Evolving Security Alignments of the Indo-Pacific: The US Alliances, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and ASEAN

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Abstract

Strategic analysts and scholars have consistently searched for the best macro-level intellectual frameworks to capture the security dynamics of the complex Asia/Indo-Pacific region. Instead of following the common practice of cataloguing and appraising the wide variety of institutions that comprise the region's so-called "security architecture" (a problematic construct; as will be revealed), this article proposes that the structural dynamics of the region's security can be better apprehended through the specific concept of "alignment." From this perspective it is argued that three relatively well-defined alignment "blocs": the US alliance network, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization strategic partnership network and the ASEAN security community serve to influence and structure strategic interactions across the region. By examining the internal composition, purpose, and behaviors of these alignment groupings—and the challenges they each face—we can gain new insights into how the consequent regional security order is produced.

"Alignment" as an ordering principle for understanding the Indo-Pacific security landscape

How to gain analytical purchase on the "big picture" of the extraordinarily complex security dynamics Indo-Pacific region is one of the greatest challenges faced by strategic analysts. And while policy-maker's attention is understandably captured by immediate events and pressing issues, this can sometimes come at the expense of deeper reflection upon the underlying structural drivers of Indo-Pacific security dynamics. Nevertheless, it is crucially important for long-term strategic planning purposes to delve into the deeper security "structures" that animate state cooperation and conflict, and which consequently define and shape the region's security order. Studies with this aim in view usually tend to focus upon the tangible institutions that constitute the region's so-called "security architecture"; by which we mean the institutional security mechanisms that contribute toward security governance, or otherwise superintend individual or collective security to states.

The so-called "noodle bowl" of regional agreements, regimes, and institutions in the Indo-Pacific encompasses everything from economic forums such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation(APEC), inter-regional meetings, such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), and Track II dialogues such as Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSACP), and everything in-between, making any attempt to impose some kind of schematic for properly comprehending this security architecture a daunting task. But in addition to the insurmountable complexity of the problem, the "security architecture" notion fails to recognise the inherent *qualitative* differentiation between its various constituents, usually lumping together multilateral

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security dialogue mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) or East Asia Summit (EAS), (often referred to as "talk shops"), with formal military alliance pacts that include joint defence planning, such as the Japan-US Alliance, or ANZUS (Australia-New Zealand-US). These examples should on no account be conflated, as the former contain an *inclusive* range of states, often working at cross-purposes, whilst striving toward confidence building measures, whereas the latter represent an *exclusive* alignment of states working toward mutually shared security and defence objectives, including joint military planning.

In a bid to disaggregate these two "unlike" forms of security architecture, and based on an extensive pan-regional study undertaken for the monograph *Security in Asia Pacific: The Dynamics of Alignment*, this article introduces the notion of "security alignment" as an alternative approach toward capturing the structural characteristics of the current Indo-Pacific security environment.[1] "Security alignment" refers to a genuine and committed effort by states to coordinate their security strategies. It will invariably manifest itself in some identifiable institutional form—whether this be a formal military alliance, or another form of exclusive organization, (including *some* plurilateral security institutions with exclusive, rather than inclusive membership). Indeed, while the alliance paradigm of alignment has traditionally been a dominant form, the phenomenon is not confined to these alone, and includes coalitions, ententes, strategic partnerships and security communities, among others. Naturally, some forms of alignment will be tighter and more developed than other looser arrangements: not all alignments take the form of "alliances" (but *all alliances are alignments*).

The key point is that alignment partners basically subscribe to a common set of security objectives, coordinate their resources closely toward these, and do not admit "outsiders" to their exclusive "club," thus differentiating them from region's multitude inclusive security dialogue forums (though all alignments, including alliances, are *institutionalised*). Moreover, when aligned states act together as holistic "units," they are frequently in *competitive* tension with one another in terms of their respective security goals (though this does not preclude elements of cooperation, including by individual member states). Using alignment as a reductionist perspective to allow us to get behind the vast proliferation of regional institutions and diverse state actors promises to simplify (reify) our understanding of the larger question of security structures in the Indo-Pacific. Indeed, the phenomenon itself has traditionally been held as fundamental to the understanding international politics by an array of seminal scholars in the International Relations discipline. As prolific alliance scholar George Liska attests: "Alignments are always instrumental in structuring the state system, sometimes transforming it."[2]

The Indo-Pacific security structure: three power centers of alignment

On the basis of these criteria, the US hub-and-spoke (H&S) alliance system, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) strategic partnership, and the ASEAN security community—but *not* its extended organs, such as the ARF/EAS—generally fulfil these criteria of *alignment* (though some caveats appear). At their core, they are all largely exclusive organizations, and each acts as a vehicle to provide security for its membership through coordinated policy objectives aimed at both internal and external security challenges, even if the institutional form of security cooperation—alliance, strategic partnership, and security community, differs in each case. These alignment groupings are different in their nature, purpose, design, internal dynamics, and external orientations, as will be demonstrated below. Moreover, it is these three alignment groupings that characterise the structural security landscape of the Indo-Pacific

1 Thomas S. Wilkins, *Security in Asia Pacific: The Dynamics of Alignment* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2019).

2 George Liska, *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), p. 12.

region, with each holds a competing "vision" for the future of regional order. Thus, as exclusive alignments, each of the three stands out as a "pole" of power and attraction, putting forward their own distinct visions of regional order and seeking adhesion to this among other external states. On the one hand, we have the Washington-led H&S alignment of maritime liberal democracies in the Pacific, backed by American military predominance. Standing in contrast to this is the Sino-Russian authoritarian compact at the heart of the SCO, backed by Beijing's cascade of Eurasian economic initiatives and institution building, alongside Moscow's superpower nuclear arsenal. Juxtaposed with these two rivalrous blocs are the ASEAN countries seeking to retain their "centrality" in regional security discourses and governance through their expansive institutional and normative framework (The "ASEAN way"). Together, these three alignments largely define the security structure of the Indo-Pacific region.

Notably, as each alignment grouping seeks to expand its power and influence over the regional order it has developed "networks" with external parties, extraneous to their core membership, and even *across* other alignments, to further its aims. These networking attempts could be conceived of as an "H&S plus," "SCO-plus," and "ASEAN-plus" configurations. With these parameters in mind, let us now unpack each of the three alignment groupings that define the overall structure of the Indo-Pacific security landscape: the US-alliance network, SCO strategic partnership network, and ASEAN security community network in turn, to probe into their background, nature, activities, and the challenges they each face going forward. (Note that the analyses below are merely "snapshots" of these alignments, and the book *Security in Asia Pacific* above, may be consulted for fully detailed accounts.) And while it should be noted that "alliances" such as the US H&S system have typically taken center stage in both academic and policy analyses, this article seeks to draw attention to the SCO and ASEAN as alternative, specifically-"non-alliance," pathways toward security alignment.

The US alliance network

The US hub-and-spokes system of alliances was developed at the time of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951, with the foundation of the Japan-US alliance and the ANZUS alliance, and US-Philippines Mutual Defence Treaty. This was later extended to alliance pacts with South Korea (1953), Thailand (1954), and Taiwan (1954: now defunct and replaced with Taiwan Relations Act (TRA)). It represents the strongest form of security alignment in the region, founded as it is upon a range of formal military security guarantees, including a commitment to joint defence. As such, these security alignments closely conform to Robert Osgood's definition of an alliance as "a formal agreement that pledges states to co-operate in using their military resources against a specific state or states and usually obligates one or more of the signatories to use force, or to consider (unilaterally or in consultation with allies) the use of force in specified circumstances."[3]

As Victor Cha has written, at the inception of the H&S Washington preferred a series of bilateral alliance pacts to a multilateral structure such as NATO, though this preference has now been eroded as policy-makers have sought to reform the H&S system to meet new challenges in the 21st Century.[4] Today, the H&S alliances are being transformed in line with internal and external pressures. Nevertheless, cooperation between "core allies"—Japan and Australia—and the US has been greatly augmented. Not only have Tokyo and Canberra individually deepened their alliance relations with the US through deeper military integration and security cooperation under the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) vision, but they have also initiated direct bilateral

[3] Robert Endicott Osgood, *Alliances and American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 17.

[4] Victor Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

security cooperation by means of their own security alignment, (dubbed a "Special Strategic Partnership").[5] This process is further triangulated through the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) process between the three allies, arguably adding up to a "virtual trilateral alliance." In addition to the strengthening and consolidation of the alliance "core," the hub-and-spokes has taken on a "networking" aspect. Washington has not only encouraged contacts between the "spokes"—such as Japan and Australia, and with elusive success; Korea and Japan—but new "strategic partners" have been sought as affiliates to the existing H&S network. Among these potential adherents to the US-alliance network is India, which has been brought into the "Quad" process (and FOIP), but also key South East Asian (SEA) states such as Vietnam and Singapore.

With its origins as a set of formal military alliances, the US-alliance network, was originally designed to counter the Cold War threat emanating from the Communist bloc. With the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the subsequent integration of the PRC into the capitalist world economy since then, these alliances were adrift and "threatless" for most of the Post–Cold War period. New life was breathed into the US-alliance network after the 2001 terrorist attacks as Asian allies were co-opted by Washington to provide military support for the "war on terror." By 2011, Washington had begun to view its military interventions in the Middle East as costly diversion away from the evident locus of geopolitical power centering on the Indo-Pacific. The "pivot" (or "rebalance") policy of the Obama Administration sought to refocus attention back to this crucial region.[6] This policy shift was in response to increase Chinese assertiveness in the region, exemplified by its rapid military modernisation and its assertiveness in the South China Sea (SCS). Now, the Trump-era *National Security Strategy* (2017) makes explicit the return of "great power rivalry" with a risen China and a resurgent Russia, with an ever provocative nuclear-armed North Korea in the background. The US has thus begun to push back more forcefully against these actors, which have both shown a disregard for internal norms and law and seek to pressure the US and its allies through an array of "disruptive" policies and "hybrid warfare" techniques.[7] The original *raison d'être* of the alliance system of balancing potential great power threats has apparently resurfaced accompanied by talk of a "new Cold War."

But the alliance has also concentrated upon renewing the normative legacy of the so-called "San Francisco system" that has always accompanied the actual military alliance dyads themselves.[8] During the Cold War American military predominance, extended through its alliance network, imposed peace and stability upon the region, allowing for East Asian states to focus upon rapid economic advancement, as well as supplying a variety of "public goods" such as freedom of the seas. This US-imposed regional order served the security interests of allies, (and some non-allies), well until the beginning of the 21st Century. Yet, as this San Francisco system has been eroded both by a relative decline in American power, it has been concomitantly challenged by ever more disruptive activities by new regional challengers such as North Korea, China, and Russia. As such, renewed efforts are underway by the US and its allies to uphold the liberal principles of the de facto "Rules-based order" centered around the principles of free trade, open markets, human rights (and support for democratisation). Such efforts have coalesced into the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision that unites the core US allies, with India, and which welcomes any state that subscribes to its principles. The shared commitment to maintaining a rules-

5 Thomas Wilkins, "From Strategic Partnership to Strategic Alliance?: Australia-Japan Security Ties and the Asia-Pacific", *Asia Policy* 20 (2015), pp. 81–112.

6 Kurt M. Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Twelve, 2016).

7 Thomas Wilkins, "Australia and Japan Facing 'Disruptive' Challenges to the Rules Based Order in the Indo-Pacific," *Policy Brief*, September 26, 2018.

8 Kimie Hara, *The San Francisco System and Its Legacies: Continuation, Transformation and Historical Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

based order based upon US regional primacy unites the US-alliance network in response to its challengers that seek to act as "spoilers" of regional order, and revise the status quo through coercive and unilateral actions.

However, the US-alliance network faces challenges going forward in upholding both its primacy and its vision of regional order. Firstly, the US no longer enjoys undisputed economic or military supremacy, especially in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, the abrogation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017 and the failure to adequately replace the carefully crafted Pivot/Rebalance strategy of the previous Administration with a tangible and cohesive regional strategy has weakened the props of the US-led alignment. Instead we have an as yet ill-defined policy of "strategic competition." Secondly, the Presidency of Donald Trump has rhetorically undercut US commitment to its allies by questioning security guarantees and spreading accusations of free-riding among allies. This has greatly undermined US credibility among allies and foes alike. Paradoxically, however, his demands for increased alliance contributions (in light of limited American resources) may actually strengthen the aggregate capabilities at the heart of the US-alliance network as allies increase their defence budgets and military acquisitions. Lastly, there are signs of distancing at the periphery of the original H&S network. It is arguable that both Thailand and the Philippines are drifting away from Washington and seeking a closer relationship with the PRC, while New Zealand has been officially expelled from ANZUS, and South Korea to some extent remains a moribund ally, trapped by its unavoidable focus upon the North Korean threat. These relationships will require political investment and resources to renew to avoid the further slippage of these peripheral allies into China's orbit.

The SCO strategic partnership network

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, spearheaded by Beijing, represents a newly emergent security alignment in eastern Eurasia in implicit, if not direct, contention with the H&S network. In partnership with Moscow, by means of the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership, and with India as the latest major power to accede to the organization (2017), the SCO now clearly represents an alternate pole of power in the Indo-Pacific and potential challenger to the vision of regional order championed by Washington and its allies. The SCO has its origins in the post–Cold War rapprochement between erstwhile Communist allies, Russia and China, which was formalised in its 1996 Strategic Partnership, and 2001 Treaty of Good neighbourliness and Cooperation.[9] These two events occurred near-simultaneously with the foundation of the "Shanghai Five," later to become the SCO, to include the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, in an axis of authoritarian Eurasian states. It was initially created to resolve border disputes and mitigate strategic competition between Beijing and Moscow in the Central Asian region itself, but soon developed into a formal organization to address a range of joint non-traditional security challenges, dubbed the "Three Evils" of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism, faced by all parties. Alarmed by US military intervention in West Asia, the organization soon took on anti-hegemonic tones, asserting that American/Western influence was to be excluded from this region. It also began to serve as a platform for the championship of a multipolar world order, and an antithesis of Western values, as represented by the maritime democracies of the US-alliance network. Washington's request for SCO Observer status was denied and the organization consolidated itself as an exclusive six-member plurilateral arrangement until 2017. At this point former Observer States India and Pakistan were admitted

[9] "Joint Declaration by the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, Adopted at Beijing on 25 April 1996," 2 May 1996, United Nations General Assembly, A/51/127, https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/51/127; 'Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation,' 24 July 2001, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t15771.shtml.

to the club, thus significantly expanding the extent of its reach across the whole of eastern Eurasia. In addition, Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia currently hold Observer status, whilst Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Turkey, are Dialogue Partners, thus indicating the "network" facet of the SCO alignment, and clearly demonstrating its powers of "attraction" for other regional states.

The eight full members with China and Russia (and now India) at its core, account for approximately half the world's population, about 80% of the Eurasian Landmass, a quarter of world GDP and around 20% of total world military expenditure.[10] The SCO bloc stretches across the "Heartland" of the Eurasian continent, thus providing a geopolitical counterweight to the "Rimland" of US maritime allies. It is frequently mischaracterised as an "Asian NATO" or "alliance of the East," but this fails to capture its novelty as an organization which superintends a "web" of bilateral strategic partnerships between the members. And whilst it includes a high degree of security cooperation on both traditional and non-traditional security threats, it does not entail a mutual defence pact (as per alliances). Thus, it conforms to the definition of a strategic partnership as "a form of enhanced bilateral cooperation between two states (or other actors) that brings them into closer alignment on security and economic issues in order to reduce uncertainties and aggregate joint capabilities."[11] In addition to the web of strategic partnerships upon which it rests, an intricate organizational apparatus has been fabricated, including a Heads of State Council and a Heads of Government Council; the highest decision-making bodies, and two permanent organs; the Secretariat and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). It now operates across a range of diplomatic, security, economic, (including joint energy projects, new financial architecture, and development funds), intelligence, cyber, and even social-cultural, areas. It therefore represents a new and, in some ways, "hybrid" form of security alignment, quite distinct from alliances.

Until the present, the organization has been dominated by China, with Russia as a nominal co-equal leader (though the accession of India will potentially dilute this influence), and has been seen by many analysts as the prototype of the kind of institutional apparatus that accurately reflects Chinese values and interests. According to Swagata Saha "China has been attempting to shape a non-Western security grouping to counterbalance NATO and allow China more room for military action in Asia."[12] Thus, the SCO in some ways serves as a backstop to Chinese outward assertiveness directed toward its Asian neighbours (e.g. SCS, Taiwan, Japan), whilst covering Russia's aggression in Eastern Europe. Though the internal parties (excepting India-Pakistan) have amicably resolved their border disputes, both China and Russia have territorial disputes with their Asian neighbours (e.g. Northern Territories, SCS). And while the SCO claims to prioritise non-traditional security issues (the "Three Evils") it engages in high-intensity warfighting exercises ("Peace Missions") involving frontline military capabilities (with a degree of inter-operability between members states forces, centered upon Russian weapon platforms, or variants thereof). On the basis of such activities it aims to advance an alternative to Western ideology, with Russia and China cooperating diplomatically (through the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)) to advance a multipolar order and resist the liberal international order represented by the US and its allies. Its internal system principle is based upon the "Shanghai Spirit"—a set of internal norms that guide its interaction with external parties. According to

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[10] World Bank, "Data-GDP (current US$) 2018," https://data.worldbank.org; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Military Expenditure Database 2018, https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex.

[11] Thomas S. Wilkins, *Security in Asia Pacific: The Dynamics of Alignment* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2019), p. 125.

[12] Swagata Saha, "The Future of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," *East Asia Forum*, 17 October 2014.

the SCO Charter, this encompasses: "mutual respect of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity of States and inviolability of State borders, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, non-use of force or threat of its use in international relations, seeking no unilateral military superiority in adjacent areas."[13] Though it claims not to target any other country, in reality, this represents an effort to challenge and revise the international order in line with the preferences of the authoritarian powers, and to mask active efforts to destabilize the US rules-based order above.

But despite its formidable potential, and clear representation as an alternative pole of power to the US H&S network, the organization faces significant internal challenges. Firstly, the recent expansion to include India (and Pakistan), weakens Beijing's heretofore dominant position as de facto leader of the SCO. Instead of a Sino-Russian leadership dyad at the core, now India will make it a triad. And though New Delhi subscribes to certain aspects of the SCO worldview such as multi-polarity, and shares notions of non-interference and the dangers of the "Three Evils", India is a democracy in many ways closer to Western traditions, and which, despite its now misnomered "non-alignment" policy, is closely aligned with the extended US-alliance network as well. Moreover, China and India (Arunachal Pradesh), as well as India and Pakistan (Kashmir), have territorial disputes, that could threaten the internal integrity of the SCO. Whether this will weaken the SCO's cohesion, and whether it will transform it into a less effective and united multilateral security dialogue forum ("talk shop"), instead of a coherent alignment bloc, remains to be seen. Secondly, the importation of the "Indo-Pak" problem—the fact that two members are actually antagonists, rather than allied or aligned, threatens to undermine the internal security of the SCO in potentially combustible ways. Lastly, Western analysts in particular have pointed out that the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership, heretofore the "engine" of the SCO is also riven with contradictions, with Moscow fearing an increased Chinese strategic presence on its borders and in Central Asia, and resentful of Chinese economic expansion, sometimes outside of the SCO framework, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which vies with the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). This indicates that the alignment functions as much as a "pact of restraint"—preventing one another from aligning with the US, for example, than a genuine confluence of long-term strategic interests, let alone, shared values.

The ASEAN security community network

In some ways caught in-between the Sino-US-led "blocs," the ASEAN security community seeks to drive internal (intramural) cooperation between South East Asian (SEA) states and safeguard their mutual external interests through strength in numbers. ASEAN was initially formed as a regional intergovernmental organization in 1967 at the height of the Cold War, to protect itself against outside interventions by the Communist powers (Vietnam, China) who threatened to destabilise newly independent but fragile post-colonial states faced with a multitude of internal nation-building challenges. With the end of the Cold War tension in SEA, the organization experienced a "second birth" with the accession of formerly antagonistic CLMV states in the 1990s (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam). Based upon the ASEAN Charter (2007) and under the (current) banner of "ASEAN 2020" it aims at building an "ASEAN Community" based upon a tripod of: Political-Security community (of most relevance here), Economic community, and Socio-cultural community. Under this triad it engages in a range of intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic (including an ASEAN Free Trade Area), political, security, military, educational, and sociocultural integration activities. There is no simple definition of a "security community," but Raimo Väyrynen defines it as "a collective arrangement in which its members have reasons to trust that the use of military and economic coercion in their mutual

[13] Shanghai Cooperation Organization, "Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 3.

relations is unlikely."[14] In other words, though they specifically eschew a collective defence pact (as per alliance), they conceive of their security as being advanced collectively. This makes this form of security alignment, quite distinguishable from the alliance paradigm.

Though ASEAN was primarily concerned with incubating intramural cooperation between its membership until the 1990s, it henceforth took on an external orientation as a discernible alignment of states, seeking to shape the wider regional security order in the Indo-Pacific. This "network" building, (usually referred to as "ASEAN-plus") is conducted by means of a wide array of multilateral institutions (i.e. security architecture) that engage with external parties, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, East Asian Summit, ASEAN+3, and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting+ (ADMM+), plus the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Through this extended network the ASEAN members themselves seek to "enmesh" other regional states, especially the major powers, in their own normative framework (see below).

ASEAN is primarily a vehicle to safeguard the security interests of the small and medium-sized SEA member states both internally and externally, through intramural cooperation, and strength in numbers, respectively. When combined they count a population of approximately 651 million and aggregated GDP of about $3trn and total military budget of $40bn.[15] They employ the organization and its extended institutional network as a "shield" against external interference in SEA, and as a way of mediating tensions between SEA and external powers, including the former two alignment blocs, with varying degrees of success. They also prioritise non-traditional security issues such as transnational crime, unregulated population movements, environmental disasters, infectious diseases, food security, transnational pollution, piracy, and terrorism. They have championed a package of "norms," in part an assertion of "Asian" versus "Western" values, known as the "ASEAN Way." This entails "the importance of neutrality; sovereignty and territorial integrity; the peaceful settlement of disputes; informal, non-confrontational negotiations; and the promotion of domestic stability and social harmony—which together underscore the importance of state autonomy and non-interference in the affairs of other states."[16] And they have sought to "export" these norms across the larger Indo-Pacific theatre by means of their ASEAN-plus institutional architecture, including gaining external states adhesion to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC); a loose form of non-aggression pact. This attempt to "enmesh" external parties in an ASEAN-led normative framework—lacking the military or economic weight to otherwise influence external states—has had some limited success in underwriting their claim to "ASEAN centrality" in regional security affairs.

But the ASEAN security community suffers from a range of limitations as a pole of alignment in the Indo-Pacific. Firstly, it lacks the critical mass of power resources and capabilities to assert its influence in the face of any opposition by the other alignment blocs, or individual powerful states. In particular, despite some aspirations to integrate SEA's defence industries, it has no collective defence agreement or combined military capabilities, as in the H&S (and to a minor degree, in the SCO). For this reason, it has devoted its security diplomacy toward normative efforts at confidence-building and cooperation through the medium of ASEAN-plus institutions as a means to shape regional order. Secondly, perhaps because of these issues, ASEAN (and its extended network) have come in for sustained criticism for a lack of effectiveness in the security sphere. The ASEAN-plus institutions are not seen as efficient security providers by

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[14] Raimo Väyrynen, *Stable Peace through Security Communities?: Steps towards Theory-Building* (The Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2000), p.166.

[15] World Bank, "Data-GDP (current US$) 2018," https://data.worldbank.org; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Military Expenditure Database 2018, https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex.

[16] Richard Stubbs, "The ASEAN Alternative? Ideas, Institutions and the Challenge to 'Global' Governance," *The Pacific Review* 21, no. 4 (2008), p. 451.

regional parties, including its members states, who retain national defence capabilities and a gamut of security agreements with external powers, especially the US (some can be counted as part of the original H&S, such as Thailand and the Philippines, as well as new strategic partners in the extended network, such as Singapore and Vietnam, for example). ASEAN organs have not successfully addressed even non-traditional security challenges in the region such as haze pollution, the refugee crisis in Myanmar, and human rights concerns, though they have had greater success on counter-terrorism, and anti-piracy operations. They have certainly failed to deal with traditional security disputes such as the SCS as a meaningful alignment of states. Lastly, questions remain as to the sustained momentum of ASEAN toward its aspiration to become a genuine "Security Community," both due to the stark diversity in political makeup and national power between its members, and some minor territorial disputes between member states (e.g. Preah Vihear temple, between Thailand and Cambodia). But external factors have placed pressure upon its proclaimed "neutrality" toward great power rivalry and territorial disputes in the region. Examples of compromised neutrality include Cambodia's scuttling of the 2016 ASEAN Summit declaration regarding the SCS as a result of Chinese diplomatic pressure on Phnom Penh.[17] This cruelly exposed the divisions within the ASEAN membership and its inability to act cohesively as a united front, thus calling into question the actual coherence of ASEAN as a meaningful security alignment.

Conclusion

It is conventional wisdom among analysts that the "noodle-bowl" of multilateral institutions of various stripes have not been fully effective in addressing the pressing multifarious challenges the region faces: great power rivalry, nuclear proliferation, maritime and territorial disputes (though it may fare better at dealing with non-traditional security issues such as piracy, and trans-national criminal organizations). Nor have sporadic efforts to build a "regional community" (sometimes predicated upon institutional security architecture) fared any better. One thinks of the failed "East Asian Community" of former Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio, or the "Asia-Pacific Community" of former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, for example.

Thus, in place of these, this article has suggested that looking at the three principle alignment groupings in the region is an alternative to understanding how security in the regional is structured and operates to maintain regional order. The strong adherence of states within these alignments to each of these groupings also testifies that they normally prioritise their alignments as their most effective form of security provision in an uncertain and unstable security environment. As this article has demonstrated, these new alignments can take the form of reconfigured alliances in the US case, or hybrid strategic partnership/plurilaterals, like the SCO, or security communities, in the ASEAN case. In other words, security alignment does not always and only occur through formal military alliances, but through alternative "non-alliance" means, such as the SCO and ASEAN. Additionally, the reach of these three alignment groupings is extended, by their respective efforts to "network" beyond their core memberships. For example: the American-led H&S system seeks to attract additional "strategic partners" (e.g. Singapore, Vietnam, India), whilst the SCO includes a range of Observer and Dialogue Partners, and ASEAN heads a suite of "ASEAN plus" institutional offshoots (e.g. EAS, ARF etc.). It is also important to recognise that alignments can vary in depth and cohesion over time, and can evolve and transform. Moreover alignments are not always "water-tight," with some states participating in multiple alignments (e.g. India is a member of the SCO and a Strategic Partner with the US/Quad), thus complicating the situation. Also, interestingly the SCO and ASEAN also increasingly

[17] Manuel Mogato, Michael Martina, Ben Blanchard, "ASEAN Deadlocked on South China Sea, Cambodia Blocks Statement," *Reuters*, 25 July 2016.

engage in cooperative activities, and partially share a similar worldview.[18] A recognition of importance of the alignment phenomenon for understanding the security landscape of the Indo-Pacific, as well as an appreciation of the transforming nature of alignments themselves, gets us closer to understanding the security structures upon which regional security order is ultimately predicated.

[18] "Memorandum of Understanding Between the Secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN Secretariat) and the Secretariat of The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO Secretariat)," 21 April 2005, https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/ASEAN-SCO-MOU.pdf.