime Security Field Training Exercise.”

¹⁹⁶ Allen, Saunders, and Chen. “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” attachment.

from any significant Chinese purchases altogether. Myanmar has been the most consistent importer of major conventional weapons from China, having imported from China every year between 2000 and 2017 (See Figure 4). Indonesia and Thailand are next in terms of annual consistency, having imported major conventional weapons from China for eleven and ten, respectively, out of the eighteen years examined, with the majority of those purchases occurring in the past several years. Laos and Cambodia round out the middle of the pack in terms of annual consistency of Chinese imports, having imported from China five and four, respectively, out of the eighteen years examined. Malaysia and East Timor are comparatively modest customers, having only imported arms from China in 2010 and 2009, respectively. At the lowest end of the spectrum, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, and Brunei have not purchased any major conventional weapons from China for the entire examined period.

Myanmar also leads Southeast Asian states in terms of volume of imports from China, having imported Chinese arms valuing 1,491 million SIPRI TIV over the period of 2000–2017 (See Figure 4). Thailand is the second largest importer at 319 million SIPRI TIV, and Indonesia is the third largest at 313 million SIPRI TIV. Cambodia imported a comparatively smaller volume of Chinese arms in comparison with these states, valued at 114 million SIPRI TIV; however, China has been Cambodia's largest arms supplier over the examined period, which is not so for any of the top three Southeast Asian importers, including Myanmar. Other Southeast Asian importers of Chinese arms in Southeast Asia purchased relatively modest amounts with Laos, East Timor, and Malaysia importing major weapons from China over the examined period valued at 39, 18, and 5 million SIPRI TIV, respectively.

C. SELECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE COUNTRIES FOR CASE STUDY

Now that a spectrum for Southeast Asian security cooperation has been established, a representative sample of two countries may be selected for case study analysis in order to examine in greater detail the factors are influencing the degree to which Southeast Asian states seek, accept, or reject security cooperation with China. The intent is that countries selected for closer analysis represent key portions of the security cooperation spectrum,

with one being among the most active security cooperators with China and another being among the least active security cooperators. Additionally, the intent is also to select countries that represent both mainland and archipelagic Southeast Asia. Lastly, the intent is also to focus on countries that are strategically significant to the interests of the United States.

Thailand and the Philippines meet this range of selection criteria. Thailand is above average on each of the quantifiable metrics indicated above. It was the first country to conduct bilateral exercises with China, has since conducted significantly more bilateral exercises with China than any other Southeast Asian country, and is second highest in terms of multilateral exercise participation with China. Thailand is above average in the region in terms of the number of Chinese port calls it has hosted, and it is second only to Myanmar in terms of the volume of arms imported from China over the examined time period. Additionally, Thailand is strategically important to the United States, representing one of two American treaty allies in the region and participating in wide range of security cooperation activities with U.S. forces annually. By comparison, the Philippines is below average on most of the quantifiable metrics indicated above. It has not conducted any bilateral exercises with China, and, while it has participated in some multilateral exercises with China, it is in the middle percentile for this metric. The Philippines is below average for the region in terms of the number of Chinese port calls it has hosted, and it has not imported any major conventional weapons from China. Lastly, the Philippines, like Thailand, is strategically important to the United States, as it is also an American treaty ally and a major participant in multiple forms of American security cooperation.

D. CONCLUSION

In sum, this chapter has demonstrated that the nature of Southeast Asian states' security relationships with China is highly diverse. While some states have developed a security relationship with China that features relatively regular interaction in terms of naval port calls, bilateral exercises, multilateral exercises, and arms sales, other states have had limited or nonexistent engagements on these fronts, and others fall somewhere in between. Thailand and the Philippines represent two countries on opposite ends of this spectrum,

with Thailand being among China's closest security cooperators in the region and the Philippines being among the least engaged. Now that the phenomenon of Chinese security cooperation has been examined from the Chinese side of the equation, the spectrum of Southeast Asian states' cooperation has been established, and case study countries have been selected, the following chapter will examine in closer detail the factors that are impacting the selected states' degree of interest in conducting security cooperation with China.

IV. SINO-SOUTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY COOPERATION: THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyzes Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation during the period of 2000–2017 from the Southeast Asian side of the equation, expanding upon concepts introduced in the literature review of Chapter I in order to fully address the sub-question: What factors influence the degree to which Southeast Asian states seek, accept, or reject Chinese security cooperation? In order to answer this question, this chapter applies each of the hypotheses introduced in Chapter I to the selected Southeast Asian countries of Thailand and the Philippines in order to explore the hypotheses' explanatory power. Overall, the ensuing analysis demonstrates that the selected hypothesis factors are each relevant in influencing the degree to which Southeast Asian states conduct security cooperation with China, but they do not impact equally in each state. Specifically, the factors identified in Hypotheses 1 through 3, which have an expansive effect on the amount of security cooperation Southeast Asian states are willing to conduct with China, are active in both Thailand and the Philippines, but they produce a stronger effect in Thailand than in the Philippines. By contrast, Hypothesis 4, which has a limiting effect on the amount of security cooperation a state is willing to conduct with China, is more active in the Philippines than in Thailand, which accounts for why Philippine security cooperation with China is lower overall. Additionally, the analysis also demonstrates that the hypothesis factors, particularly those indicated in Hypotheses 1–3, can operate simultaneously to have an interactive, sometimes compounding, effect. This interaction will be expanded upon in more detail in the ensuing sections.

This chapter proceeds in the following sub-sections. First, it tests Hypothesis 1 by evaluating whether decreased security cooperation with the United States has driven Thailand and the Philippines to seek or accept greater security cooperation with China. Next, it tests Hypothesis 2 by evaluating whether a desire to minimize their dependence on a single source of external security support has driven these states to engage in greater security cooperation with China. Third, it tests Hypothesis 3 by considering how major

domestic political changes, specifically changes in regime or political leadership that have been illiberal and/or accompanied by an increase in human rights abuses, have driven Thailand and the Philippines to seek or accept closer security cooperation with China. Then, it tests Hypothesis 4 by assessing how the presence or absence of major territorial disputes between these states and China has impacted the degree to which they conduct security cooperation with China. Lastly, this chapter offers some observations on some of the advantages the U.S. maintains over China with regard to preserving security relationships in Thailand and the Philippines and then closes with some concluding statements.

B. FACTORS INFLUENCING THAI AND THE PHILIPPINE RATES OF SECURITY COOPERATION WITH CHINA

1. Decreased U.S. Security Cooperation

The amount of security cooperation that the United States conducts with states in Southeast Asia impacts the degree to which those states are amenable to security cooperation with China. Specifically, when U.S. security engagement wanes, states lean closer to China as an alternative means of support.¹⁹⁷ Waning U.S. security engagement could be in the form of decreased arms sales or scaled back exercises; however, it could also be observable in the form of a decreased Southeast Asian perception of the U.S. security commitment to a specific state or to the region writ large. Both of these manifestations have been observable in Thailand and in the Philippines over the course of the examined time period. In both countries, there have been episodes in which U.S. security cooperation waned or faith in the U.S. security commitment decreased, followed by correlating increases in Chinese security cooperation, or at least correlating expressions of interest in greater Chinese security cooperation. However, while this phenomenon has been evident in both countries, it is has manifested more prominently in Thailand than in the Philippines.

¹⁹⁷ Vaughn and Morrison, *China-Southeast Asia Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications for the United States*, 5.

In Thailand, there are multiple instances over the examined period during which U.S. security cooperation, measured in terms of arms sales and military training or exercises, decreased, and Chinese security cooperation correspondingly increased. The most notable instances occurred in 2006 and in 2014. In 2006, the United States suspended \$24 million worth in military aid and curtailed sales of major conventional arms after Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was ousted from power (See Figure 5).¹⁹⁸ The United States also suspended International Military Education and Training (IMET) funding for Thailand, which enables foreign military members to come receive instruction at U.S. military facilities.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, the United States threatened to cancel the 2007 iteration of the annual Cobra Gold exercises.²⁰⁰ Ultimately, the exercises were held, but they were reduced in scale, and the United States had to frame them as a multilateral, as opposed to bilateral, exercises in order to facilitate its participation.²⁰¹ After this drawdown episode, the United States resumed normal security cooperation with Thailand in 2008 when a new Thai government was sworn in.²⁰² In 2014, another drawdown in U.S. security engagement occurred. After another coup, the United States again suspended IMET funding and reduced the scale of Cobra Gold exercises.²⁰³ The United States also reduced military sales to Thailand (See Figure 5). However, as with the previous coup, the drawdown was only temporary. The United States dispatched a number of high-level visitors to Thailand in

¹⁹⁸ Storey, “China’s Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia,” 300 and SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

¹⁹⁹ Thomas Parks and Benjamin Zawacki, *The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations: Views of Thai and American Leaders on the Bilateral Relationship and Ways Forward* (Bangkok, Thailand: The Asia Foundation, 2018), <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/the-future-of-thai-u-s-relations/>, 18 and Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China’s Rise*, 153.

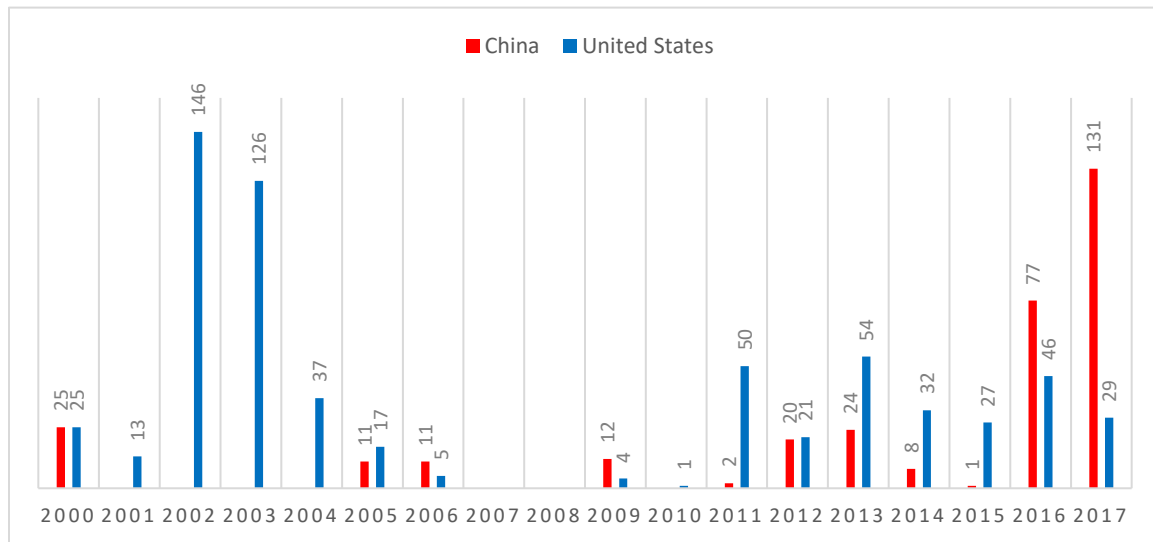
²⁰⁰ Ann Marie Murphy, “Beyond Balancing and Bandwagoning: Thailand’s Response to China’s Rise,” *Asian Security* 6, no. 1 (January 2010): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799850903471922>.

²⁰¹ Murphy, “Beyond Balancing and Bandwagoning: Thailand’s Response to China’s Rise,” 21 and Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China’s Rise*.

²⁰² Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China’s Rise*, 153.

²⁰³ Yoshihide and Hideo, “Chapter 4 Southeast Asia: ASEAN – Pulled Between China and the United States.” 123.

2017 in an effort to repair the relationship, including then PACOM Commander Admiral Harry Harris and U.S. Army Pacific Commander General Robert Brown.²⁰⁴ The following year, Cobra Gold exercises had already been scaled back up to pre-coup levels.²⁰⁵



The figure above indicates the volume of transfers of major conventional weapons to Thailand from China and the United States, reflected in trend-indicator value (TIV), which is based on the unit production costs of the transferred weapons. The TIV represents the transfer of military resources, not the sales price for the arms sales. SIPRI TIVs are expressed in millions.

Figure 5. Thailand Arms Imports from China and the U.S., 2000–2017²⁰⁶

While the material impact to the U.S.-Thai security relationship was relatively short-lived after each of these incidents, the decrease in U.S. security cooperation during these periods was significant enough that it created a window of opportunity for Thailand to look elsewhere for support, and China was eager to oblige. After the 2006 coup, when the United States cut millions of dollars in military aid, Thai coup leader General Sonthi Boonyarataglin expeditiously conducted a visit to China, where the Chinese government

²⁰⁴ Yoshihide and Hideo, “Chapter 4 Southeast Asia: ASEAN – Pulled Between China and the United States.” 124.

²⁰⁵ Parks and Zawacki, *The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations: Views of Thai and American Leaders on the Bilateral Relationship and Ways Forward*, 6.

²⁰⁶ Adapted from SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

offered \$49 million in military aid.²⁰⁷ Thailand used this money to then purchase Chinese military equipment, specifically \$48 million worth of C-802 anti-ship missiles (ASMs).²⁰⁸ The increased interaction with China was primarily in the realm of military aid of this kind and high level visits. There was not a notable increase in Chinese naval port calls to Thailand in 2006 or the years immediately following or in bilateral military exercises between China and Thailand.²⁰⁹ However, Thailand took advantage of some new military training opportunities with China during the period of decreased U.S. support, for example dispatching thirty special forces soldiers to conduct training with China in Guangzhou.²¹⁰

The increase in Thai security cooperation with China during the 2014 drawdown of U.S. support was more notable than during the 2006 drawdown, both in the areas of military aid and procurement and in military exercises. Since 2014, Thailand has significantly increased its purchase of major conventional Chinese weapons, to include MBTs, armored personnel carriers, and diesel submarines.²¹¹ In fact, Chinese arms sales to Thailand eclipsed U.S. sales, with China selling arms valued at 209 million SIPRI TIV to Thailand over the course of 2015–2017, and with the U.S. selling arms worth less than half of that amount at 102 million SIPRI TIV over the same time period (See Figure 5). Furthermore, unlike in 2006, there was a notable increase in Thailand’s exercise activity with China when the U.S. scaled back support in 2014, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Thailand conducted three exercises with China in 2013, one bilateral and two multilateral, and two pre-coup exercises, both multilateral, with China in 2014.²¹² There was a slight uptick in Thai military exercise activity with China in subsequent years. In 2015, Thailand and China

²⁰⁷ Storey, “China’s Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia,” 300.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” attachment.

²¹⁰ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China’s Rise*, 152.

²¹¹ Heginbotham, “China’s Strategy in Southeast Asia,” 23.

²¹² Allen, Saunders, and Chen, “Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications,” attachment and ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting, “ADMM-PLUS HADR & MM Ex Was Impressive” and ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting, “Inaugural ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus Maritime Security Field Training Exercise.”

conducted a total of five exercises together, one bilateral and four multilateral.²¹³ The bilateral exercise, Falcon Strike 2015, was particularly notable, as it marked the first time that the Chinese and Thai air forces held an exercise together.²¹⁴ Exercise activity between Thailand and China remained elevated in 2016, with the countries again conducting five exercises together that year, this time two bilateral and three multilateral.²¹⁵ There was no notable increase in the number of port calls that China conducted to Thailand in the years immediately following 2014.

There is a clear pattern from 2006 and 2014 demonstrating that Thai security cooperation with China has increased during periods in which Thai cooperation with the U.S. has decreased; but the actual, measurable amount of U.S. security engagement is not the only relevant factor contributing to this trend. The perceived level of the U.S. security commitment to Thailand, and the U.S. capability to live up to that commitment, is also important in shaping Thailand's calculus with regard to its security relationship with China. In recent years, there are many indications that Thailand's faith in the U.S. security commitment to itself and the region has been waning. When asked to rate the current U.S. president's level of engagement in Southeast Asia, a 2019 survey of Thai academics, businessmen, government members, civil society organization members, and media members produced resoundingly negative results, with 72.8% agreeing that U.S. engagement had decreased.²¹⁶ In the same survey, when asked to rate U.S. reliability as a strategic partner and as a guarantor of regional security, 43.5% of respondents indicated that they had little or no confidence in the U.S. in this respect; comparatively, only 20.9% of respondents reported being confident or very confident.²¹⁷ A separate bilateral dialogue

²¹³ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment.

²¹⁴ "China and Thailand's air forces to hold first joint exercise," The Straits Times, November 11, 2015, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-and-thailands-air-forces-to-hold-first-joint-exercise>.

²¹⁵ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment.

²¹⁶ Tang Siew Mun et al., *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019), https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/TheStateofSEASurveyReport_2019.pdf, 16.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 17.

in 2018 with Thai leaders revealed a similar sentiment, with Thai interviewees revealing a long-standing concern about U.S. reliability in the event of a crisis.²¹⁸ The Thai military still expresses the view that the U.S. security guarantee is important, but even respondents among that cadre indicated in 2017 that they felt that U.S. influence had been overtaken by Chinese influence in the region, and they estimated that the two countries now have equal influence on Thai national security policy.²¹⁹ It is likely that these kinds of sentiments, in combination with the intermittent, though admittedly brief, drawdowns in U.S. support have also had an effect on Thailand's greater consideration of China as an increasingly active alternative security partner.

There is some evidence of a similar pattern in the Philippines wherein a U.S. reduction in security cooperation corresponded with an increased interest in security cooperation with China, but the phenomenon is much less prominent in the archipelagic nation in comparison with its mainland counterpart. A key example occurred in 2004. That year, the United States temporarily suspended some military aid to the Philippines after President Macapagal Arroyo had made a decision to withdraw AFP forces from Iraq.²²⁰ Shortly thereafter, President Macapagal Arroyo conducted a state visit to China and met with Chinese President Hu Jintao, and the two parties agreed to begin conducting high-level talks on security cooperation and on opportunities to increase military exchange visits, among other security related issues.²²¹ Later that year, in November of 2004, the Philippine defense secretary and the Chinese defense minister signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Cooperation in which China proposed conducting more military

²¹⁸ Parks and Zawacki, *The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations: Views of Thai and American Leaders on the Bilateral Relationship and Ways Forward*, 22.

²¹⁹ John Blaxland and Greg Raymond, "Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China," Centre of Gravity Series, no. 37 (November 2017), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/tipping-balance-southeast-asia>, 4.

²²⁰ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 300.

²²¹ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise*, 120.

exchanges.²²² Subsequently, in May of 2005, the two countries held the first Philippines-China Defense and Security Dialogue, at which time China offered \$1.2 million in engineering equipment for the AFP that was subsequently delivered in 2006.²²³

However, while these developments represented significant initial steps, closer security ties with China did not manifest as strongly in the Philippines during this period as they did in Thailand during rocky periods in their own security relationship with the United States. For one thing, the Philippines did not increase its procurement from China; in fact, it has still not imported any major conventional arms from China.²²⁴ The Philippines did not conduct any bilateral exercises with China in the Macapagal Arroyo years and has still not held any such exercises subsequently.²²⁵ While China proposed beginning bilateral exercises when the Memorandum of Understanding was negotiated, the Philippines declined to take this step.²²⁶ Additionally, the Philippines did not begin to participate in multilateral exercises with China until several years later.²²⁷ The Philippines did host a Chinese destroyer and replenishment ship in 2006 for a port call.²²⁸ While it was only a single port call during the period in which the U.S.-Philippine security relationship had become temporarily strained, it is worth noting, as such occurrences in the Philippines are quite infrequent. No Chinese naval ship had made a port call to the Philippines for several years preceding that, prior to the period examined in this thesis.

²²² Renato De Castro, "China, the Philippines, and U.S. Influence in Asia," *American Enterprise Institute*, no. 2 (July 2007): 6, <http://www.aei.org/publication/china-the-philippines-and-u-s-influence-in-asia/print/>.

²²³ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 299.

²²⁴ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

²²⁵ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment.

²²⁶ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise*, 120.

²²⁷ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment.

²²⁸ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise*, 120.

This period during the Macapagal Arroyo presidency does not represent the only time since the turn of the 21st century that U.S. security cooperation decreased in the Philippines to some degree. However, other incidents of decreased U.S. security engagement were initiated by the Philippines, not the United States. After assuming office in 2016, President Duterte conducted a visit to Beijing during which he announced explicitly that he intended to “break up” the Philippines’ security ties with the United States and seek a stronger security relationship with China.²²⁹ While U.S. security ties with the Philippines remain solidly intact, and Philippine security cooperation with China remains very limited, President Duterte has succeeded in facilitating some changes consistent with his stated goal. Early in his presidency, he either canceled or reduced in scope a number of military exercises between American forces and the AFP.²³⁰ President Duterte ultimately agreed to allow bilateral exercises with the U.S. to continue in light of AFP resistance to cancelling them altogether; however, he reduced the overall number of war games from 28 to 13, he reoriented the surviving exercises to focus on humanitarian assistance or counter-terrorism instead of territorial defense, and he still cancelled some major exercises outright, including Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) and Philippine Amphibious Landing Exercise PHIBLEX.²³¹

However, as with the previous period in which the U.S.-Philippine security relationship suffered during President Macapagal Arroyo’s term, there has been a corresponding growth in the Sino-Philippine relationship, but it has been relatively limited in scope. President Duterte has not begun to import major conventional weapons from China, but he has acquired some Chinese military equipment while simultaneously seeking to decrease imports from the United States. For example, when Duterte revoked the Philippine acquisition of 26,000 American rifles in 2016, he turned to China, procuring weapons and patrol boats worth \$14 million and securing \$500 million in financing for

²²⁹ Murphy, “Great Power Rivalries, Domestic Politics and Southeast Asian Foreign Policy: Exploring the Linkages,” 174.

²³⁰ De Castro, “The Duterte Administration’s Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance,” 169.

²³¹ Ibid.

future Chinese acquisitions.²³² According to Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) officials in Manila with whom the author met on April 4, 2019, China has subsequently supplied the Philippine military with deliveries of other military equipment on a sporadic basis, to include rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), small patrol boats, and heavy earth-moving equipment. It is possible that Philippine acquisitions of Chinese equipment will increase moving forward. In 2017, the Philippine Department of National Defense (DND) signed a letter of intent with one of China's biggest defense companies in order to enable both sides to explore new opportunities for defense trade.²³³ Chinese naval port call activity to the Philippines has remained relatively modest, but China did conduct a port call to the Philippines in 2017, ending a several years' long hiatus for such activity.²³⁴ There has been no movement on the bilateral exercises front, and it seems unlikely that the Philippines and China will conduct such activities imminently; however, President Duterte has suggested openly that the two countries should consider conducting such exercises in the future.²³⁵

As is the case with Thailand, the perceived level of the U.S. security commitment to the Philippines, and the perceived U.S. reliability to live up to that commitment among leading defense and political figures in the Philippines, is also relevant in shaping the state's calculus with regard to its security relationship with China. Coincident with President Duterte's lean towards China, certain circles in the Philippines have begun to express doubt about whether the United States has sufficient interest or capability in fulfilling its commitments to the Philippines as the country's primary security partner.

²³² De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement, Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," 169.

²³³ Jon Grevatt, "Philippines Signs Defense Trade Deal with China's Poly Technologies," Jane's by IHS Markit, Last modified May 17, 2017, https://janes-ihs-com.libproxy.nps.edu/Janes/Display/FG_499539-JDIN.

²³⁴ Catherine Wong, "Chinese Navy to Make First Philippines Port Call in Seven Years," South China Morning Post, Last modified April 29, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2091562/chinese-navy-make-first-philippines-port-call-decade>.

²³⁵ De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Foreign Policy: Unraveling the Aquino Administration's Balancing Agenda on an Emergent China," 141 and Prasanth Parameswaran, "Are China-Philippines Military Exercises Under Duterte Coming Soon?"

Among Philippine leaders, President Duterte has been the most vocal in expressing doubt about the reliability of the United States, as he has insinuated publicly that the United States has not only been deliberately passive in preventing China from building infrastructure in the South China Sea but is also unlikely to aid the Philippines militarily in the event of an armed confrontation with China in those waters.²³⁶ However, President Duterte is not alone in his concern. Philippine Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana has indicated dissatisfaction with the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty and has called for its review.²³⁷ According to Assistant Secretary for Assessments and International Affairs for the Philippine DND Teodoro Torralba, Secretary Lorenzana's public dissatisfaction emanates from a concern that the current framework allows for a lack of clarity about what kind of support the Philippines can expect from the United States in the event of Chinese incursions into Philippine-claimed territory that fall short of an armed attack.²³⁸

In addition to these specific concerns about the U.S. willingness to come to the Philippines' defense in the South China Sea, there is also a more general sense in the Philippines that the United States is losing influence in the region and is both less reliable and more disinterested in its role as a strategic ally. When asked to reflect on U.S. influence today in comparison with one year ago, the Trump administration's level of engagement in Southeast Asia, and U.S. reliability as a strategic partner for the Philippines and purveyor of security for the region writ large, 52.3% of surveyed Philippine academics and government officials expressed a negative view, describing each of these areas as having "deteriorated."²³⁹ In combination, these doubts about the U.S.-Philippine security relationship have directly contributed to the Philippine shift, admittedly modest, towards China. The shift emanates directly from the growing sense that, given perceived U.S.

²³⁶ Baviera, "President Duterte's Foreign Policy Challenges," 204 and De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," 173.

²³⁷ Chiara Zambrano, "Lorenzana Seeks Review of 'Ambiguous' PH-US Defense Treaty," ABS-CBN News, Last modified March 1, 2019, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/01/19/lorenzana-seeks-review-of-ambiguous-ph-us-defense-treaty>.

²³⁸ Assistant Secretary for Assessments and International Affairs for the Philippine DND Teodoro Torralba, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 5, 2019.

²³⁹ Tang Siew Mun et al., *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report*, 15.

unreliability to adequately protect the Philippines in the event of a conflict in the South China Sea, learning to coexist and cooperate more closely with an emergent China is the only option.²⁴⁰

2. Diversification

As has been demonstrated in the previous section, there have been multiple episodes in both Thailand and the Philippines in which each country sought closer security ties with China during periods in which U.S. security engagement decreased, or faith in the U.S. security commitment waned. However, the shift towards China during these periods can't be attributed solely to changes in U.S. engagement. Other, related factors were also at play during these episodes that are assessed to have had a simultaneous impact on the degree to which Thailand and the Philippines have sought to deepen security cooperation with China. Among these has been an expressed desire on the part of both Thailand and the Philippines to diversify security partnerships and thereby reduce dependency on a single ally, specifically the United States. This factor is observable in both Thailand and the Philippines. Both countries have demonstrated an explicit interest in diversifying security partnerships for both strategic and practical purposes, though Thailand has gone further than the Philippines in taking concrete steps to make diversification a reality. Instances of increased security cooperation with China for the examined period were largely covered in section 1 and will not be rehashed in detail in this and subsequent sections. Rather, the purpose of this and the following sections is to demonstrate that other factors were simultaneously at play contributing to the trend.

Thailand has frequently indicated an interest in diversification since the beginning of the period examined in this thesis and has concurrently taken multiple concrete steps, across multiple leadership changes, that have resulted in Thailand building closer security relationships with more bilateral partners other than the United States, including China. For example, in 2001, Prime Minister Thaksin stated publicly that he was interested in expanding Thailand's strategic options and diversifying sources from which Thailand

²⁴⁰ De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," 173.

imported military equipment.²⁴¹ It is not a coincidence that Thailand passed some significant security milestones with China shortly thereafter. Not long after his statement, Prime Minister Thaksin visited Beijing and signed a joint strategic-cooperation agreement with China.²⁴² The next year, in 2002, Thailand and China initiated annual defense security consultations, which eventually paved the way for the two countries' first bilateral military exercise, held in 2005.²⁴³

This interest in developing closer security relationships with non-U.S. partners has persisted over time, sometimes coinciding with the periods in which U.S. security engagement waned. For example, Thailand reiterated its interest in diversification of security cooperation in the years following the 2014 coup that brought Prayut Chan-o-cha to power and also featured a drawdown in U.S. support.²⁴⁴ Subsequently, trends demonstrate an effort on the part of Thailand to increase its cooperation with China in order, at least in part, to reduce dependence on the U.S. As indicated in Figure 5, Thai military imports from China significantly increased in the years following the 2014 coup and included some of Thailand's most notable purchases from China to date, such as three diesel submarines. This procurement shift is likely to endure; U.S. dominance of Thai arms imports is likely a thing of the past.²⁴⁵ In terms of other forms of engagement, as indicated in section 1, it was also during this same timeframe that Thailand and China achieved a new milestone in exercise activity, conducting a joint air force exercise for the first time in 2015 in addition to existing annual naval and army exercises.²⁴⁶

Thailand's interest in diversification is driven by both strategic and practical considerations. Thailand is seeking to establish and maintain a balance among its relations

²⁴¹ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise*, 142.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid, 151.

²⁴⁴ USDAO officials, interview with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, April 1, 2019.

²⁴⁵ Thomas Parks, interview with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, April 2, 2019.

²⁴⁶ Parks and Zawacki, *The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations: Views of Thai and American Leaders on the Bilateral Relationship and Ways Forward*, 20.

with major powers, specifically the United States and China, in order to ensure that it does not become overly dependent on one power, thereby imbuing an outside entity with disproportionate influence that would infringe on Thailand's autonomous sovereign agency.²⁴⁷ Additionally, diversification with regard to security cooperation is also a useful strategic lever that Thailand employs in its foreign policy.²⁴⁸ Buying arms from new sources or buying arms at a higher volume from existing sources, like China, is one way in which Thailand can indicate goodwill to another country on the foreign policy stage. Another strategic consideration is that, if Thailand is overly dependent on a single source, then it is particularly vulnerable in the event of any lapse in support from that single source. Thai military officers expressed this concern about U.S. support in a recent survey, indicating that they found the U.S. to be unreliable as a supplier.²⁴⁹ One solution to U.S. unreliability as a supplier is to import larger volumes from a broader range of partners, including China.

From a practical standpoint, diversifying sources from which Thailand receives military support and creating a closer security relationship with China is also driven by cost considerations, particularly with regard to procuring new military equipment. In fact, Thai military officials cite cost as the most important factor that has caused them to see Chinese equipment as more attractive in recent years.²⁵⁰ While Thai military officials do consider U.S. equipment to be desirable in terms of quality, it is not always affordable in terms of cost.²⁵¹ When it has come to major recent purchases like MBTs or even submarines, China has simply had the right price. These cost considerations are particularly important in recent years as Thailand has made military modernization a major priority. During a period in which Thailand is seeking to upgrade its military equipment, it makes

²⁴⁷ Blaxland and Raymond, "Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China," 15.

²⁴⁸ Benjamin Zawacki, interview with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, April 2, 2019.

²⁴⁹ Blaxland and Raymond, "Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China," 14.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 13.

²⁵¹ JUSMAG officials, interview with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, April 1, 2019.

sense to diversify and pursue lower cost options in order to get a “bigger bang for the buck.” It should also be noted that sometimes changes in purchasing behavior are neither strategic or practical. In some cases, Thailand may opt for more Chinese purchases as a result of key Thai officials being targeted for bribes and kickbacks if they choose a Chinese import over an American one.²⁵²

Like Thailand, the Philippines has also indicated that diversification is increasingly desirable in its security relationships. Assistant Secretary Torralba identified diversification with regard to security cooperation as a current priority for the Philippines.²⁵³ President Duterte has also been a vocal proponent of diversification, noting not long after his election in 2016 that he aspired to acquire new military equipment from countries like Russia and China in order to reduce dependency on the Philippines’ primary security partner, the United States.²⁵⁴ As has been indicated in section 1, while there has been some small shift towards acquiring more Chinese equipment, it’s been relatively modest, especially in comparison with Thailand. Overall, while the rhetoric indicating an interest in diversification has been frequent since President Duterte’s election, specifically couched in terms of greater security cooperation with China and Russia, actual manifestation in the form of significant procurements from these countries or in the form of bilateral exercises with them has yet to become a reality.

As with Thailand, the interest in diversification is both strategic and practical. From the strategic perspective, the push for greater diversification is code for the Philippines’ interest in achieving a more independent foreign policy.²⁵⁵ The push for diversification is driven by the Philippines’ interest developing more strategic partnerships so that it is not overly reliant on a single partner and thus encumbered to act in a manner consistent with

²⁵² Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China’s Rise*, 151.

²⁵³ Assistant Secretary for Assessments and International Affairs for the Philippine DND Teodoro Torralba, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 5, 2019.

²⁵⁴ Jon Grevatt, “UPDATE: Philippines Commits to Procurement Diversification,” Jane’s by IHS Markit, Last modified September 16, 2016, <https://janes-ihs-com.libproxy.nps.edu/Janes/Display/jdin90827-jdw-2016>.

²⁵⁵ Professor Herman Kraft, video interview with the author, April 11, 2019.

the pressures exerted by that partner. In diversifying its array of security relationships, the Philippines hopes to not only become less dependent on the United States for security support but also more able to make its own foreign policy choices rather than just following the U.S. lead. Assistant Secretary Torralba echoed these sentiments, noting that diversification is driven by an aspiration for the Philippines to be less dependent on the United States so that it is free to more fully assert its own independent agency.²⁵⁶

From a practical perspective, the Philippines is also concerned with cutting costs just like Thailand, particularly in the midst of its own military modernization. Assistant Secretary Torralba frequently cited cost as a leading concern when discussing the Philippine justification for diversification, highlighting certain recent purchases and prospective purchases in which the Philippines has chosen to import from alternative, sometimes new, partners.²⁵⁷ For example, he noted that the Philippines decided to import South Korean FA-50 aircraft rather than more expensive Western alternatives because they were cheaper but still judged to be effective for their desired purpose. Additionally, he indicated that the Philippine military is seeking to purchase new heavy helicopters in order to enhance Philippine HADR capabilities as one of its military modernization priorities. However, he stated that the Philippines would likely not consider U.S. Chinook helicopters for the purchase, as they are simply too expensive.

It's possible that these practical, cost cutting considerations will lead the Philippines to also begin importing major conventional arms from China at some point in the future. For now, there are no indications of any imminent major Philippine purchases from China.²⁵⁸ However, there is some potential for a shift in this direction. As indicated previously, President Duterte has expressed a clear interest in Chinese imports. Additionally, the Philippine military has expressed frustration about the U.S. procurement

²⁵⁶ Assistant Secretary for Assessments and International Affairs for the Philippine DND Teodoro Torralba, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 5, 2019.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ JUSMAG and U.S. Department of State officials, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 4, 2019.

process, indicating that it is too lengthy and cumbersome.²⁵⁹ China may be able to exploit President Duterte's motivations and the military's frustrations if it is able to offer sales that meet the Philippines' practical concerns regarding cost, expediency of delivery, and overall ease with regard to the procurement process.

3. Illiberal Political Transitions and Human Rights Abuses

Another relevant factor that is assessed to have an impact on Southeast Asian states' decision to seek or accept closer security cooperation with China is the occurrence of illiberal political transitions or the prevalence of human rights abuses. When these conditions have been present in either Thailand or the Philippines, there has been a correlating shift in these states' security relationships with the United States and China, though the phenomenon has been more modest in the Philippines. This factor is related to the previous two factors and often occurs simultaneously, or even as an instigating catalyst. The periods during which the United States was critical of Thailand and the Philippines or even withdrew some security cooperation, or the periods in which the two Southeast Asian countries sought to diversify by accepting greater cooperation from China, have sometimes been preceded by incidents like military coups in Thailand or human rights abuses in the Philippines.²⁶⁰ So, these episodes of illiberalism and human rights abuses are powerful in terms of their catalytic capability in relation to these two other factors. However, they are especially significant because they create a rift between the United States and the Philippines and Thailand that can weaken the security relationship over time and create space for Chinese cooperation to take root.

The U.S.-Thai security relationship suffered significant damage in the wake of the 2014 coup especially, with Thai partners being left with a perception that the United States had treated them unfairly with an overly harsh response. The U.S. response to this coup took a harder line than responses to previous ones, because the 2014 coup was particularly severe in terms of restrictions on civil liberties, and there was significant doubt at the time

²⁵⁹ JUSMAG officials, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 4, 2019.

²⁶⁰ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 72–73.

as to when, or whether, democratic rule would be restored.²⁶¹ The United States was particularly public and vocal in its criticism of Thailand regarding the state of democracy and human rights in the country following the 2014 coup, where previously the United States had reserved much of its criticism for private diplomatic channels.²⁶² Additionally, as required by U.S. law, the United States suspended millions of dollars in IMET and Foreign Military Financing (FMF), but the United States also went further than legal mandates with the cancellation of multiple high-level engagements, training exchanges, and exercises.²⁶³

U.S. rhetoric and the withdrawal of support triggered a significant backlash in Thailand against the United States that had the effect of shaking faith in U.S. reliability as an ally and weakening the alliance overall.²⁶⁴ Thailand largely perceived the U.S. response to be hypocritical, noting that the United States treated other countries, like Egypt, that had also had coups much more leniently.²⁶⁵ Thai leaders, including military leadership, had seen the U.S. relationship as a special friendship, and they felt as though they had been jilted by the U.S. rebuke.²⁶⁶ Thai elites had expected that the United States would understand Thailand's need to assert military control, and that the American alliance would be resilient and steadfast as the country's government transitioned.²⁶⁷ Once it became apparent that this would not be the case, frustration emerged among Thai elites that the U.S. conception of democracy has become too narrow.²⁶⁸ In Thailand, the coup was

²⁶¹ Blaxland and Raymond, "Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China," 1.

²⁶² Pongphisoot Busbarat, "Thai-US Relations in the Post-Cold War Era: Untying the Special Relationship," *Asian Security* 13, no. 3 (August 2017): 268, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2017.1357999>.

²⁶³ Blaxland and Raymond, "Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China," 9.

²⁶⁴ Busbarat, "Thai-US Relations in the Post-Cold War Era: Untying the Special Relationship," 268.

²⁶⁵ Parks and Zawacki, *The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations: Views of Thai and American Leaders on the Bilateral Relationship and Ways Forward*, 8.

²⁶⁶ USDAO officials, interview with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, April 1, 2019.

²⁶⁷ Busbarat, "Thai-US Relations in the Post-Cold War Era: Untying the Special Relationship," 267.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

considered a necessary maneuver to dissolve a corrupt and ineffective government and get the country on a better track. Furthermore, there is was a sense in Thailand that, while restoring elections was important, they were of secondary importance to that more immediate purpose, and they should not have been the singular measure by which Thai governance was judged to be legitimate. When the U.S., according to the Thai perspective, did not appreciate the nuances and local complexities of Thai governance, Thai elites were caught off guard. This sense of jiltedness by the U.S. cut deeply and has persisted over time, damaging Thai perceptions of U.S. intentions for years afterward. When asked in a 2017 survey which country they perceived as the greatest external threat to Thailand, Thai military officers reported that they viewed the United States as the top threat, likely driven out of a concern that their traditional ally could someday seek to interfere directly in Thailand's domestic politics.²⁶⁹

The U.S.-Philippine security relationship also suffered significant damage in the wake of U.S. criticism regarding human rights abuses. At the beginning of his presidency in 2016, President Duterte initiated a crackdown, with a “war on drugs” campaign that resulted in thousands of extrajudicial killings resulting in as many as 1,000 deaths per month during the first eight months of his tenure in office.²⁷⁰ In response, the Obama administration was highly critical of President Duterte, suspended certain shipments of military equipment, and also postponed the renewal of an aid package worth hundreds of millions of dollars.²⁷¹ President Duterte has not been shy in his identification of this criticism, and these actions, as triggering factors for why his taste for the U.S. security relationship has soured and his interest in China has increased.²⁷² In fact, he initially followed his predecessor President Aquino's lead in adopting a balancing strategy against

²⁶⁹ Blaxland and Raymond, “Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China,” 9.

²⁷⁰ Heydarian, “Tragedy of Small Power Politics: Duterte and the Shifting Sands of Philippine Foreign Policy,” 232.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

China that hinged on deepening the security relationship with the United States.²⁷³ It was only after his government was the recipient of vocal U.S. criticism that he altered his calculus. This pattern has been consistent over time. Each time that President Duterte receives renewed criticism from the West regarding human rights concerns, he offers immediate and vocal pushback that is also sometimes accompanied with material ramifications.²⁷⁴ For example, the timing of President Duterte's rejection of a delivery of American military rifles in 2016 is directly linked to vocal opposition to the sale on the basis of human rights concerns among members of the U.S. Senate.²⁷⁵ President Duterte's rhetoric also makes clear that instances in which he has expressed support for diversification and outreach to China are linked to his disdain for American criticism.

China is uniquely suited to exploiting the sense of grievance that Thailand and the Philippines have felt during periods of heightened U.S. criticism. China does not have the same qualms about cooperating with countries that are undemocratic or that have a poor human rights record.²⁷⁶ In fact, it has a long history of providing military support to regimes with egregious human rights abuses, like Myanmar. Additionally, as an authoritarian state, China is in no position to advise states like Thailand on the functioning, or lack thereof, of its democracy, nor is China interested in doing so.²⁷⁷ Consequently, there is a sense that China is judgment-free with regard to its security relationships and that it will not attach strings to cooperation to the same degree that the United States does. During instances of heightened U.S. criticism and withdrawal, this comparatively agnostic support can be appealing, as has been demonstrated by coincident periods of heightened Thai and Philippine engagement with China covered in section 1.

²⁷³ De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," 165, 167.

²⁷⁴ JUSMAG and U.S. Department of State officials, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 4, 2019.

²⁷⁵ De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," 169.

²⁷⁶ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 294.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

4. Territorial Disputes

A final factor that this thesis finds to have significant impact on the degree to which Thailand and the Philippines seek, accept, or reject security cooperation with China is the presence or absence of a territorial dispute with China. The existence of a significant territorial dispute with China is a major limiting factor on the degree to which a Southeast Asian state will conduct security cooperation with China.²⁷⁸ This finding is borne out with regard to Thailand and the Philippines. The Philippines has a major maritime territorial dispute with China in the South China Sea. By contrast, Thailand does have some concerns with regard to Chinese activity in the Mekong region, but its dispute is not comparable to the scale of the Philippine dispute in the South China Sea. The existence of a significantly stronger territorial dispute is a primary reason why, despite featuring all of the other same factors that Thailand has, such as a demonstrated pattern of greater interest in diversification and Chinese security cooperation during periods of weakened U.S. engagement or heightened U.S. criticism on the basis of human rights abuses, the Philippine security relationship with China remains much more limited.

In the Philippines, there is a correlation between the limitation of Chinese security cooperation inroads to the country and the intensity of the maritime territorial dispute in the South China Sea. This correlation was first evident during the Macapagal Arroyo administration (2001-2010), when tensions first began to significantly ratchet up. As indicated previously, there was a degree of modest increased openness between the Philippines and China in regard to security cooperation during the early 2000s. However, when China's behavior became much more assertive in the South China Sea, these inroads were largely curtailed, as China began to be seen as a security threat rather than a benign rising power.²⁷⁹ There were a number of incidents that contributed to this shift in perceptions. In 2009, China submitted its nine-dash line claim to a U.N. commission,

²⁷⁸ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 64, 72.

²⁷⁹ Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise*, 121.

asserting that it had sovereignty over the entire South China Sea and the islands therein.²⁸⁰ Subsequently, China began to expel foreign fishermen, including Filipino fishermen, from its newly claimed waters.²⁸¹ China then harassed a Philippine survey ship conducting oil exploration in the Reed Bank in 2009, established a presence at Scarborough Shoal and began to turn Philippine ships away in 2012, established a Chinese Coast Guard presence at Second Thomas Shoal in 2013, and then initiated substantial land reclamation and infrastructure development operations on a number of claimed formations, among other incidents.²⁸²

Largely in response to these Chinese actions in the South China Sea, the subsequent Philippine president, President Benigno Aquino III, shifted his country's policy towards China. Whereas his predecessor had begun to initiate security relations with China, Aquino curtailed this progress and instead adopted a balancing strategy against China and promoted closer security cooperation with the United States through measures like the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA).²⁸³ While President Duterte has tried to shift away from Aquino's strategy of balancing against China, he has been limited by the persistence and potency of the South China Sea dispute. His handling of the dispute is the one issue area in which President Duterte is unpopular domestically.²⁸⁴ The Philippine public has been vocally critical of Chinese aggression, on occasion holding large demonstrations to protest Chinese claims of sovereignty and provocative actions in the South China Sea.²⁸⁵ This kind of public opposition places a limitation on President Duterte's outreach to China, as he is at risk of a domestic backlash if he pushes warmer

²⁸⁰ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 49.

²⁸¹ Ibid, 66.

²⁸² De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," 163 and Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 66.

²⁸³ De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," 160.

²⁸⁴ Dr. Victor Manhit, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 4, 2019.

²⁸⁵ Huang, "China's Dual Strategy of Coercion and Inducement towards ASEAN," 8.

relations too far.²⁸⁶ In fact, as long as the territorial dispute remains unresolved, it is highly unlikely that the Philippines will make significant additional steps with China with regard to security cooperation, such as with the initiation of major conventional arms purchases from China, regardless of President Duterte's rhetoric indicating an interest in doing so.²⁸⁷

By contrast, the lack of a major territorial dispute between Thailand and China has enabled the former country to remain more receptive over time to Chinese cooperation than countries like the Philippines.²⁸⁸ It is likely not a coincidence that, overall, China's largest customers for sales of military equipment in Southeast Asia are those countries with which China does not have a territorial dispute.²⁸⁹ Additionally, China's most active bilateral exercise partners in Southeast Asia have been those countries with which China does not have a territorial dispute.²⁹⁰ Thailand's own security cooperation activity with China is consistent with these trends. As indicated in Chapter III, Thailand is the second largest importer of Chinese military equipment in Southeast Asia, and it has conducted more bilateral exercises with China than any other country in the region.²⁹¹

One of the reasons Thailand cooperates more with China is likely related to a different threat perception of China, in comparison with the Philippine threat perception, that derives from the absence of a territorial dispute. Overall, the Thai perception of the Chinese threat is lower than that of states like the Philippines.²⁹² A 2019 survey of Southeast Asian academics and military officials demonstrates the disparity.²⁹³ When

²⁸⁶ Murphy, "Great Power Rivalries, Domestic Politics and Southeast Asian Foreign Policy: Exploring the Linkages," 180–81.

²⁸⁷ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 301.

²⁸⁸ Heginbotham, "China's Strategy in Southeast Asia," 72.

²⁸⁹ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 298.

²⁹⁰ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment.

²⁹¹ Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," attachment and SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

²⁹² Murphy, "Great Power Rivalries, Domestic Politics and Southeast Asian Foreign Policy: Exploring the Linkages," 177.

²⁹³ Tang Siew Mun et al., *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report*, 18.

questioned about how they viewed “China’s reemergence as a major power with respect to Southeast Asia,” 30.1% of Thai respondents indicated that they viewed China as a status quo power that would not undermine the current regional order. By contrast, only 7.3% of Filipino respondents held the same view of China and its intentions. There were a significant number of Thai respondents that reported having a more negative view of China, but this number was also significantly smaller than the corresponding number Filipino respondents with a negative view. Specifically, 45.1% of Thai respondents indicated that they believe that China is a revisionist power with an interest in turning Southeast Asia “into its sphere of influence,” while 66.4% of Filipino respondents reported having that view. It should be stated that the respondents were not specifically asked about whether the presence or absence of a territorial dispute directly contributed to their view of China. However, their responses certainly demonstrate at least a strong correlation between the two issues.

While Thailand does not have a dispute with China comparable to a conflicting South China Sea claim, Thailand does harbor some opposition to China with regard to the latter country’s behavior in the Mekong region. The Mekong River runs through Thailand, and its significance extends to key areas such as national security and sovereignty.²⁹⁴ China’s behavior on the river is thus a sensitive issue for Thailand. China has been constructing dams, leading to a major drop in the water level on a portion of the river shared with Thailand.²⁹⁵ China has also been blasting and dredging areas of the river bed and conducting security patrols on the Mekong.²⁹⁶ These activities have all contributed to a growing sense of grievance among Thai political and military leaders.²⁹⁷ China’s actions in the Mekong are a sovereignty concern for Thailand.²⁹⁸ The Thai military is concerned

²⁹⁴ Parks and Zawacki, *The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations: Views of Thai and American Leaders on the Bilateral Relationship and Ways Forward*, 21.

²⁹⁵ Murphy, “Beyond Balancing and Bandwagoning: Thailand’s Response to China’s Rise,” 16.

²⁹⁶ Parks and Zawacki, *The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations: Views of Thai and American Leaders on the Bilateral Relationship and Ways Forward*, 34.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 22.

²⁹⁸ USDAO officials, interview with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, April 1, 2019.

about Chinese encroachment in the area, a concern that is compounded by an increasing sense of encirclement wrought by increasing Chinese engagement in the surrounding countries of Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. Thailand has liked to maintain a strategic buffer around itself and that Chinese activity in the Mekong as well as Chinese inroads in surrounding countries have created a sense that this buffer is disappearing.²⁹⁹ For now, it does not appear that these concerns are presenting a significant impediment to Thai security cooperation with China, certainly not to the degree that territorial concerns impact Philippine cooperation with China. However, it is possible to envision that, if Chinese behavior in the Mekong becomes more provocative and Thailand feels increasingly pinched by a growing Chinese presence in bordering states, then Thai engagement with China could someday become more limited as a result.

C. U.S. COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE IN THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES

While there are a number of factors that have caused Thailand and the Philippines to seek or accept closer security cooperation with China, such as periods of drawdown in U.S. support or periods of heightened emphasis on diversification sometimes brought on after episodes of illiberalism or human rights abuses, there are still areas in which the United States maintains a strong comparative advantage over China. These advantages have had a limiting effect on how far U.S.-Thai or U.S.-Philippine security cooperation has eroded and how much Sino-Thai or Sino-Philippine cooperation has been able to expand. The advantages stem from a long-term institutionalization of the U.S. relationship within the military cadre in both countries. This institutionalization has created a bond between host nation militaries and U.S. counterparts based on interoperability and personal relationships that reinforces a strong preference for U.S. support over Chinese support within Thai and Philippine militaries that goes on to reverberate at the political level.

In both Thailand and the Philippines, the military cadres maintain a strong preference for the United States as a security partner. This is true across a range of cooperation areas, from military equipment and training to interpersonal interactions at the

²⁹⁹ Thomas Parks, interview with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, April 2, 2019.

service level. In terms of equipment, Thai and Filipino servicemembers prefer to import and use U.S. military equipment due to its higher quality and because it is more interoperable with their existing equipment.³⁰⁰ By contrast, they are generally dissatisfied with Chinese equipment. For example, when Thailand decided to purchase Song-class diesel submarines from China, the Thai Navy was reluctant to accept them due to concerns about the reliability of the Chinese vessels.³⁰¹ When the Philippines accepted Chinese rifles, the AFP preferred not to accept them due to their poor quality and instead diverted them to the Philippine National Police (PNP).³⁰²

There is a similar, ingrained preference for U.S. security cooperation when it comes to training. Thai and Filipino servicemembers consider U.S. training to be qualitatively superior to Chinese training.³⁰³ Exercises with China tend to be smaller, less complex, and much more limited in terms of interoperability due to issues like the language barrier and doctrinal differences. The English language and U.S. doctrine have been heavily institutionalized in the Thai and Philippine militaries; by contrast, China has not made meaningful inroads in encouraging these Southeast Asian partners to begin to learn Mandarin or to adopt Chinese doctrine as a basis for operations.³⁰⁴ Lastly, on an interpersonal level, the United States is far and away ahead of China in terms of personal relationships at the service level after years of the U.S. having been Thailand's and the Philippines' primary exercise partner and hosting Thai and Filipino officers for IMET-funded training.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁰ JUSMAG officials, phone interview with the author, March 29, 2019 and JUSMAG officials, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 5, 2019.

³⁰¹ Storey, "China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," 301.

³⁰² JUSMAG officials, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 4, 2019.

³⁰³ JUSMAG and USDAO officials, interviews with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, March 29 and April 1, 2019 and JUSMAG officials, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 5, 2019.

³⁰⁴ Blaxland and Raymond, "Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China," 14.

³⁰⁵ JUSMAG and USDAO officials, interviews with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, March 29 and April 1, 2019 and JUSMAG officials, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 5, 2019.

These service level preferences are significant because they influence decisions at the political level. This dynamic is especially apparent in the Philippines. As indicated in sections 1 through 3 of this chapter, President Duterte has voiced a strong preference for decreasing security cooperation with the United States and increasing security cooperation with China, but his rhetoric has far outpaced the degree to which he has been able to implement this shift. One of the reasons for his slow progress is covered in section 4 and relates to Philippines' territorial dispute with China. However, another significant limitation on President Duterte's desired pivot to China has been the AFP. Many members of the AFP have spent their entire careers training and operating with the U.S. military, and they still consider the security relationship to be a crucial asset.³⁰⁶ Additionally, they continue to view China primarily as an adversary and thus have no appetite for Chinese military engagement.³⁰⁷ While President Duterte is ultimately in charge, the AFP have been able to exert significant influence to preserve their preferred relationship with the United States. For example, even after President Duterte publicly stated that he no longer wanted to import U.S. equipment, the AFP have largely continued to successfully justify and insist on continuing to make U.S. purchases.³⁰⁸

D. CONCLUSION

In sum, this chapter has demonstrated that there are multiple, interrelated factors at play that influence the degree to which Southeast Asian states seek, accept, or reject security cooperation with China. Specifically, the level of U.S. security engagement, the level of host nation interest in diversification, and the existence of illiberal political transitions, and the presence or absence of a major territorial dispute with China are all relevant factors that help to shape Thai and Philippine orientation towards China with regard to security cooperation. Both Thailand and the Philippines are similarly impacted by periods of U.S. withdrawal, shaken faith in the U.S. security commitment, and

³⁰⁶ De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy on China and the Crisis in the Philippine-US Alliance," 170–171.

³⁰⁷ JUSMAG officials, interview with the author, Manila, Philippines, April 4, 2019.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

heightened interest in diversification, brought on to some degree by U.S. reactions to military coups or human rights abuses in these countries. However, despite sharing these factors in common, Thailand has moved much further in its security relationship with China. It is assessed that this is due to the fact that the Philippines has a major territorial dispute with China, whereas Thailand does not. The presence of this dispute is significant enough that it is able to temper the influence of other factors that could otherwise incline the Philippines closer towards China.

The subsequent chapter will summarize these and other findings highlighted in this and preceding chapters of the thesis. It will also comment on the outlook regarding Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation moving forward, and it will offer some policy implications that emanate from the preceding analysis.

V. CONCLUSION

A. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Chinese security cooperation in Southeast Asia has significantly increased since the turn of the 21st century. This increase has specifically been reflected in terms of more frequent port calls, bilateral exercises, multilateral exercises, and a growing volume of arms sales over the period from 2000 to 2017. The increase has also been reflected in terms of the number of Southeast Asian partners with which China has conducted some form of security cooperation over the course of the same period. This thesis has examined this trend of increasing Sino-Southeast Asian security cooperation from both the Chinese and Southeast Asian sides of the equation, identifying key motivations for China to expand its security relationships in the region and key factors influencing Southeast Asian states' interest in seeking, accepting, or rejecting Chinese cooperation.

From the Chinese side of the equation, this thesis has found that the Chinese motivation for amplifying its security cooperation activities in Southeast Asia is multifaceted. China's primary motivation is to establish regional preeminence and cement its status as a great power. While security cooperation is not the only method by which China can achieve this end, it is a key tool in China's toolkit. Other motivations contributing to this ultimate end that are also driving China to expand security cooperation in Southeast Asia include a desire to establish influence within key Southeast Asian states that can be wielded to serve Chinese interests, to prevent encirclement by the United States or its allies, and to assuage regional anxieties about perceived Chinese aggressiveness.

On the Southeast Asian side of the equation, this thesis established a spectrum along which the wide degree of cooperation among Southeast Asian states with China could be demonstrated. Thailand and the Philippines stood out on this spectrum as countries whose security relationships with China, respectively, were among the most and least developed in Southeast Asia. When this thesis applied the hypothesis factors identified in Chapter I to these two selected case study countries, it found that each was relevant and had some

explanatory power in accounting for Thailand's and the Philippines degree of security cooperation with China.

However, the explanatory power of the hypotheses is not clear cut. As they operate in a simultaneous, and sometimes interactive, manner, it is not possible to assign a specific degree to which each hypothesis factor is functioning individually to determine the amount of security cooperation each Southeast Asian state conducts with China. For example, in Thailand, illiberal political transitions were largely responsible for prompting a decrease in U.S. security support. Concurrently, the reduction in support from the United States, and a consequent perception that the United States was less reliable as a security partner, played a role in causing Thailand to place a greater priority on diversification of its security partnerships. In this way, Hypotheses 1 through 3 had an interactive and compounding impact in influencing Thailand to conduct more security cooperation with China. Additionally, the absence of a major territorial dispute between Thailand and China, a factor represented in Hypothesis 4, has meant that there is not a significant barrier in place to temper this pro-cooperation influence. By contrast, for the Philippines, human rights abuses, in concert with decreased U.S. security support and a stated interest in greater diversification, interacted in a similar way as they did in Thailand to influence the country to take some limited steps towards greater security cooperation with China. However, the existence of a significant territorial dispute with China has been sufficient enough to temper the positive influence of the other factors, helping to explain why the Philippine security relationship with China is nascent in comparison with Thailand, despite the fact that the two countries bear many similarities with regard to the other hypothesis factors.

B. OUTLOOK

China's security cooperation replacing or superseding U.S. security relationships in Southeast Asia is neither imminent nor inevitable. Even in countries where China has made the greatest effort, progress is still in development and remains somewhat limited overall, especially in comparison with the United States' closest security relationships in

the region.³⁰⁹ Additionally, the United States maintains a comparative advantage in certain areas that will help to guard against rapid Chinese progress, particularly in countries like Thailand and the Philippines where the U.S. security relationship remains strong. In these countries, U.S. security cooperation is highly entrenched and institutionalized, and significant Chinese inroads in terms of replacing U.S. equipment with Chinese equipment, replacing English with Mandarin as a common second language among the military cadre, replacing U.S. doctrine with Chinese doctrine, and achieving interoperability would be very cost intensive and are unlikely in the near term.³¹⁰

There is more reason for concern, from the U.S. perspective, when one considers the long-term trajectory as opposed to the current reality of Chinese security relationships in Southeast Asia. U.S. security relationships in Southeast Asia remain strong; however, the United States should be wary of complacency.³¹¹ China has been strategic in seizing opportunities to increase security cooperation in Southeast Asia as they arise. Furthermore, once China does make inroads, it is difficult for the United States to gain that ground back, even if it steps up its own involvement in response. Additionally, once China has a foothold, it becomes easier for them to achieve additional progress, however incrementally.

China is assisted by a number of other factors that do not work in the U.S. favor. The widespread perception of declining U.S. influence in Southeast Asia and the waning faith in the United States as a regional security provider is unlikely to abate in the near term due to the realities of the shrinking comparative advantage the United States has over China with regard to economic and military power. As indicated in Chapter IV, Southeast Asian states' awareness of these realities can have a negative impact on the U.S. security relationship with certain states, creating an opening for China to pursue closer security cooperation. Additionally, for some Southeast Asian countries, the cost effectiveness of Chinese military equipment is a major draw with regard to procurements, even to the extent

³⁰⁹ Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security*, 68–69.

³¹⁰ Blaxland and Raymond, “Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China,” 14.

³¹¹ JUSMAG and USDAO officials, interviews with the author, Bangkok, Thailand and Manila, Philippines, April 1–5, 2019.

that they are willing to compromise to some degree with regard to quality. It is not likely that the United States would be able to reduce the price of procurements sufficiently to compete with China on a cost basis.

C. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are certain policies that the United States can implement in order to sustain its current security relationships in Southeast Asia and guard against Chinese usurpation:

- The United States should capitalize on those areas identified herein that have proven to have a limiting effect on Chinese security inroads in Southeast Asia. The most prominent of these areas relates to territorial disputes. In the South China Sea, this will mean continuing to emphasize that Chinese behavior there is revisionist and resisting any regional tendency towards normalization of Chinese dominance over the territory. If Chinese behavior in the South China Sea were to become normalized over time, then the potency of this factor in limiting cooperation by countries such as the Philippines with China will likely wane. Additionally, there are opportunities for the United States to capitalize on the potency of territorial concerns even among Southeast Asian states that do not have a claim in the South China Sea. For example, the Mekong river region is an area of strategic importance for Thailand and an area where there is growing Thai concern about Chinese encroachment. The United States should increase its engagement with Thailand on the Mekong issue and seek ways in which to highlight unwanted Chinese activity in the area and assist Thailand in providing a desired counter-balance there.³¹²
- The United States should strive, to the greatest degree possible, to maintain consistency in its provision of security cooperation. As indicated herein, when the United States reduces security cooperation or is otherwise perceived to be unreliable as a security partner, Southeast Asian partners become more willing

³¹² Parks and Zawacki, *The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations: Views of Thai and American Leaders on the Bilateral Relationship and Ways Forward*, 34.

to seek or accept security cooperation with China and thereby diversify sources of support in order to reduce dependence on the United States. Increased security cooperation and diversification of security partnerships could slowly erode the comparative advantage that the United States has with its closest partners in Southeast Asia, specifically with regard to the institutionalization of the U.S. security relationship based on the entrenchment of U.S. equipment, doctrine, and English language proficiency. Any degradation of this advantage will create opportunities for gaining ground that China will likely exploit.

- Relatedly, the United States must reassure Southeast Asian security partners of its security commitment to the region. As indicated in herein, when Southeast Asian states' faith in the U.S. security commitment wanes, there is a correlating willingness to consider warmer security relations with China. There are some concrete ways that the United States can achieve this end. For example, with regard to the Philippines, the United States can work with Philippine political and military counterparts to reduce the ambiguity in the MDT that has created a sense of doubt in the country about the reliability of the U.S. security commitment.
- The United States should broach the topics of democratic principles and human rights with greater sensitivity and understanding. As indicated herein, when certain Southeast Asian partners receive U.S. criticism, or experience a curtailment of U.S. security support, as a result of a military coup or human rights abuses, this creates a justification for those partners to diversify sources of support away from the United States and towards China. Additionally, it can also create a sense of grievance that not only lingers and damages the country's overall relationship with the United States but is also exploitable by China. This is not to say that the United States should change its stance on issues of democracy and human rights; rather, the United States should promote and adhere to these values in a manner more sensitive to the local context so that

their promotion does not come at the expense of the relationship.³¹³ For example, the United States could strive to reduce the tenor of public criticism and resume the approach used prior to 2014 wherein sensitive policy related to democratic and human rights abuses was executed more quietly via diplomatic channels.

³¹³ Parks and Zawacki, *The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations: Views of Thai and American Leaders on the Bilateral Relationship and Ways Forward*, 36.

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