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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE:**

A THREE-DIMENSIONAL HEDGING APPROACH TOWARDS MAXIMIZING  
SINGAPORE'S FREEDOM OF DIPLOMATIC MANEUVER

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Title:** A Three-Dimensional Hedging Approach Towards Maximizing Singapore's Freedom of Diplomatic Maneuver

**Author:** Major Muhammad Helmi, Singapore Armed Forces

**Thesis:** While Singapore's hedging approach remains optimal to forestall any rising power, Singapore can enhance its position vis-à-vis the great powers by strengthening ASEAN's role as a vital geopolitical bloc and pursuing a three-dimensional hedging strategy entrenching India's role in the region to overcome the binary hedging construct between US and China.

**Discussion:** This essay examines international relations theories and conceptual frameworks that best explain Singapore's hedging approach. Using a conceptual framework, this essay examines the threat posed by China's ascendancy and concludes that China seeks regional primacy, manifested by its attempts to subvert regional orders from within to shift from being ASEAN-centric towards a more China-led regional order. In order to maintain Singapore's freedom of diplomatic maneuver, this essay asserts that Singapore should aim to evolve ASEAN into a significant geopolitical bloc, leveraging on its Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2018 as the means to advance this agenda. In addition, Singapore should aim to strengthen relations with India and advocate establishing a maritime partnership involving great powers using the existing bilateral exercises as a basis for expansion. Doing so would allow Singapore to reduce its reliance on the US and China.

**Conclusion:** Singapore has much to gain by adopting hedging strategies that continue to enmesh and balance out great powers against each other. It allows Singapore to retain flexibility to continue its policy of pragmatism and maintain freedom of diplomatic maneuver while concomitantly ensuring its survival and economic prosperity. This essay has argued the need to evolve ASEAN into a more significant bloc and deepen relations with India to improve Singapore's hedging position vis-à-vis great powers. It is hoped that policymakers consider the utility of the policy recommendations mentioned in this essay, in order to achieve a more stable and peaceful SEA region in which Singapore can continue to thrive and prosper.

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## **PREFACE**

Singapore has always prided itself as an interlocutor between the East and the West. Having grown up in Singapore and afforded the opportunity to study in the United States and United Kingdom, Singapore's position as a small city-state and interlocutor allows for a confluence of Western and Eastern ideals to co-exist, thus facilitating a neutral and also alternate standpoint to worldviews. I hope that my insights from studying the interplay of South East Asia, China, US and middle power dynamics will allow policymakers from the US and China to consider the views of small states entrapped between the conflict of great powers and for policymakers in the Singapore Ministry of Defense and the Singapore Armed Forces to take into consideration some of the policy recommendations that I have advocated in the thesis.

My wife, Shera, has been a staunch pillar of support throughout the course of the year. Her patience and constant encouragement afforded me the time, latitude, and motivation to complete the thesis.

I would also like to thank the United States Marine Corps (USMC) and the Marine Corps University in Quantico for all the support in helping me develop as a professional military officer and for the opportunity to express some of my salient thoughts. The staff at the Leadership Communication Skills Center, Marine Corps University provided excellent support as I pursued my research. The guidance provided by the faculty members in the University has been invaluable. I would like to thank my mentor, Dr. Eric Shibuya, and my faculty advisors, LtCol Andrew Del Gaudio and Dr. James Joyner for their mentorship, advice, and patience. Their dedication to students will continue to inspire me throughout my academic and professional career.

## INTRODUCTION

China's rise and growing uncertainties over its intentions in the long term has dominated much of the discourse of international relations in the last decade. China watchers assert that there has been a shift in how China perceives its role in the world.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Since 2004, China has expanded its strategic partnership with Russia; jointly exercising vetoes against US-sponsored UN Security Council resolutions, conducting large joint military exercises in 2005 and 2007, and establishing regional institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), designed to counter or offset American influence in Central Asia. This shift became more pronounced when President Xi Jinping promulgated the concept of new "great-power relations" in 2012, arguing for a more equal relationship between the US and China.<sup>4</sup>

China's assertiveness is even more pronounced in the Asia-Pacific region. While China's actions previously revolved around blending in within existing regional institutional frameworks like the Association of South East Asian Nations Regional Forum (ARF) and East Asia Summit (EAS) to reassure Asian states of its peaceful rise and benign nature, this position has shifted. In 2005, China attempted to exclude countries like the US, Australia, New Zealand, and India from gaining entry to the East Asia Summit.<sup>5</sup> China has also since sought to establish new frameworks that are more China-centric, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, which strengthens China's influence over weaker states and would allow it to assume a more de facto leadership role in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>6</sup>

The views are thus divided with regards to China's rise - power transition theory proponents argue that China aims to supplant the US as the regional hegemon in the Asia-

Pacific, while more optimistic views argue in support of China's "peaceful rise" within the international order.<sup>7</sup> The implications for Singapore's strategic interests are significant, particularly in the context of the evolving regional security architecture in Southeast Asia (SEA), where the US presently plays the role of a guarantor in maintaining regional security and stability.

Singapore's leaders are just as concerned about China's growing assertiveness as they are about US commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. The emergence of transnational terrorism created a climate of unrest and troubled peace within Southeast Asia, but the threat of terrorism was also accompanied by a shift in US foreign policy away from the Asia-Pacific and towards the Middle East. This policy stance however, has since evolved. After a decade of military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq to stem the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the US articulated its "Rebalance to Asia" resolving to expand and intensify its role in the Asia-Pacific region in an effort to reassert itself as the dominant presence in the region.<sup>8</sup> Efforts to strengthen relations with existing allies and rebalance forces towards the Asia-Pacific have culminated towards establishing a Marine Rotational Force (MRF) in Darwin, Australia, deployment of Littoral Combat Ships to Singapore, and establishment of military bases in the Philippines.<sup>9</sup> Concerns remain over US commitment to the region, particularly in light of recent events in the Middle East, where Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has grown increasingly influential. Political pressure is building up in the US once more to militarily intervene in the Middle East.

### **Research Question**

The evolving geopolitical trends have created the following dilemma for Singapore and other states in South East Asia: China is the primary economic partner that facilitates

prosperity while the US is the regional security guarantor who guards the peace. As Singapore's founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew once said, "When elephants fight, the grass gets trampled."<sup>10</sup> The same could be inferred for small states seeking freedom of maneuver between great powers. Thus, how can Singapore evolve its security strategy in order to maximize its freedom of diplomatic maneuver?

### **Thesis**

This essay argues that while Singapore's hedging approach remains optimal to forestall any rising power, Singapore can enhance its position vis-à-vis the great powers by strengthening ASEAN's role as a vital geopolitical bloc and by pursuing a three-dimensional hedging strategy which entails entrenching India's role in the region to overcome the binary hedging construct between US and China.

This essay is divided into three segments. First, this essay will examine international relations theories and conceptual frameworks that best explain Singapore's hedging approach. Second, this essay will examine the threat posed by China's ascendancy within the context of Southeast Asian politics and argue for a case to constrain China's assertiveness. Last, this essay will propose how Singapore should influence ASEAN's development as a geopolitical bloc as it assumes the ASEAN Chair in 2018 and argue that entrenching relations with India would allow Singapore to reduce its reliance on the US and China.

## **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS: BALANCING, BANDWAGONING AND HEDGING STRATEGIES**

Insofar as the argument is premised on a zero-sum conundrum, it necessitates a discussion of the various means in which states in Southeast Asia are able to exercise freedom of maneuver when faced with a rising power like China. Within this context, Stephen Walt provides two salient conceptions: “balancing, which is *allying with others against the prevailing threat*; and bandwagoning, which is its opposite, *an alignment with the source of danger*.”<sup>11</sup> For the purpose of this essay, China is viewed as the prevailing threat or source of danger. Kenneth Waltz cautions that any emerging great power should be viewed with suspicion.<sup>12</sup> He argues that there is a need to keep the rising power in check through “internal balancing” by building up one’s military capabilities, and “external balancing”, by pursuing a closer alliance with trusted big powers. Balancing is thus an important conception as ASEAN states have no formal security alliance and member states on their own do not possess military capabilities sufficient to deter China’s military power.<sup>13</sup> In Southeast Asia, balancing would entail states declaring formal alliances with the United States, who is viewed favorably as a benign presence and ultimate guarantor of security. Schweller, on the other hand, exemplifies the “bandwagoning” school of thought.<sup>14</sup> He argues that it is futile to contain a rising power like China; instead, he posits that it makes more sense to take advantage of its ascendancy and to nurture a long-term relationship to safeguard future interests.

Kuik posits that state actors rarely adopt pure balancing and bandwagoning strategies. Within the context of Southeast Asian politics, he argues that “balancing is

considered strategically unnecessary because the threat of Chinese aggression remains potential rather than actual.”<sup>15</sup> The act of balancing will only realize the unintended effect of pushing China to go on the defensive; to counter the formation of an anti-China coalition. A case in point is China’s response to US foreign policy announcement of its “Rebalance” whereby China has since sought to grow anti-access, area-denial capabilities against the US rebalance.<sup>16</sup> Balancing runs the risk of escalating tensions and increasing the risk of conflagration between these two great powers.

Balancing would also limit economic engagements with China. Since Singapore established the Singapore-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA), China now stands as Singapore’s largest trading partner, with two-way trade amounting to \$121.5 billion in 2014.<sup>17</sup> In June 2015, Singapore agreed to partake in initiatives undertaken by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), aimed at funding infrastructure projects to promote regional connectivity and economic cooperation. Given China’s growing importance as a market for Singapore goods and services and its willingness to fund regional projects, China could leverage these vulnerabilities to exert pressure on Singapore. A pure balancing strategy would lead to a significant loss of the above-mentioned economic opportunities.<sup>18</sup>

Bandwagoning is also strategically risky. First, according to Cai, pure bandwagoning would mean that Singapore would lose its position as a trusted partner in the region and will no longer possess privileged access to US military technology, training, and procurement of weapon platforms and systems.<sup>19</sup> Second, bandwagoning would preclude loss of economic opportunities with the US, which according to the World in 2050 report, would still remain as the second largest economy in the world.

Third, bandwagoning with China would escalate tensions with Malaysia and Indonesia, destabilize the periphery, and possibly create domestic discontent, given Singapore's large Malay-Muslim population. This factor is particularly pertinent considering that previously, Singapore's leaders deliberately waited for the other four ASEAN founding members (Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia) to normalize diplomatic relations with China before doing so in 1990.<sup>20</sup> In particular, it was only after Beijing pledged not to interfere in Indonesia's internal affairs and Indonesia resumed formal relations with China in August 1990, that Singapore proceeded to establish diplomatic relations. Domestically, there is also the risk that Singapore's social cohesion would be undermined as minority races perceive that they will be marginalized in the future. Lastly, bandwagoning would undermine and fracture ASEAN's cohesion. Evelyn Goh asserts that there is a basic divergence between maritime and continental ASEAN nations as maritime states prefer the stabilizing presence afforded by the US in ensuring vital sea lines of communications (SLOCs) remain open, while continental states align more closely with China, given that they operate in close proximity along shared borders, share cultural similarities, and are economically more inter-dependent.<sup>21</sup> Bandwagoning would accentuate this divergence and cause maritime states to become more wary of China's intentions. Thus, considering the arguments laid out above, a pure bandwagoning policy is also highly risky.

### **SINGAPORE'S HEDGING APPROACH: A BINARY CONSTRUCT**

Kuik made the observation that no ASEAN member states have chosen to balance or bandwagon against China<sup>22</sup> and instead, he argues that a middle point exists between these diametrically opposed strategies: a concept known as hedging.<sup>23</sup> Evelyn Goh also

argues that ASEAN states pursue hedging strategies and defines it as “a behaviour in which a country seeks to offset risks by pursuing multiple policy options intended to produce mutually counteracting effects, under the situation of high uncertainties and high stakes.”<sup>24</sup>

Hedging is a useful analytical concept to explain Singapore’s behaviour with respect to great powers. It is perceived as the most logical policy option for small states like Singapore. It allows Singapore to fulfill its core interests of maximising freedom of diplomatic maneuver and leverages triangular politics with great powers to maximise trade and economic development. It also affords Singapore strategic flexibility in its engagement with great powers like China and the US, especially when it is unclear when and how the power structure will adjust following shifts in the dynamics of regional geopolitical order.<sup>25</sup> Singapore’s close relationship with Taiwan and membership in both the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the AIIB are good examples of how hedging has allowed Singapore to exercise its political independence.

Kuik provides a conceptual framework to view hedging strategies through a spectrum of policy options (see Figure 1). It highlights both pure balancing and bandwagoning strategies on the opposite ends, with balancing representing the highest degree of rejection of China’s power and bandwagoning representing the highest degree of acceptance of China’s power. He posits that a hedging policy can constitute up to five possible components: Indirect balancing, dominance denial, economic pragmatism, binding engagement, and limited bandwagoning.<sup>26</sup> He also asserts that the first two components can be categorised as options to minimize risk and the latter three options as options to maximize returns. Each component comprises all elements of national power.

Kuik’s conceptual framework will form the basis for discussing policy elements of Singapore’s overarching hedging strategy. Implicit is the caveat that hedging strategies would be rendered irrelevant if emergence or escalation of Singapore’s existential threats necessitate establishing a formal alliance with one of the great powers for protection and if Singapore is forced to choose sides in a conflict involving China and the US.<sup>27</sup>

**Figure 1. Hedging Strategies<sup>28</sup>**

FACTORS	BALANCING (Pro US)	HEDGING					BANDWAGONING (Pro China)
		MINIMIZES RISK		MAXIMIZES RETURNS			
	INDIRECT BALANCING	DOMINANCE DENIAL	ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM	BINDING ENGAGEMENT	LIMITED BANDWAGONING		
	“Security First”	“Just in Case”	“Ascendancy is ok, but not Dominance”	“Business First”	“Socialization Matters”	“Grasp opportunity for profit, but cautiously”	“Profit First”
DIPLOMATIC	Political partnership with US (partner/ ally)	Involvement of other powers in regional affairs (India, EU, Japan) Political support to other alliances	Entering into bilateral and regional economic cooperation	Creating and maintaining regularized institutional links with China through bilateral and multilateral diplomatic platforms	Political partnership with China Coordinating external policies		
ECONOMIC	Enters into trade agreements exclusively with the US		Establish and maintain direct trade and investment links with China			Enters into trade agreements exclusively with China	
MILITARY	Entering into a military alliance with the US and upgrading armament program for the purpose of containment	Maintain military ties with US Modernizing its own military				Entering into military alliance with China	

← Degree of Power Rejection      ↑ Neutrality Point      Degree of Power Acceptance →

**Figure 2. Singapore’s Binary Hedging Construct<sup>29</sup>**

COUNTRY	BALANCING (Pro US)	HEDGING					BANDWAGONING (Pro China)
		MINIMIZES RISK		MAXIMIZES RETURNS			
	INDIRECT BALANCING	DOMINANCE DENIAL	ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM	BINDING ENGAGEMENT	LIMITED BANDWAGONING		
	"Security First"	"Just in Case"	"Ascendancy is Ok, but not Dominance"	"Business First"	"Socialization Matters"	"Grasp Opportunity for Profit, but Cautiously"	"Profit First"
SINGAPORE		M: Strategic Framework Agreement with US in 2005. Relies on US for military technology transfer for military modernization program. Regular security cooperation activities and has access to training facilities in CONUS. Offers US access to naval bases for LCS	D: Strategic Partnership Dialogue in 2012	E: SIN-US FTA and TPP. US is 3 <sup>rd</sup> largest trading partner. E: SIN-China FTA and AIB/NDB. China is largest trading partner. Involved in several state-led industrial development projects.	D: China's inclusion in ASEAN regional frameworks and commitment to Treaty of Amity and Cooperation M: Conducts bilateral exercise, Ex COOPERATION with China and military exchange programs		

To Countervail Militarily      To Neutralize Diplomatically      To Make Economic Profit      To Accommodate Diplomatically      To Draw Strength From it

← Degree of Power Rejection      ↑ Neutrality Point      Degree of Power Acceptance →

**Indirect Balancing**

*Indirect Balancing* involves establishing strategic relations both in the political and military domain (i.e. formal military or political partnership). Singapore’s strategic defense partnership with the US is driven by the conviction that US presence in the Asia-Pacific is a determining factor of the “peace and stability that Asia enjoys today.”<sup>30</sup> Strategic alignment with the US, as manifested by the Strategic Framework Agreement signed in 2005, serves as Singapore’s hedge against military coercion by great powers. Singapore’s military cooperation with the US also allows the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to continue its transformation and military modernization program. Privileged access in acquisition programs like the Joint Strike Fighter program, in which Singapore’s defense industry is not equipped to develop, is vital to ensure Singapore’s military remains a credible deterrent against its perceived threats.

This relationship became even more pronounced following the 9/11 attacks and the discovery of a plot to bomb Yishun MRT by Islamic terrorist cells in Singapore.<sup>31</sup> Surrounded by largely Muslim-majority states such as Malaysia and Indonesia, Singapore became extremely concerned about the pervading influence of extremist Islamism in the region. The counter-terrorism (CT) agenda, viewed as a shared interest, invariably led to

greater cooperation efforts between Singapore and the US. To some extent, the CT agenda is viewed as a stronger reason to maintain the strategic relationship vis-à-vis the China challenge.<sup>32</sup> Despite such positive relations, Singapore carefully manages the messaging behind its close relationship with the US, and has deliberately abstained from formalizing its alliance with the US “for fear of upsetting its immediate neighbors or China.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Dominance Denial**

*Dominance Denial* is characterized by Singapore’s efforts to enmesh the US within regional frameworks in order to neutralize China’s growing assertiveness. Singapore’s leadership is concerned that China’s assertiveness may disrupt regional order and stability. As such, Singapore actively advocated for US involvement in the inaugural ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994 and its membership in the East Asian Summit in 2011, in support of the US “rebalance”. When the US closed its military bases in Philippines in 1989, Singapore offered the US access to its facilities, which has since culminated in the deployment of Littoral Combat Ships in Singapore’s naval bases.<sup>34</sup>

### **Economic Pragmatism**

*Economic Pragmatism* involves entering into a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) and extensive economic cooperation with a great power. Apart from its involvement in the AIIB and Singapore-China FTA, Singapore also has a FTA with the US. The US is currently Singapore’s third largest trading partner, behind China and Malaysia. Singapore’s economic engagement with the US was further reinforced by its ascension to the TPP, in which China is excluded. This policy of economic pragmatism, cultivating a middle position in terms of trade and investment links with both great powers, allows

Singapore to reap maximum economic benefits.

### **Binding Engagement**

Binding Engagement involves establishing a regular institutional link with great powers through bilateral platforms such as strategic dialogues or multilateral institutions. By binding China to Southeast Asia through its involvement in ASEAN's regional institutional frameworks like the ASEAN Plus Three, ARF and EAS, Singapore aims to socialize China to international norms and the "ASEAN way" of consensus building.<sup>35</sup> China would better understand ASEAN's internal processes and also develop a vested interest in promoting regional stability and growth. ASEAN's ability to commit China to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation was a positive indication that China would not resort to use of military force in resolving disputes.<sup>36</sup> To foster China's involvement in the regional security architecture, Singapore's Ministry of Defense signed the Agreement on Defense Exchanges and Security Cooperation in 2008 to encourage more high-level visits, exercises, professional exchanges and mutual naval ship visits while also advocating China's inclusion in the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus).<sup>37</sup> The bilateral Exercise Cooperation inaugurated in 2009 is a manifestation of this agreement. It was envisaged that China's enduring participation in the Shangri-La Dialogue and the ADMM-Plus would allow China to understand ASEAN's norms and adopt a more constructive and consensus-building approach in its interactions.

### **Limited Bandwagoning**

Singapore does not pursue limited bandwagoning; coordinating external policies in selected areas and deference with regards to regional issues. With regards to maritime

disputes in the South China Sea, Singapore's leaders have not refrained from articulating their concerns, even at the expense of incurring China's displeasure. In addition, there is no formal agreement equivalent to a political partnership.<sup>38</sup>

### **CHINA'S ASSERTIVENESS IN REGIONAL AFFAIRS: A CASE FOR CONSTRAINING CHINA'S POWER**

China's assertiveness in regional affairs has reinforced notions that China, with its newfound confidence is no longer willing to abide by norms in an international or regional order that it had no means to shape.<sup>39</sup> Using Kuik's conceptual model as a basis, trends associated with China's rise in the region were analyzed and subsequently translated into degrees of acceptance or rejection of China's power (see Figure 3). These trends were then categorized in the context of Singapore's strategic interests across the political, economic, security, and also cultural domain. Although existing literature on hedging only considers the political, economic, and security dimensions, the cultural aspect was an important factor in discerning any proclivities for one side over the other. This framework could function as a hedging strategy index for policymakers to ascertain how Singapore's strategic inclinations may shift between two or more powers.

**Figure 3. Analysis of Power Rejection and Acceptance Factors<sup>40</sup>**

FACTORS		BALANCING (Great Powers US/ China)	HEDGING				BANDWAGONING (India)	
			MINIMIZES RISK		MAXIMIZES RETURNS			
			INDIRECT BALANCING	DOMINANCE DENIAL	ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM	BINDING ENGAGEMENT		LIMITED BANDWAGONING
		"Security First"	"Just in Case"	"Ascendancy is Ok, but not Dominance"	"Business First"	"Socialization Matters"	"Grasp Opportunity for Profit, but Cautiously"	"Profit First"
DIPLOMATIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freedom of Diplomatic Maneuver</li> <li>Respect for International Law</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>China will constrain Singapore's autonomy – deference as part of tributary state relationship (R)</li> <li>China does not willingly adhere to international law that it had no prior influence to shape (R)</li> </ul>				
ECONOMIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximizes Trade</li> <li>Attracts FDI and Spurs Growth of Businesses</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>US Trans-Pacific Partnership (R)</li> <li>Stronger ASEAN - Rapid Economic Growth of Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia (R)</li> <li>Strengthening India-Japan alliance (R)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>China will become world' largest economy over the next decade (A)</li> <li>China's One-Belt, One Road initiative will spur infrastructure development (high speed railway) (A)</li> <li>Erosion of China's competitiveness due to rising wages and ageing population (R)</li> <li>Future of CCP is uncertain (R)</li> <li>China's focus on OBOR initiative may erode Singapore's competitiveness (R)</li> </ul>			
MILITARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conventional Capabilities</li> <li>Military Modernization</li> <li>Counter-Terrorism</li> <li>Counter-Proliferation</li> <li>Counter-Piracy</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>US Pivot to Asia (R)</li> <li>Significant Tech Advantage for at least the next 20 years (R)</li> <li>Power projection capabilities to protect Singapore's Sea Lines of Communications and support anti-piracy efforts (R)</li> <li>Increasing strength of transnational terrorism (A)</li> <li>Weakened US ability as provider of international security goods and need for burden sharing (A)</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rise of Taiwan Nationalism (R)</li> <li>ASEAN's ineffectiveness as a power broker to negotiate with China over SCS disputes (R)</li> <li>ASEAN's increasing proclivity towards ASEAN Plus Three (R)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Military modernization program may allow China to achieve parity with US by 2030 (A)</li> </ul>	
CULTURAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language</li> <li>Religion</li> <li>Traditions and Norms</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English as Lingua Franca (R)</li> <li>Multi-racial and religious society (R)</li> <li>Education System more aligned to Western norms (R)</li> </ul>			

← Degree of Power Rejection      ↑      Degree of Power Acceptance →

To Countervail Militarily      To Neutralize Diplomatically      To Make Economic Profit      To Accommodate Diplomatically      To Draw Strength From it

Neutrality Point

**Exposing Inadequacies in China’s Peaceful Rise**

Uncertainties remain about China’s peaceful rise as a superpower. According to Zhang Baohui, China harbors intentions to reshape regional dynamics in Southeast Asia.<sup>41</sup> While China’s actions in the past were largely aligned to Deng Xiaoping’s mantra of “Lay low, never take the lead, and bide our time,” its achievements in this period of “strategic opportunity” have instilled a new-found confidence.<sup>42</sup> To this point, Men Honghua asserts that it is indicative of China’s ambition to attain regional primacy in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>43</sup> On the economic front, the ASEAN-China FTA which ASEAN intended to be beneficial in its favor, has shifted the centrality of economic power in the Asia-Pacific northward towards China. Of significant concern are China’s actions in the

diplomatic front. According to Tang Xiaosong, the model of ASEAN Plus Three (initiated by ASEAN), where “regional cooperation is defined by rules set by small and weak countries,” constrains China’s ability to dominate the regional order.<sup>44</sup> In 2004, China attempted to posture the East Asia Summit as a means to build towards a China-led platform, the East Asian Community.<sup>45</sup> China argued against the inclusion of non-Asian countries like US and Australia, but the US was able to convince ASEAN to advocate for Australia, New Zealand, and India’s inclusion. To limit US influence, China also rejected the proposal by the US in 2006 to establish a Pacific Rim FTA under Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).<sup>46</sup> Instead, China proposed that the FTAs be separated into two different systems: the FTA of the Americas (which has since translated to the Trans-Pacific Partnership) and the East Asian FTA. Such actions were indicative of China’s ambitions to weaken ASEAN’s influence over regional institutional frameworks and US influence in regional affairs. It should be no surprise that ASEAN has actively sought to engage other non-Asian powers like the US, Russia and India, advancing Evelyn Goh’s concept of omni-enmeshment, while the US has embarked on its “Rebalance” policy and the Trans-Pacific Partnership initiative to prevent China from dominating Asia’s regional forums.

### **Regional Instability arising from Maritime Disputes in the South China Sea**

China has regularly asserted the need for peaceful resolution of conflict; however, recent clashes between China and claimant states over territorial claims have caused instability in the region and reinforced the divergence between maritime and continental ASEAN states. Despite claims to resolve maritime disputes through peaceful means, the stand-off between the Philippines Navy and Chinese vessels during the Scarborough

Shoal incident in 2012, China's harassment of the *USNS Impeccable* in 2009 and *USS Cowpens* in 2014, and collision between Vietnamese naval ships and Chinese civilian maritime law enforcement vessels in 2014, are just some examples of China's willingness to use military force over SCS.<sup>47</sup> The US is currently embroiled in the conflict, and it has responded by conducting Freedom of Navigation exercises in December 2015 to convey the message that the US will not tolerate China's abrogation of international law.<sup>48</sup> Nations in Southeast Asia have increased defense spending in recent years, in an effort to modernize their militaries and present a credible deterrent against China's aggression. Such an environment perpetuates the risk of escalating tensions, and although confidence building measures such as navy-to-navy hotlines have been established, there is still the risk that an armed conflict may ensue between US, China, and claimant states should miscalculations occur.

SCS disputes have demonstrated that China does not willingly adhere to international law, particularly, over issues where it has had no prior influence in shaping its norms. In response to Vietnam and Malaysia's joint submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, China circulated a *Note Verbale* to the United Nations, using historical precedent as a means to circumvent existing international law.<sup>49</sup> China also adopts a "salami-slicing" approach, rapidly escalating island reclamation efforts in an attempt to accumulate small gains that over time will accrue into a major strategic advantage, which can then be used to strengthen territorial sovereignty claims.<sup>50</sup>

## **Undermining ASEAN as an Effective Regional Institution**

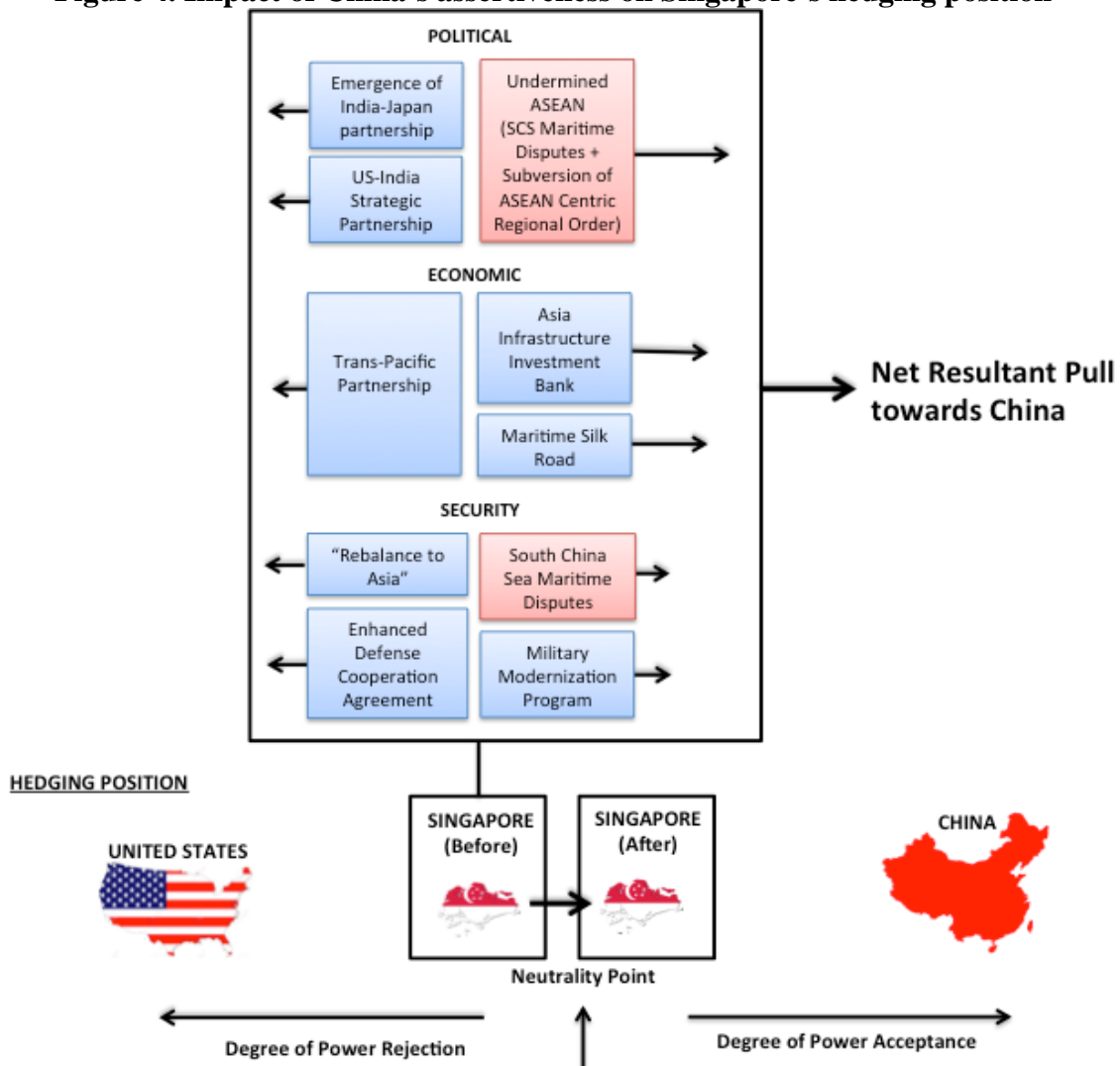
China's acute sense of vulnerability is heightened by what it perceives as encirclement campaigns by its adversaries. China views the US Rebalance, which was positively received by maritime SEA states, and ASEAN's constant attempts to negotiate multilaterally, as part of an anti-China movement to balance against its rise and undermine its influence.

In response, employing Sun Tzu's maxim of disrupting enemy alliances, China has sought to reinforce the divergence between maritime and continental ASEAN states to fracture ASEAN's cohesiveness. On two occasions, ASEAN-level forums failed to deliver a joint communiqué on escalating tensions in the SCS. The first was during the 21<sup>st</sup> ASEAN summit held in Phnom Penh in 2012. ASEAN failed to issue a joint communiqué because Cambodia, the ASEAN Chair, having negotiated economic inducements with China, consequently refused to incorporate the Philippines' and Vietnam's positions in the communiqué. In 2015, ASEAN Defense Ministers again failed to issue a joint agreement on the same issue during the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM). China has also effectively stymied progress on the ASEAN-China Code of Conduct in the SCS, arguing the case that claimant states, not ASEAN, are party to the disputes.

China has repeatedly refused to engage in multilateral negotiations, preferring instead to negotiate bilaterally, in an attempt to weaken the claims and bargaining power of maritime ASEAN states. Such perceptions are troubling for Singapore as it suggests that in a China-led regional hegemonic order, ASEAN will be rendered ineffective as a regional institution and small states have no means to seek redress other than through

bilateral negotiations with China. ASEAN once thought of as a geopolitical bloc with significant economic potential and diplomatic clout in the Asia-Pacific has seen its influence diminished greatly by China's rise. As shown in Figure 4, Singapore's hedging position has weakened due to ASEAN's institutional weaknesses and China's assertiveness in regional affairs. To reverse this trend, there is a need to examine how ASEAN can continue to maintain its centrality in the regional order.

**Figure 4. Impact of China's assertiveness on Singapore's hedging position<sup>51</sup>**



## **EVOLVING ASEAN INTO A SIGNIFICANT GEOPOLITICAL BLOC**

Within the binary hedging construct, Singapore's ability to cultivate a strong hedging position will depend on the extent that ASEAN can evolve into a significant geopolitical bloc to countervail China's influence. This paper has derived the following recommendations for policymakers to consider.

### **ASEAN's Role as a Trusted Mediator**

Singapore should seek to strengthen ASEAN's role as a neutral mediator and an effective regional institution. Singapore should define its agenda when it assumes the ASEAN Chair in 2018 as one characterized by ambitious goals to resolve SCS maritime disputes, advanced on a strategy of mutually beneficial arrangements. Working together to develop oil and gas resources in the SCS is not a new concept. In 2005, China, the Philippines and Vietnam signed the Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking (JMSU) agreement, where the signatories agreed to conduct joint petroleum exploration "as part of efforts to turn the disputed area into a zone peace, stability and cooperation."<sup>52</sup> In 2006, China worked with Vietnam on oil exploration, which included the China National Offshore Oil Cooperation (CNOOC) and Vietnam National Oil and Gas Group conducting joint explorations in the Gulf of Tonkin. China offered economic inducements to solicit agreement from the Philippines and Vietnam. However, Philippines' domestic politics and emerging anti-China sentiments from the Philippine legislature halted the negotiations.<sup>53</sup> The deal was rescinded and parties once again adopted negative militaristic and economic actions. For joint developments to take place, ASEAN should play a central role in negotiating such undertakings.<sup>54</sup> Elevating such discussions at the regional level, sequencing actions such that it appeases domestic constituencies, and

mediating in order to solicit compromise is a role that ASEAN can perform to broker a mutually beneficial outcome. ASEAN's history of consensus-building and brokering agreements between two parties in conflicts such as the Cambodia-Thailand border clashes in 2011 underlines ASEAN's credibility as a mediator. Within this agenda, ASEAN should commission a non-claimant state, a neutral power broker such as Thailand or even Singapore (two states that China perceives as relatively neutral)<sup>55,56</sup> to identify and examine overlapping maritime claims in the SCS, consistent with international law and to highlight contentious issues for conflict resolution.

Singapore should also influence ASEAN to limit formal discussions of SCS disputes in ASEAN meetings, as China deems it disrespectful. Instead, ASEAN should position itself as a platform for collaboration. Based on the findings from the first initiative, the ASEAN Coordinating Council could initiate working groups involving associated ministries from China and claimant states, focused on developing mechanisms for joint exploration and development of resources. The working groups can develop resource sharing agreements or bilateral patrolling mechanisms that may deter potential sources of conflict like illegal fishing or any disagreements arising from oil and gas exploration.<sup>57</sup>

### **Entrench Role of ASEAN-centric Regional Institutional Frameworks**

Singapore could countervail against China's influence by preventing China from overhauling or subverting the regional order. China is currently positioning ASEAN Plus Three as the preferred platform to discuss Asia-Pacific matters. There are also signs that the Plus Three countries are in agreement with China on this issue. In 2008, in the Japanese town of Dazaifu, the Plus Three countries organized a meeting and agreed to

institutionalise annual summit meetings.<sup>58</sup> This raises fundamental questions on the future of ASEAN's centrality in regional affairs.

It is in Singapore's interests to ensure that ASEAN entrenches the ARF and EAS as its main forum, as these involve US and India, Singapore's preferred strategic partners. If Singapore is not pro-active, China will leverage on its soft-power diplomacy and economic inducements to rally other ASEAN member states to shift towards a more Sino-centric forum to discuss regional affairs. A shift away from an ASEAN-centric regional platform would be detrimental to Singapore's interests as China would dictate regional norms and potentially constrain Singapore's autonomy. To prevent a repeat of the failure to issue a joint communique in 2013, it is also imperative that Singapore create opportunities for India to assert and wield greater influence in ASEAN meetings. India's deepening relations with ASEAN states such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Myanmar would allow states to assert greater autonomy, particularly, when assuming the role of Chairmanship of ASEAN. As long as India and ASEAN continue to share a convergence of strategic interests, a strong ASEAN-India relationship is an effective geopolitical counterweight against China's assertiveness.

### **Shift towards Stronger Institutionalism**

In the long run, ASEAN should aim to introduce greater institutionalism within its framework. ASEAN and the EU represent the dichotomy between soft and hard institutionalism. While it is not practical to expect ASEAN to evolve towards the EU's hard institutionalism, there is scope to adopt a middle position to allow ASEAN centrality to emerge above parochial national interests. Since its inception, the European Council has released the European Security Strategy, EU Strategy Against the Proliferation of

Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the EU Counterterrorism Strategy.<sup>59</sup> The EU also develops common positions in response to an ongoing security issue, such as the position on North Korea. The EU also makes decisions on joint civilian and military actions, or financial support in support of the EU's foreign and security interests, and this is implemented through the Common Security and Defense Policy.

ASEAN had originally envisaged establishing an ASEAN Political and Security Community in 2015. Thus far, this has not materialized. It is likely that Singapore would face an unfavorable response from some ASEAN member states as there is a general disdain for European models and standards. Its recent failings such as the bailout of Greece and dissonance amongst EU member states on how to tackle human trafficking and irregular migration may also reinforce the notion that emulating the EU might not be appropriate for ASEAN. However, in light of China's assertiveness, it is timely that Singapore should aim to advance this agenda when it assumes the ASEAN Chair in 2018; else ASEAN risks being a peripheral geopolitical bloc in the future.

Critics would also add that ASEAN's diversity and deference towards state sovereignty are significant challenges to overcome.<sup>60</sup> However, the ASEAN Political Security Blueprint adopted by the ASEAN Summit in 2009 highlighted three key characteristics: "a rules-based community of shared values and norms; a cohesive peaceful, stable, and resilient region with shared responsibility for comprehensive security; and a dynamic and outward-looking region in an increasingly integrated and independent world."<sup>61</sup> This would suggest that members are amenable to gradually shift from "soft regionalism" to a more rules-based institutional framework. The World in 2050 report predicts that ASEAN will possess five of the top twenty-five economies in

the world.<sup>62</sup> If ASEAN can translate economic prosperity towards accruing military might and diplomatic leverage and mitigate China's assertiveness in regional affairs, ASEAN would be a significant geopolitical bloc of influence against China.

## **PURSuing A THREE-DIMENSIONAL HEDGING STRATEGY INVOLVING INDIA**

### **India's Emergence as a Key Player in Regional Security**

Against the backdrop of territorial conflicts, ASEAN's weakness as a regional institution, and deteriorating great power relations between US and China in the Asia-Pacific region, ASEAN states have begun to view India as a potential counterweight to constrain China's influence in the region. India's ascendancy has significant merits for Singapore. A strong alignment with India would allow Singapore to circumvent its existing binary hedging construct and pursue "three-dimensional hedging," which for the purpose of this paper will be defined as cultivating a middle position between three great powers. Deepening bilateral relations with India would allow Singapore to meet dual objectives of constraining China's assertiveness and mitigating any gaps that may arise in US provision of collective security in the region.

India's rise as a great power has raised India's geopolitical standing among ASEAN states. India is commonly attributed as the "fastest growing free market democracy" and is projected to become the second-largest economy in the world in 2050.<sup>63</sup> While India's engagement in regional security was largely confined to bilateral activities previously, India has begun to broaden defense cooperation efforts towards ASEAN as a collective. In 2010, India participated in the inaugural meeting of ADMM-Plus in 2010, the main defense and security cooperation mechanism for regional security issues.<sup>64</sup> India also

initiated several confidence-building measures. In 2012, during its eighth iteration of the MILAN exercise, the Indian Navy together with fourteen Asian nations, discussed challenges associated with maritime terrorism, piracy, poaching, humanitarian and search and rescue operations, and capacity building.<sup>65</sup> They also executed sea-lane security exercises in the vicinity of the Andaman and Nicobar islands using its Joint Command facility at Port Blair as a base of operations.<sup>66</sup> The Indian Navy has also emerged as an important contributor to counter-piracy operations in the Straits of Malacca. It has offered to participate in coordinated patrols in the Straits of Malacca and in 2002, the Indian Navy escorted US Navy units through the Straits of Malacca.<sup>67</sup> Despite Indonesia and Malaysia's hesitance initially, their eventual support demonstrated acceptance towards India's naval presence in the region.<sup>68</sup> India has also played its role as a responsible international stakeholder, acting decisively during the 2004 Tsunami through its Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief efforts. India's reliability in coming to the aid of maritime SEA states has diminished any apprehension ASEAN initially had towards India and reinforced its credibility as a committed player in SEA regional security. India's "Act East" policy (AEP), which advocates engagement, integration within regional institutions and increased security cooperation with ASEAN states, has since culminated towards an elevation of ties between ASEAN and India to the level of strategic partnership.<sup>69</sup>

While India's presence in the region affords economic and security benefits, albeit to a lesser degree than those provided by China, ASEAN states are swayed mainly by India's benign nature. India's constitution, which advocates for "promotion and maintenance of international peace and security, just and honorable relations, respect for

international law and obligation to settle international disputes by arbitration”<sup>70</sup>, coupled with its values of democracy and pluralism, resonates well with ASEAN member states.<sup>71</sup> India’s accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2003 was significant as it demonstrated India’s willingness to adhere to the tenets of inter-state conduct, which ASEAN deems as essential towards ensuring regional security and stability.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, unlike China, India has no pre-existing territorial disputes with any ASEAN member states.

More importantly, India has been a staunch advocate of “ASEAN centrality.”<sup>73</sup> In 2012, then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh lauded ASEAN “for their leadership in launching wider regional initiatives such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus).”<sup>74</sup> He also acknowledged ASEAN’s role in building a regional mechanism of cooperation and consensus and articulated India’s support for an ASEAN-centric regional order.<sup>75</sup>

### **A Case for Three-Dimensional Hedging**

Two important trends have emerged that support the case for Singapore to pursue a three-dimensional hedging strategy. First, against the backdrop of China’s assertiveness, India has sought to develop strategic partnerships with several Asian states, reinforcing its claim as a responsible stakeholder with vested economic and security interests in the region.<sup>76</sup> In the recently concluded talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the two countries published a joint statement entitled “India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World.”<sup>77</sup> It alluded to escalating tensions in the South China Sea and highlighted aims to shape a regional

architecture, involving Japan, India and the US to ensure freedom of navigation along critical SLOCs in the Asia-Pacific region. This unique partnership has matured as part of India's "Act East Policy." The Japan-India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX) conducted in 2012 is a manifestation of growing Indo-Japanese maritime cooperation. While China may react negatively to this emerging strategic partnership, ASEAN benefits overall from this convergence of strategic maritime interests between India and Japan; two countries that rely heavily on SLOCs that pass through the waters of maritime ASEAN states. Both countries have already initiated efforts to build up the maritime security capacities of ASEAN states.<sup>78</sup> With India and Japan backing maritime ASEAN states, it would allow these states to negotiate with China from a position of strength regarding SCS disputes, even under auspices of bilateral negotiations.<sup>79</sup> This would facilitate the aforementioned initiative to resolve SCS maritime disputes during Singapore's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2018.

India has also actively developed partnerships with Southeast Asian navies. According to Catherine Lea, India and Malaysia extensively cooperate on maintenance and operations of their Scorpene submarines, while the Indonesia-India maritime partnership entails enhanced cooperation in capacity building, technical assistance and information sharing.<sup>80</sup> India and Vietnam also partake in a maritime security partnership, where India provides technical support for repair and maintenance of its platforms, in return for allowing Indian vessels to use maintenance and repair facilities at Vietnamese ports.<sup>81</sup> Considering ASEAN's positive perception of India's security role in regional affairs, any alignment with India would not invoke any negative responses.

Second, the emergence of the notion of India as a “swing state” may be favorable to Singapore. Raja Mohan assessed that India is adopting cautious realpolitik, engaging both the US and China, while ultimately playing the role of a “swing state” in the long run.<sup>82</sup> Rahul Mishra makes the case that India’s policies are akin to the hedging policies adopted by ASEAN states, whereby India has cultivated a middle position between the US and China.<sup>83</sup> Rahul Mishra posits that India has delicately managed the balance between practicing non-alignment in its foreign policy, avoiding overt alliances so as not to get entangled in a rivalry with China, while concomitantly strengthening its soft power diplomacy and influence within ASEAN, advancing its economic interests and expanding its military capabilities.<sup>84</sup> Given that ASEAN views India as a potential countervailing influence against China, and considering India’s “hedging” approach towards the US and China, aligning with India would be akin to cultivating a hedging position within the larger ambit of an ASEAN-India hedging policy vis-à-vis great powers.

### **Elevating the Singapore-India Strategic Partnership**

Singapore has always sought to cultivate great power interest in Southeast Asia, and India’s “Act East” policy was an opportunity to involve India, and diversify its reliance on its partners. Furthermore, India’s geostrategic location in the Indian Ocean, its fast-growing economy and shared historical and cultural similarities makes it an attractive partner. Singapore played a vital role in involving India as part of regional institutional frameworks. Singapore actively lobbied for India’s participation and sponsored India’s admission into the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1996 and East Asia Summit in 2005.<sup>85</sup> Given that India perceives ASEAN as a central component of India’s “Act East” policy, this convergence of strategic interests accounts for the strong bilateral relations that exist.

**Figure 5. Analysis of India Power Rejection and Acceptance Factors<sup>86</sup>**

FACTORS		BALANCING (Great Powers US/ China)	HEDGING				BANDWAGONING (India)	
		MINIMIZES RISK		MAXIMIZES RETURNS				
		INDIRECT BALANCING	DOMINANCE DENIAL	ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM	BINDING ENGAGEMENT	LIMITED BANDWAGONING		
		"Security First"	"Just in Case"	"Ascendancy is Ok, but not Dominance"	"Business First"	"Socialization Matters"	"Grasp Opportunity for Profit, but Cautiously"	"Profit First"
DIPLOMATIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freedom of Diplomatic Maneuver</li> <li>Respect for International Law</li> </ul>						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>India-Singapore Strategic Partnership</li> <li>India-Singapore Strategic Dialogue</li> <li>India-Singapore Defense Policy Dialogue</li> </ul>	
ECONOMIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximizes Trade</li> <li>Attracts FDI and Spurs Growth of Businesses</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>India will become third world' largest economy over the next decade (A)</li> <li>India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement</li> </ul>			
MILITARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conventional Capabilities</li> <li>Military Modernization</li> <li>Counter-Terrorism</li> <li>Counter-Proliferation</li> <li>Counter-Piracy</li> </ul>					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>India's integration as part of Asia's institutional frameworks (ARF, EAS)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defense Cooperation Agreement (Maritime Security, Defense Technology, Cyber Security, Intelligence-sharing, Counter Terrorism)</li> </ul>	
CULTURAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language</li> <li>Religion</li> <li>Traditions and Norms</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Former British Colony</li> <li>Large Indian diaspora</li> <li>English as Lingua Franca (R)</li> <li>Multi-racial and religious society (R)</li> <li>Education System more aligned to Western norms (R)</li> </ul>			

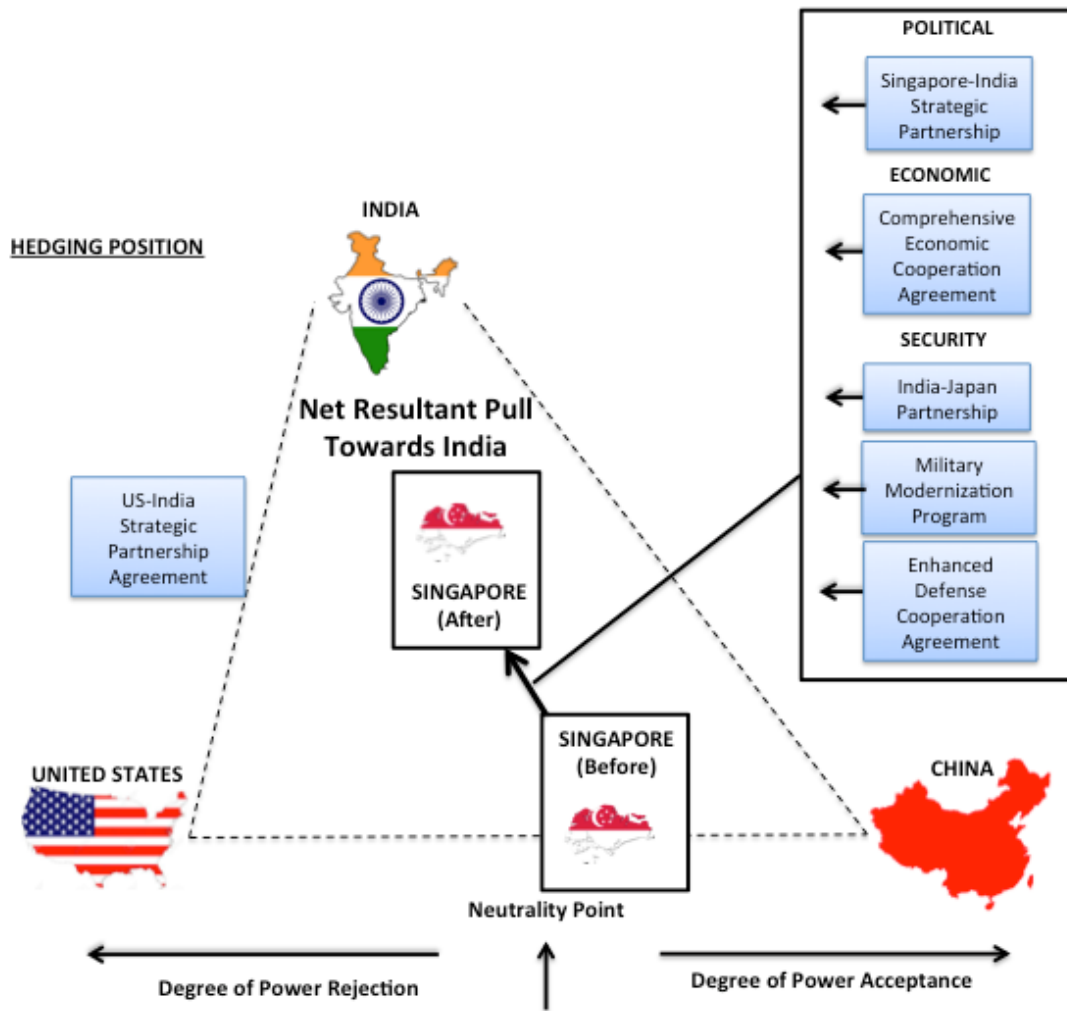
To Countervail Militarily
To Neutralize Diplomatically
To Make Economic Profit
To Accommodate Diplomatically
To Draw Strength From it

Neutrality Point

← Degree of Power Rejection      Degree of Power Acceptance →

Using Kuik’s conceptual framework, the implications of aligning closely with India were examined (see Figure 5 above). It is concluded that India’s ascendancy is relatively benign, with no instances of aggression in Southeast Asia thus far. Given that India will be the third-largest economy in the future, sustained relations would invariably lead to increased trade and a burgeoning market to export Singapore’s goods and services.<sup>87</sup> Cultural similarities such as a common lingua franca, shared colonial history, and large diaspora of Indian workers and large local ethnic Indian population also entail a natural proclivity towards India.<sup>88</sup> Considering the renaissance in US-India relations, Singapore’s overall proclivity towards the US and India’s cautious realpolitik towards engagements with China, there appears to be little risk involved in aligning strategically with India.

**Figure 6. Three-Dimensional Hedging involving India and Effect on Singapore's Hedging Position<sup>89</sup>**



It is in Singapore's interest to strengthen economic cooperation and defence collaboration efforts with India (see Figure 6 above). In November 2015, Singapore and India revised the Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) alongside the India-Singapore Strategic Partnership.<sup>90</sup> As part of the DCA, Singapore and India agreed to establish a regular Defense Ministers' Dialogue, deepen cooperation in maritime security, and encourage cooperation between defense industries. Both countries agreed to enhance bilateral training and exercises and cooperate on issues of common interest such as

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and defence technology. While the DCA is an upgrade over previous agreements, this approach was designed to meet diametrically opposed objectives of constraining China's influence while not incurring China's displeasure, and it is debatable whether Singapore's hedging position has strengthened overall. This essay posits a few options for policymakers to consider.

Singapore should build upon the success of the recently concluded Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief joint exercise during ASEAN Defense Minister's Meeting Plus in 2013 (in which both the US and China were involved) and work towards establishing an Asian version of RIMPAC, premised on maritime security along vital SLOCs in the Asia-Pacific. Asian powers like China, India, and Japan all see the need to secure vital SLOCs that span from the Indian Ocean, Straits of Malacca, and South China Sea, as they are critical for energy security and trade. While it may not be realistic to encourage ASEAN member states to partake in an India-Japan-ASEAN maritime partnership given conflicting interests among member states, Collin Koh and Satoru Nagao highlight the possibility that Singapore could "spearhead an eventual trilateral Japan-India-Singapore maritime partnership" that would eventually expand to include other maritime ASEAN states.<sup>91</sup> They also assert that this partnership could work given that Singapore, India, and Japan have a vested interest to protect SLOCs and also share a common belief in upholding international rule of law in global commons.<sup>92</sup> This is a useful initiative to contemplate, but it runs the risk of invoking a negative response from China. In addition, Singapore does not possess a joint maritime training and exercise arrangement with Japan. Instead, Singapore should consider soliciting China's participation in this endeavor. It will allow Singapore to allay China's concerns over protecting its SLOCs,

foster a spirit of cooperation among great powers and ASEAN maritime states, facilitate confluence of norms, and advance doctrine on military engagements out at sea. Singapore is well positioned to play the role of an interlocutor. Singapore is an active member of the ASEAN regional architecture and thus could use its influence to draw in ASEAN maritime states in the future. Furthermore, Singapore has cemented its role as a trusted broker in China's eyes, having successfully hosted a potentially controversial China-Taiwan summit in 2015.<sup>93</sup>

Alternatively, Singapore should consider building upon the Malacca Straits Patrol initiative between Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand to include India, China, and the US. Japan and India have already conducted counter-piracy patrols in the international waters along the Straits of Malacca and Indonesia and Malaysia have gradually accepted India's naval presence in the region. This pragmatic approach involves more actors, but is less challenging to execute given the pre-existing framework. More importantly, the Straits of Malacca is a SLOC of strategic interest for all parties, who have grown increasingly concerned given the increased frequency of piracy attacks. Many of the piracy attacks take place in territorial waters, instead of the high seas where great powers have an influence. The involvement of great power navies in the high seas, allows Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore to better focus its naval resources towards patrolling its own territorial waters, thus reducing the incidence of piracy attacks. Such an initiative also has the potential to eventually expand into the maritime partnership that articulated previously. This initiative creates a positive sum outcome, as it allows China and India to resolve their insecurities over protecting vital SLOCs, while concomitantly,

functions as a useful confidence-building mechanism to improve relations between great powers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Singapore has much to gain by adopting a three-dimensional hedging strategy that continue to enmesh and balance out great powers against each other. It allows Singapore to retain flexibility to continue its policy of pragmatism and maintain freedom of diplomatic maneuver while concomitantly ensuring our survival and economic prosperity. This essay has argued the need to evolve ASEAN into a more significant bloc and deepen relations with India as a catalyst to develop constructive maritime partnerships to improve Singapore's hedging position vis-à-vis great powers. It is hoped that policymakers consider the utility of the policy recommendations mentioned in this essay, in order to achieve a more stable and peaceful SEA region, in which Singapore can continue to thrive and prosper.

# APPENDIX A

## Figure A-1. ASEAN Hedging Index

COUNTRY	BALANCING (Pro US)		HEDGING				BANDWAGONING (Pro China)
	MINIMIZES RISK		ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM		MAXIMIZES RETURNS		
	INDIRECT BALANCING	DOMINANCE DENIAL	BINDING ENGAGEMENT	LIMITED BANDWAGONING			
"Security First"	"Just in Case"	"Ascendancy is Ok, but not Dominance"	"Business First"	"Socialization Matters"	"Grasp Opportunity for Profit, but Cautiously"	"Profit First"	
PHILIPPINES	D: Ally status	M: 2014 Gained access to use military bases + equipment + rotational US forces. Strained ties due to SCS disputes	E: US is largest trading partner and foreign investor (Bilateral FTA)	E: Increase in Chinese investment into Philippines			
BRUNEI		M: Regular security cooperation exercises with the US	E: Strong economic ties under the Trade and Investment Framework and Trans-Pacific Partnership	E: Steady economic cooperation with China. Increase in investment from China.			
VIETNAM		M: Allows US warships access to strategic naval base	D: Politically supports US involvement in Asia to counter China	E: China expected to overtake US as largest trading partner and foreign investor	M: Introduced cross border hotline to prevent future conflict and increase military to military interactions		
INDONESIA		M: US continues to provide military aid for counter-terrorism training	D: Regards US as indispensable partner	E: US provides crucial development assistance to Indonesia since 1950s. Has not acceded to TPP yet. E: China is Indonesia's second largest trade partner. China views Indonesia as a key economic partner.	D: China and Indonesia agreed to elevate bilateral ties to comprehensive strategic partnership. M: Close ties between militaries in areas of maritime cooperation and anti-terrorism, exchange programs and joint exercises		
SINGAPORE		M: Strategic Framework Agreement with US in 2005. Relies on US for military technology transfer for military modernization program. Regular security cooperation activities and has access to training facilities in CONUS. Offers US access to naval bases for LCS	D: Strategic Partnership Dialogue in 2012	E: SIN-US FTA and TPP. US is 3 <sup>rd</sup> largest trading partner. E: SIN-China FTA and AIB/ NDB. China is largest trading partner. Involved in several state-led industrial development projects.	M: Conducts bilateral exercise, Ex COOPERATION with China and military exchange programs		
MALAYSIA		M: Regular security cooperation activities (CARAT and multilateral exercises). Keen to increase level of participation and complexity. Supported US coalition efforts. Has competing territorial claims with China in SCS.	D: Strong bilateral relations with the US	E: Strong economic relationships with both countries. US is Malaysia's single largest investor. Part of TPP. E: China is Malaysia's largest trading partner. China aims to increase direct investment.	D: Aims to elevate bilateral ties to comprehensive strategic partnership. M: Both countries aim to increase naval defense and joint military exercises to combat terrorism and promote security.		
THAILAND	D: Major Non-NATO Ally	M: Regular security cooperation activities with US. Thailand provides airfield for large-scale logistical operations	D: Hedges towards US to neutralize China diplomatically.	E: China contributes to Mekong Basic development to improve Thailand infrastructure. E: US-Thailand FTA in 2004. US 3 <sup>rd</sup> largest trading partner	D: Employs strategy to enmesh China as part of ASEAN institutional frameworks	M: China increases arms sales and military training to Thailand. Regular security cooperation activities	
LAOS			D: Diplomatic ties with US restored in 1992.	E: US provided foreign aid for healthcare, education and governance. Bilateral trade agreement in 2004.	D: Supports strategy to enmesh China as part of ASEAN institutional frameworks	D: Used to be traditional ally of China. Still views China as an important partner for political issues.	
CAMBODIA				E: US contributes to healthcare, education, governance and economic growth. US is Cambodia's largest export partner	D: Supports strategy to enmesh China as part of ASEAN institutional frameworks	D: Traditional ally of China. Blocked consensus on SCS dispute when it was ASEAN Chair. E: China is Cambodia's top foreign investor and important trading partner	
MYANMAR					D: Supports strategy to enmesh China as part of ASEAN institutional frameworks	D: Traditional ally of China since 1950s. Unhappy with US sanctions over human rights abuses. M: China supplier of military aid	

To Countervail Militarily
To Neutralize Diplomatically
To Make Economic Profit
To Accommodate Diplomatically
To Draw Strength From it

Neutrality Point

← Degree of Power Rejection      Degree of Power Acceptance →

## ENDNOTES

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