

Strategic Hedging and the Future of Asia-Pacific Stability

The United States and China are shadowboxing each other for influence and status in the Asia Pacific. Rhetorically pulling punches but operationally throwing jabs, both are using diplomacy and military cooperation to jockey for position as the regional security order evolves. Driven by China's ascending role in Asian security and economic affairs and the U.S. desire to maintain its position of regional preponderance, policymakers in each nation are hedging¹ their security bets about the uncertain intentions, implicitly competitive strategies, and potentially coercive policies of the other. To hedge, the United States and China are pursuing policies that, on one hand, stress engagement and integration mechanisms and, on the other, emphasize realist-style balancing in the form of external security cooperation with Asian states and national military modernization programs. Neither country is openly talking about such hedging strategies per se, especially the security balancing, but both are pursuing them with mission and dedication. U.S. and Chinese leaders regularly recite the bilateral mantra about possessing a "cooperative, constructive, and candid" relationship, even as policymakers and analysts in each nation remain deeply concerned about the other's real strategic intentions. Such balance-of-power dynamics certainly do not drive each and every U.S. or Chinese policy action in Asia, but mutual hedging is fast becoming a core and perhaps even defining dynamic between the United States and China in the Asia-Pacific region.

Evan S. Medeiros is a political scientist at the RAND Corporation, based in Washington, D.C. The author would like to thank M. Taylor Fravel, Paul Heer, Eric Heginbotham, Seth Jones, Derek Mitchell, Brad Roberts, Robert Sutter, and Michael Yahuda for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this article. The views and conclusions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the RAND Corporation or any of its research sponsors.

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The logic of this mutual hedging is understandable, as it allows Washington and Beijing each to maintain its extensive and mutually beneficial economic ties with each other and with the rest of Asia while addressing uncertainty and growing security concerns about the other. Hedging also helps prevent a geopolitical rivalry from becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, another mutual core interest. In this sense, the U.S. and Chinese choice of hedging strategies could arguably be a manifestation of security dilemma dynamics at work in a globalized world characterized by deep economic interdependence and the need for multilateral security cooperation. Yet, such hedging is fraught with complications and dangers that could precipitate a shift toward rivalry and regional instability. It is a delicate balancing act that, to be effective and sustainable, requires careful management of accumulating stresses in U.S.-China relations, of regional reactions to U.S. and Chinese hedging policies, and of the domestic politics in each country. The prospect of armed conflict over Taiwan's status exacerbates these challenges.

This pattern of U.S. and Chinese reciprocal hedging is taking form and becoming more explicit at the very time that the security architecture in Asia is profoundly evolving. Since the Cold War, a U.S.-centric system of bilateral alliances and partnerships, more commonly known as the hub-and-spokes system, has delivered stability and security to the region and facilitated Asia's impressive economic development. The traditional role of this edifice is now being called into question. China and Japan are simultaneously re-emerging, India is ascending in the Asian order, most Southeast Asian nations are themselves hedging by pursuing positive relations both with China and the United States, economic and technological interdependence is accelerating, and the region is calling for greater economic integration and multilateral cooperation. In the context of these complex dynamics, this reciprocal hedging is an especially precarious pattern of interaction. If not carefully managed, it could undermine the historical U.S. centrality to the region, alienate U.S. allies and security partners, and precipitate adversarial competition between the United States and China. How are the United States and China hedging? What is driving this hedging behavior? What risks and complications may arise for both countries, and how can they avoid those risks as they collectively seek to shape the evolving security architecture in Asia?

Why the United States Hedges

Washington faces the classic challenge in international relations of responding to a rising power in a region where the United States has long been predominant, possessing substantial economic interests and security commitments

(five of the seven U.S. mutual defense alliances are in Asia). Policymakers have grown increasingly concerned about the impact of China's ascendance on relative U.S. influence in the region and about the possibility that China's rise could precipitate regional instability, such as an armed conflict over Taiwan or other intraregional disputes.

Based on these concerns, U.S. policymakers confront two core questions. The first involves China's current intentions: is China a revisionist or a limited aims rising state? Does it seek to change the structure of the regional order, or does its rise represent one change within the current system and one that the United States can tolerate? The second involves China's long-term aspirations: even if China is currently a rising power with limited aims, will it evolve into a revolutionary power with revisionist goals that challenges the regional or even the global order? Will China's diplomatic and military propensities change over time as it accumulates material power and status?

Reciprocal hedging is becoming explicit as the Asian security architecture is changing.

Such calculations, for any nation, are fraught with uncertainty, which becomes a defining element of its policymaking. The United States now faces three archetypal problems: assessing China's current and future material capabilities; finding credible and consistent indicators of its intentions (e.g., inferring intentions from either capabilities or behavior is unreliable); and then determining whether such intentions will change over time as China's capabilities expand and improve.² The deep ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in answering these questions has become a central driver of current U.S. China policy.

In response, the United States has chosen to hedge its security bets by adopting both cooperative and competitive policies toward China's rise in Asia, resulting in a geopolitical insurance strategy of sorts. The U.S. approach combines engagement, binding, and balancing mechanisms. U.S. policies aim to bind China further into the existing international system of norms, rules, and institutions and to shape its evolving interests and values through bilateral and multilateral engagement. Yet, U.S. policy also includes implicitly competitive and potentially coercive policies that seek to discourage China from challenging the current regional security order and to deter China from using coercion and/or force to pursue its current or future economic or security interests in Asia, such as reclaiming Taiwan.³

The U.S. hedging strategy rests on four key assumptions about China's current intentions and U.S. interests in Asia. First, U.S. policymakers seem to conclude that contemporary China has a continued stake in maintaining

the current status quo of international economic and security rules, norms, and institutions that were established during and after the Cold War. For Chinese leaders, such conditions will continue to facilitate, as they have for the past 25 years, domestic economic development, relative political stability, and the accretion of “comprehensive national power,” all of which China needs in order to reemerge as a great power in the coming decades. Secondly, however, China is decidedly dissatisfied with certain aspects of the current international system, such as Taiwan’s indeterminate status and the U.S. position of unipolar dominance. Many Chinese view U.S. foreign policy as increasingly arbitrary, unrestrained, and coercive. Chinese strategists are acutely aware that the instruments of U.S. power could be turned on the mainland.⁴ A third key assumption is that, given its multiple and competing interests in Asia, hedging its security bets is the optimum choice for the United States. The economic costs of balancing and containing China, thereby limiting bilateral trade and investment, are extraordinarily high. Furthermore, because U.S. allies and partners in Asia would not support such a highly confrontational approach, it would undermine the relative U.S. position in Asia as well as its regional economic interests. Fourth, confronting China through explicit external balancing and containment policies would simply turn it into an enemy, achieving the very outcome the United States seeks to avoid.⁵

How the United States Hedges

The U.S. hedging strategy toward China possesses both cooperative and competitive dimensions, with the latter growing more pronounced in recent years. The cooperative elements of U.S. China policy are well known and long-standing. They are the policies of engaging and binding China that Washington and much of the Western world have pursued since China’s opening in the late 1970s. These policies have largely worked, as Chinese foreign policy generally reflects a growing stake in and an acceptance of, to varying degrees, key international rules, norms, and structures on economic and security issues in support of China’s own interests.⁶ Current U.S. policy seeks to prevent backsliding on these trends and to encourage Chinese behavior to evolve further in a benign direction. Less visible but equally important manifestations of the cooperative dimensions of U.S. Asia policy have involved welcoming improved bilateral relations between U.S. allies and China and encouraging Chinese involvement in and contributions to regional problem solving in Asia and elsewhere.

Yet, as China’s ascendance in Asia has accelerated and U.S. uncertainty about China’s future ambitions and capabilities has deepened, the competi-

tive elements of U.S. hedging strategy have become increasingly pronounced. These have taken the form of U.S. policy statements and bilateral actions that seek to improve the scope and quality of U.S. security cooperation with Asian allies and partners, in particular those nations with longstanding concerns about China. Multiple motives lie behind U.S. security cooperation in Asia, but a central impetus is to create structures that prevent or dissuade China from throwing its weight around the region through coercive diplomacy. Washington also uses such cooperation to empower U.S. allies and partners with the capabilities and confidence to resist both Chinese coercion and the future impulse to bandwagon with an increasingly powerful China. Ashley Tellis, a former Bush administration strategist and long-time South Asia expert, explained the logic of using bilateral security cooperation to respond to China's rise:

The competitive elements of U.S. hedging strategy have become increasingly pronounced.

Deepened relations with Japan, India, and key allies in Southeast Asia will create structural constraints that may discourage Beijing from abusing its growing regional power. Even as Washington attempts to preserve good relations with Beijing—and encourages these rimland states to do the same—cultivating ties with these nations may be the best way to prevent China from dominating Asia in the long-term.⁷

One of the primary themes of the Department of Defense's Security Cooperation Guidance, which directs U.S. military relations with other nations, calls for "influencing strategic directions of key powers," a well-known reference to China.⁸ Washington's use of defense policies to dissuade China from competitive regional behavior was a central issue of research and debate in 2005 during the drafting of the Defense Department's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld reportedly designated as one of the QDR's core issues "how to shape the choices of countries at strategic crossroads," a euphemism for China.⁹ In a rare public admission, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick affirmed that the United States was, in fact, hedging against China by enhancing its diplomatic and military ties with Japan and especially with India.¹⁰

To be sure, U.S. diplomacy and security cooperation in Asia are driven by numerous motivations that are not all tied to balancing Chinese power, such as burden sharing with capable allies, counterterrorism, nonproliferation, and maritime security. Yet, the fact that much of Washington's diplomacy and defense cooperation can be explained with reference to these other re-

gional policy goals contributes to the hedge by reducing its appearance as overtly competitive and as solely directed at China. The intense U.S. fortification and expansion of its security relations with Japan and India in the last few years further reflect the above policy goals. In the words of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice,

[K]nowing that China is a new factor, knowing that China has the potential for good or for bad, knowing that it will one way or another be an influence, it is our responsibility to try and push and prod and persuade China toward the more positive course. ... I really do believe that the U.S.-Japan relationship, the U.S.-South Korean relationship, the U.S.-Indian relationship, all are important in creating an environment in which China is more likely to play a positive role than a negative role.¹¹

The U.S.-Japanese alliance is the most important and long-standing element of U.S. security strategy in Asia and is central to its efforts to hedge against the possible emergence of a revisionist China. The Bush administration has consistently taken steps to increase Japan's military role and diplomatic involvement in global and regional security affairs. U.S. strategists support such actions in arguing they are commensurate with Japan's position as an economic power, as a means to burden-share with Japan in addressing regional security challenges, and as consistent with U.S. efforts to shape China's ascendance and dissuade it from potentially destabilizing actions in the future.¹² The United States seeks a "global partnership" with Japan and is pursuing this by encouraging it to contribute to U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, coordinating extensively with Tokyo on regional aid and relief issues, and augmenting bilateral defense trade. The United States also supports constitutional reform that could allow Japan's military potentially to expand and be more active in the region. Such an expanded role was demonstrated by the participation of Japanese forces in the U.S.-Thai-Singaporean "Cobra Gold" military exercise with Southeast Asian nations for the first time this year. U.S.-Japanese military technical cooperation is also growing, especially on missile defenses. In February 2005, the United States and Japan issued for the first time a highly consequential joint statement that explicitly tied the bilateral alliance to peace and security in the Taiwan Strait. Finally, the current U.S. Global Defense Posture Review envisions changes in deployments and command structures that would increase interoperability and further facilitate Japan's military assuming a greater role in U.S.-led military operations in Asia and beyond.¹³

The United States has also aggressively pursued extensive defense and security cooperation with India, to the degree that it increasingly possesses many of the trappings of a formal alliance.¹⁴ The Bush administration has pledged to "help India become a major world power in the twenty-first

century,” and U.S. and Indian leaders now talk about their “strategic partnership.”¹⁵ In the last four years, the United States has held multiple, unprecedented joint exercises with all branches of the Indian military, including advanced naval and air combat exercises that involved U.S. submarines and aircraft carriers as well as India’s Russian-built Su-30MKI fighters, similar to those in China’s air force. The bilateral arms sales relationship has blossomed as well, encompassing highly capable systems that could affect regional power balances. In 2004 the United States authorized Israel to sell to India the Phalcon airborne early-warning system, after pressuring Israel not to sell the same item to China only a few years earlier. In March 2005, the United States opened the door for the sale of F-16 or F/A-18 multirole fighters, and India has also expressed interest in purchasing the U.S.-Israeli Arrow antimissile defense system. U.S. policymakers have indicated they would be willing to discuss sales of “transformative” capabilities in such areas as command and control, early warning, and missile defense.¹⁶

U.S. cooperation with India now possesses many of the trappings of a formal alliance.

These extensive defense policy initiatives culminated in the June 2005 signing of a 10-year defense pact that facilitates even further cooperation in such areas as multilateral operations; defense trade, including technology transfers and co-production; missile defense collaboration; and the establishment of a Defense Procurement and Production Group.¹⁷ Most recently, during Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh’s July 2005 state visit to the United States, he signed a joint statement with Bush that discussed the formation of a “global partnership.” The two leaders also concluded negotiations on the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP), opening the door to civilian nuclear technology sharing, civilian space cooperation, and trade in other dual-use high-technology goods. The latter are all items that China has long sought from the United States with minimal success, with the exception of bilateral trade in civilian nuclear power reactors and related technologies.

The United States has also taken multiple steps with Southeast Asian nations to bolster its defense ties and security cooperation, which are arguably more extensive now than at any time since the end of the Cold War. This defense cooperation has multiple motivations and has largely focused on improving regional capabilities for counterterrorism, nonproliferation, and antipiracy operations. Regardless of the specific objectives, however, such extensive military-to-military interactions inject energy into and provide renewed mandates for new and existing security relationships, extending their

longevity. Significantly, such cooperation also creates operational linkages and dependencies that not only improve regional military capabilities but also support the broad policy agendas of all parties involved. For the United States, such security cooperation specifically seeks to provide its Southeast Asian partners with the diplomatic will and military capability to resist potential pressure stemming from an increasingly powerful neighbor who possesses multiple levers of influence.¹⁸

For many Chinese, Washington seeks to contain or at least constrain China's reemergence.

Defense cooperation with Singapore has continuously improved over the last five years, making it the closest U.S. security partner in Southeast Asia. Balancing Chinese power has long been a key aspect of Singapore's ties with the United States. In 2001, former Singaporean prime minister Lee Kuan Yew stated that "[n]o combination of other East Asian economies—Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and [the Association

of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)]—will be able to balance China. ... Therefore the role of America as balancer is crucial if we are to have elbow room."¹⁹ That same year, Singapore, using its own funds, completed a deepwater pier at the new Changi Naval Base to become the sole location in the region at which a U.S. aircraft carrier can port. Defense trade has also expanded, and Singapore is currently the only Asian country to have joined the Joint Strike Fighter program.²⁰ In July 2005, the United States and Singapore completed a new strategic framework agreement that will further expand the depth of regional security dialogues; the scope of U.S.-Singaporean defense trade; and joint education, training, and exercises.

In 2003 the United States designated Thailand and the Philippines as major non-NATO allies and granted both large security assistance packages. The United States actively worked with both countries' militaries to improve their counterterrorism capabilities, including special operations joint planning, training, and exercises. Beginning in 2002, the United States started to rebuild its bilateral security cooperation with Indonesia, a country with long-standing concerns about China's regional influence. The United States has revived policy dialogues as well as joint military training and education activities. In 2005 it announced the resumption of sales of nonlethal defense articles and services to the Indonesian military, which had been cancelled in 1999 following concerns that the Indonesian military and related militia forces had committed human rights abuses in East Timor. The United States has also approached Vietnam about developing bilateral security cooperation, including possible arms sales. Vietnamese prime minister Phan Van

Khai visited the United States in June 2005 and, in meetings with Bush and Rumsfeld, agreed to expand military cooperation to include Vietnamese military training in the United States and to establish a channel for intelligence sharing on terrorism and transnational crime.²¹

In response to regional critiques that policy toward Southeast Asia has been too focused on U.S. needs since the September 11 attacks, Washington has started to broaden the scope of its security assistance in the last year to emphasize areas of “mutual benefit,” which include providing hardware, training, and information that help Southeast Asian nations address their security challenges in a manner suitable to their needs.²² U.S. policymakers are also seeking to address regional concerns about economic security, which remains at the core of Asian conceptions of national security. Zoellick’s trip in May 2005 and the new U.S.-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership initiative are important initial steps in this regard.²³ The Bush administration previously launched the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative, under which it negotiated a free-trade agreement (FTA) with Singapore and has begun FTA talks with Thailand. The United States has also granted trade-and-investment-framework-agreement status, a mechanism to begin discussing trade liberalization, to the Philippines and Malaysia. FTA negotiations with both may be forthcoming.

Why China Hedges

Whereas the United States hedging against a rising power can be expected, China’s choice of a hedging strategy, as the rising power, is less common in the history of great-power politics. China’s hedging behavior stems from its general foreign policy goals of maximizing its influence, leverage, and freedom of action while pursuing economic development to facilitate its reemergence as a great power. China naturally seeks to minimize other nations’ ability to constrain its pursuit of these goals. More specifically, Beijing’s hedging strategy is driven by a deep uncertainty about its international security environment and especially about Sino-U.S. relations. On one hand, China remains heavily reliant on continued access to U.S. markets, investment, and technology and therefore it requires stable, if not amicable, relations with the United States to ensure continued economic development and to increase China’s comprehensive national power. Adversarial relations would also complicate China’s regional aspirations by hindering economic and political interactions with U.S. friends and allies in Asia. These conditions collectively enhance Beijing’s sense of vulnerability in its relationship with Washington, in which the stakes are high and the United States could turn on China.

On the other hand, many Chinese policymakers and analysts are convinced that the United States poses the most significant long-term external threat to China's national rejuvenation and regional aspirations. For many Chinese, Washington seeks to contain or at least constrain China's reemergence as a great power in Asia for fear that it will undermine U.S. global predominance and its alleged pursuit of "absolute security." Chinese officials and analysts affirm these views by pointing to three themes in current U.S. policy: U.S. efforts to encourage the peaceful evolution of China's political system toward democratization, China's further integration into an international system heavily influenced by U.S. rules, and Washington's use of its alliances to contain China and prevent reunification with Taiwan.²⁴ Chinese concerns about the direction of the U.S.-Japanese alliance are becoming particularly acute. For some, the alliance is no longer a restraint on Japanese remilitarization but rather the main vehicle for a buildup aimed at limiting Chinese power and forestalling reunification.²⁵

These dueling perceptions motivate Beijing's decision to hedge its security bets. China seeks to stabilize Sino-U.S. relations while trying to minimize perceived U.S. efforts to constrain its revival and regional aspirations. China's hedging behavior, as in the U.S. case, possesses cooperative and competitive dimensions. The former involves Chinese actions to stabilize bilateral economic and security tensions while avoiding confrontation with the United States and broadening areas of cooperation. State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan reiterated this year the principles guiding China's policy toward the United States: "We should stand high to get a commanding view [of U.S.-China relations], recognize the mainstream of the relationship and the trend of the times, keep the overall picture and the future in mind and work to broaden consensus and promote cooperation."²⁶ Shifting U.S. national security priorities after the September 11 attacks provided China with a unique opportunity to do this.²⁷ From Beijing's vantage point, it sought to leverage this shift by expanding bilateral counterterrorism and nonproliferation cooperation, assuming a more active role in resolving the North Korea nuclear crisis, and making concessions to resolve bilateral economic disagreements while expressing relatively low-key opposition to the U.S. war in Iraq.

The Competitive Side of China's Hedge

Yet, numerous and acute differences over geopolitics, economic affairs, Taiwan, and human rights continue to plague U.S.-China relations, fueling competitive components of China's hedging strategy. Beijing's tactics include diplomatic policies to minimize Washington's ability to contain or constrain China in the region as well as military modernization programs

that seek to provide China with the capability to successfully reclaim Taiwan with force if necessary and, more importantly, to deter Taiwan and the United States from taking steps that would lead to Taiwan's formal and permanent separation from the mainland. Although Beijing seldom talks about these aspects of its foreign policy and military programs, its actions strongly indicate that balancing against U.S. security cooperation in Asia is a prominent policy driver.

Through its diplomacy in Asia, Beijing seeks to create a regional environment in which U.S. containment of China would be unwelcome, unfeasible, and deleterious to U.S. interests. To achieve this, China hopes to raise the barriers to and costs of the potential U.S. exercise of its power against China in the region in a nonconfrontational manner. Beijing has enhanced its bilateral diplomacy and involvement in multilateral organizations to develop bilateral diplomatic and security partnerships and, multilaterally, to create norms and structures that facilitate this strategy. Although an imperfect analogy, China's policies in Asia are in some ways a reflection of U.S. efforts to bind and engage China over the last two decades. To some extent, Beijing may be playing Washington's own game against it in the region by precluding Washington from constraining China by implicitly binding the United States as much as possible.²⁸

China's embrace of Asian multilateral organizations such as ASEAN contributes to its hedging strategy. Over time, Chinese policymakers could use these venues to shape regional security perceptions, preferences, and agendas in ways that accomplish the above goals. Such steps could also create norms and structures with the practical effect of limiting U.S. involvement in regional security affairs because of its unwillingness to participate. At a minimum, new norms or rules could force Washington to make unwanted policy trade-offs. In this sense, China could be seeking implicitly to bind the United States through the latter's role in Asian multilateral organizations. For example, the United States will not participate in the East Asian summit in December because, among other factors, it is unwilling to meet the designated requirement of signing ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.

Beyond multilateral diplomacy, China has made a concerted effort in the last decade to cultivate economic and security partners in Southeast Asia, reassuring nations that China's development presents long-term economic opportunities and does not threaten their security interests. Strategic reassurance, combined with rapidly expanding trade and investment relation-

Chinese concerns about the U.S.-Japanese alliance are becoming particularly acute.

ships, links ASEAN's economic fortunes to China and seeks to present China in a less threatening light. Such policies have the added benefit of creating an environment in which few Southeast Asian countries would support a confrontational U.S. approach toward China, and none want to choose between Washington and Beijing.²⁹ Moreover, as Sino-ASEAN relations have expanded and deepened, Beijing has sensitized these nations to Chinese

The U.S. and China face three problems that could undermine stability.

views of regional security affairs and the Taiwan question. China and ASEAN countries now share converging views on current security challenges facing the region, the value of multilateral solutions, and the principles guiding the latter two. On Taiwan, China has effectively pressured many ASEAN states to limit their interactions with the island, including haranguing Singapore's incoming prime minister in 2004 about a planned trip to

Taiwan, publicly pressuring Australia to exclude Taiwan from its defense obligations to the United States, and pressing regional policymakers to prohibit Taiwanese naval vessels from making port calls. To cultivate security partners further, Beijing has stepped up its bilateral military interactions with Southeast Asian nations, particularly Indonesia and the Philippines, to include regular high-level exchanges, joint education and training, and new defense trade relationships that in some instances incorporate weapons codevelopment.³⁰

Chinese outreach to India in recent years represents a major reversal in a relationship long fraught with distance, suspicion, and tension. It is no coincidence that this is occurring on the heels of the U.S.-Indian strategic rapprochement. Beginning with Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's trip to China in 2003, Beijing has rushed to strengthen its political, military, and economic relations with New Delhi. This culminated in the formation of a Sino-Indian "strategic partnership" during Chinese premier Wen Jiabao's April 2005 visit to India. In early 2005, China and India initiated a security dialogue at the vice foreign minister level, and China supported India's admission as an observer into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a multilateral organization among China, Russia, and Central Asian states. Significantly, Wen indicated during his 2005 trip that China would look favorably on, even though it refrained from explicitly endorsing, India's bid to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council.³¹ Sino-Indian military ties have rapidly developed, as demonstrated by a robust pattern of senior-level exchanges in the last year, possibly including military intelligence officials, according to the Indian media. A clear aim on China's part,

as longtime Chinese foreign policy specialist John Garver argues, is “to persuade India to look benevolently on an open-ended and expanding Chinese economic, political, and military presence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, to eliminate suspicion in Sino-Indian relations, and to transform India into China’s partner.”³² In doing so, Beijing seeks to minimize India’s willingness to countervail China in concert with the United States.

Russia serves two critical roles in China’s hedging strategy. First, it is an irreplaceable source of military hardware for the Chinese military during a critical stage in the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) modernization program. Second, Moscow shares China’s deep discomfort with unipolar U.S. dominance and especially with the U.S. military presence in Central Asia. Despite this mutual dissatisfaction with U.S. power and policymaking, neither country can openly confront or alienate the United States because their national goals of development and reclaiming great-power status are tied to cordial relations with Washington. Russian and Chinese policymakers therefore seek to remind the United States via diplomatic cooperation and defense ties of their dissatisfaction and jointly present alternate views of international affairs to contrast with U.S. actions.³³ Both nations also pursue such cooperation in the hopes of creating options and influence that they can theoretically leverage in bilateral dealings with Washington. Most tangibly, Russia and China supported and facilitated the recent statement by the SCO calling for a timetable for U.S. military withdrawal from Central Asia. The August 2005 Sino-Russian military exercise in northeast China was a prominent but clumsy effort to underscore such messages to the United States, as it included large maritime and airborne attack simulations under the hardly faint guise of counterterrorism operations.

China’s rapid military modernization efforts since the mid-1990s, when Chinese leaders became highly concerned that Taiwan was moving rapidly away from reunification, represent the internal-balancing dimension of China’s hedging strategy in Asia. China is seeking to provide itself with the capability to take back Taiwan if it so chooses and to raise the costs of war to deter Taiwanese independence and U.S. involvement in a possible conflict. The scope of current PLA efforts encompasses modernizing doctrine, force structure, and training/education in a unique convergence seldom seen in PLA history. This internal balancing against the United States is best reflected in the PLA’s heavy focus on acquiring advanced airborne, naval, missile, and command and control capabilities for area denial, precision strike, and information dominance. These force modernization developments are uniquely aimed at complicating U.S. military operations in the East Asian littoral and at imposing greater costs on U.S. naval and air force assets in a conflict over Taiwan.³⁴

The Risks and Perils of Hedging

In their simultaneous pursuit of hedging strategies, albeit in different forms, the United States and China face three problems that could undermine the stability of the U.S.-Chinese bilateral relationship and of Asian security more broadly: managing the Taiwan issue, regional reactions, and domestic politics in each country. If these risks are not carefully controlled, they could result in a gradual drift from the current status quo to adversarial competition and perhaps outright strategic rivalry between the United States and China. The balancing act that is implicit in such hedging strategies is inherently unstable and demands constant nurturing to be effective and sustainable.

It's TAIWAN, AGAIN!

The possibility of conflict over Taiwan exacerbates the pervasive uncertainty, growing strategic distrust, and security dilemma dynamics that motivate both sides' current hedging strategies. Mutual concerns about the possibility of conflict over the Taiwan issue and related military planning and force enhancements by both sides obscures the ability of each nation to evaluate the other's strategic intentions and reinforces worst-case perceptions. This situation undermines the ability of U.S. and Chinese policymakers to maintain the balance inherent in effective hedging strategies. For many Chinese, U.S. policy toward Taiwan is the centerpiece of the perceived U.S. attempt to contain China. U.S. arms sales to and military interactions with Taiwan seek to prevent reunification and compel Beijing to spend scarce resources on military modernization, thereby undermining its revival as a great power in Asia. Key aspects of U.S. contingency planning for a Taiwan conflict, such as changes in the U.S.-Japanese alliance and shifting U.S. military deployments in Asia, are viewed as directly supporting U.S. efforts to hinder China's rise in Asia. Few Chinese distinguish between the two.

For the United States, China's threats to use force against Taiwan coupled with its robust military modernization program are shaping U.S. views of China's long-term regional ambitions. Senior U.S. policymakers have noted several times that China's approach to resolving the Taiwan issue is a key indicator of China's future behavior as a major power. Then-Secretary of State Colin Powell, for example, stated in 2002 that "[w]hether China chooses peace or coercion to resolve its differences with Taiwan will tell us a great deal about the kind of relationship China seeks not only with its neighbors, but with us."³⁵ In other words, China's approach toward Taiwan is not seen as *sui generis* but rather as a key litmus test of whether China is a "limited aims" or "a revisionist" rising power that prefers coercive diplo-

macy and military solutions. Similarly, China's military modernization efforts since the late 1990s, which are largely but not exclusively focused on preparing for a Taiwan contingency, are raising acute concerns in Washington about China's long-term regional ambitions. The 2005 Defense Department report, "The Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2005," specifically raised this issue, as did Rice in August 2005 when she stated that PLA modernization "looked outsized for its regional interests."³⁶ The lack of PLA transparency about the scope of their modernization efforts or their regional goals further complicates the U.S. ability to assess Chinese intentions.

REGIONAL REACTIONS

A second challenge is managing regional reactions in Asia to such mutual hedging. The United States and China both require willing partners for their approaches to be effective. This becomes especially complex when most nations in the region are themselves hedging their security bets by seeking positive relations both with Beijing and Washington, to varying degrees. China's challenge is to pursue its countercontainment efforts while avoiding any actions that are even perceived as undermining the role of U.S. alliances or pushing the United States out of the region. Many Southeast Asian nations have long-standing suspicions about China's regional ambitions, and Chinese policies that appear competitive with U.S. security assurances will tap into these historical fears. China's military modernization, regardless of its justification as being defensive and Taiwan-oriented, is already raising regional concerns about the PLA's ultimate goals and the implications for regional stability.³⁷

China's approach toward Taiwan is seen as a key litmus test of China's broader aims.

The current U.S. use of external balancing behavior in its hedging strategy runs the risk of undermining the region's long-standing faith in U.S. alliances as a source of restraint and reassurance. U.S. efforts to promote a greater regional role for Japanese diplomacy and the Japanese military, given Japan's history of the violent colonization of Asia in the last century, will raise concerns in the region. It is unlikely that Japan could ever play the same role for the United States in Asia that the United Kingdom played in Europe. U.S. and Japanese leaders need to articulate a political strategy for raising Japan's diplomatic and military profile in the region in a stabilizing manner that protects America's long-term interests. Furthermore, manipulated nationalism is a growing phenomena in Asia, and U.S. efforts to bolster its security partners, such as Japan, could unwittingly feed such dangerous dynamics. It is not clear how the United States would manage such national

sentiments, despite claims to the contrary. This could reduce Japan's leadership potential, exacerbate intraregional tensions, and undermine U.S. legitimacy in the region's eyes.³⁸

Moreover, the traditional reassurance function of U.S. alliances could come under strain if or when Washington pushes its security partners to participate in planning for a Taiwan contingency. Few leaders in Asia want to

U.S. efforts to bolster its security partners could unwittingly feed regional nationalism.

choose implicitly or explicitly between the United States and China. The ongoing Global Defense Posture Review raises the prospect of new regional base access agreements with smaller footprints but broader geographic application, called Cooperative Security Locations, that may bring these questions to the fore and strain existing security partnerships. Such tension could intensify existing regional perceptions that U.S. security cooperation is already too focused on U.S. concerns about counterterrorism and nonproliferation.³⁹ Furthermore, if Asian policymakers view U.S. foreign policy beyond Asia as highly coercive, unilateral, and arbitrary, this will gradually erode support for the U.S. alliance structure and the willingness of nations to accept U.S. leadership within the region, especially in the face of growing reassurances from and economic integration with China.⁴⁰

To be sure, in evaluating regional reactions, the United States has the advantage of strategic incumbency. For the last several decades, the United States has been the key security guarantor in Asia and the provider of critical "public goods" that have allowed the region to prosper. The United States continues to offer far more than others in the form of tangible material resources and capabilities to meet the developmental and security needs of regional states. The most recent example was the massive scale of the U.S.-led tsunami relief effort in 2004–2005, which reaffirmed that U.S. military capabilities can contribute to the region's political and economic development at the very times that such resources are desperately needed. Current regional frustrations with the United States aside, these positive perceptions persist. By contrast, China has historically been a source of suspicion, tension, and instability, especially in Southeast Asia. Beijing has made important strides in reassuring the region in the last five years, but its legacy endures.

DOMESTIC POLITICS

A final problem for policymakers in each country is the domestic political sustainability of a hedging strategy. Hedging could lose its political moorings

in either country and precipitate a drift into deepening strategic distrust, leading to intensified geopolitical competition. For many Chinese, separating U.S. policy on Taiwan from the broader U.S. policy on China's emerging role in Asia appears to be difficult. Absent resolution of the Taiwan issue, many Chinese will continue to see the United States as the main barrier to its reemergence as a great power in Asia. The growth of nationalism in China will further complicate the leadership's ability to balance the cooperative and competitive aspects of its policy. A future crisis with the United States that inflamed nationalist sentiment could constrain the Chinese leadership's ability to prevent such events from precipitating a more adversarial bilateral relationship.

For the United States, domestic support for the cooperative dimensions of a hedging strategy is becoming increasingly difficult in light of persistent concerns about the large bilateral trade deficit, China's unfair trading practices, the value of the Chinese currency, technological espionage, and the scope of PLA modernization. Because the U.S. business community is now divided about whether China represents a continued opportunity or a threat to U.S. economic security, maintaining internal consensus for amicable bilateral relations has become particularly complex. In 2005 alone, there has been no dearth of examples of acute U.S. concerns about the economic and political threats posed by China. Moreover, the United States has yet to answer core questions about its future relations with China, including whether it identifies China as a security-seeking or a power-seeking state, whether Taiwan's reunification with the mainland is in the U.S. interest,⁴¹ and whether Chinese preeminence in Asia is acceptable to Washington in a manner that does not compromise U.S. security interests. Until they are answered, the political sustainability of the current U.S. hedging strategy will remain precarious.

Next Steps in Asia's Evolving Security Order

As the regional security order in Asia evolves and the risks associated with hedging become more acute, U.S. policy should seek to create a framework that moderates great-power rivalries and security dilemma dynamics; perpetuates the U.S.-led alliance system, to help manage the latter; enhances burden sharing among major regional powers; and increases bilateral and multilateral security cooperation. To that end, U.S. policymaking could include three elements: broadening the scope of bilateral diplomatic assurances; enhancing coordination between bilateral security cooperation and multilateral organizations; and developing a Northeast Asian security organization to manage great-power relations among the United States, China,

Russia, Japan, Korea, and possibly India. Each measure has limits to its effectiveness. Collectively, however, they could help to stabilize the situation and prevent the drift to rivalry, especially in Sino-U.S. relations, aiming to create a system that consists of an implicit hierarchy among major powers but with explicit power-sharing to address common economic and security challenges.⁴² The United States could credibly claim to remain at the top of the hierarchy but would recognize the status of China as an emerging preeminent power, addressing Beijing's worst fears about U.S. policy and keeping hedging strategies from contributing to the emergence of U.S.-China rivalry.

Sino-U.S. security relations and regional stability would benefit from bilateral assurances from both nations that acknowledged their mutual interests and respective regional roles and responsibilities. Such signals from Washington would seek to reduce China's temptation to compete for hegemony by acknowledging its status and contributions to the region. For example, the United States could specifically recognize China's historical position as a great power in Asia as well as its current centrality to the regional economic order and welcomes China as a preeminent power, just not *the* preeminent power, in Asia that actively contributes to regional security, stability, and prosperity. Such statements would serve as a call for China to engage in more burden-sharing activities and to think in terms of regional and global problem-solving. In other words, if China wants to be acknowledged and accepted as a preeminent regional power with global equities, it has to act like one. In doing so, the United States would also begin to test China's intentions and aspirations by establishing standards against which to judge its future behavior. Washington may have begun to communicate these themes in the newly initiated U.S.-China "senior dialogue" between Zoellick and Dai Bingguo, a venue that is ripe for further discussion of these very issues.

In exchange, China could acknowledge the role and value of U.S. alliances in addressing both traditional and nontraditional security threats and welcome a continued U.S. military presence in the region as a force for stability. Chinese leaders could also pledge to provide "public goods" that contribute to regional security and economic development and to work with the United States and other regional powers, bilaterally and multilaterally, to meet these goals in explicit acknowledgement of the value of burden sharing.

A diplomatic strategy that expands coordination between U.S. bilateral security cooperation and existing multilateral mechanisms such as ASEAN and the ASEAN Regional Forum would buttress the value of the above signals and assurances. Actively mixing bilateral and multilateral mechanisms would improve the legitimacy of the U.S. regional role and may prod China

to contribute more to regional activities. This step may also render U.S. power and alliances more predictable and valuable to U.S. allies and partners, as well as to China. Given the plethora of nontraditional security challenges facing the region, such as terrorism, piracy, proliferation, and infectious diseases, bilateral-multilateral coordination makes good policy sense. U.S. security cooperation with Southeast Asian nations is a critical source of hardware, training, and experience needed to combat such threats effectively. Multilateral cooperation complements these bilateral efforts by facilitating joint operations in the region as well as serving as a mechanism to harmonize national structures and capabilities, for example, laws and law enforcement assets, needed to respond to problems such as weapons proliferation and piracy. This harmonization is best accomplished within existing multilateral mechanisms but is complemented by the advanced capabilities acquired via bilateral channels.

The domestic political sustainability of hedging is a problem for both countries.

A final possible step to enhance stability further in the evolving regional security order could be the creation of a Northeast Asian security organization based notionally on the structure of the six-party talks' process. Although this forum has yet to prove ultimately effective, the grouping could be made permanent, and its scope expanded to serve as a mechanism for great-power consultation and coordination on common regional security problems. Chinese analysts have expressed interest in this notional framework, and senior U.S. policymakers reciprocated during bilateral discussions earlier in 2005. Such an organization could further fortify U.S. and Chinese status and expand the possibilities for burden sharing in Sino-U.S. relations.⁴³ For the United States, the organization could function as a political framework that justifies and legitimizes continuing the U.S. alliance system, while allowing other regional powers to become more directly involved in managing regional security affairs. The new organization could also validate China's status as a preeminent regional power and serve as a mechanism for sharing responsibilities for tackling regional challenges and crises. Although not itself a solution, this multilateral subregional organization could serve U.S. and Chinese interests in a manner that further mutes the deepening strategic mistrust on both sides and sets a course for manageable security relations in the twenty-first century.

The timing is now propitious for U.S., Chinese, and other Asian policymakers to acknowledge mutual hedging as a prominent feature of the emerging regional security order and to take practical actions to protect against its po-

tentially destabilizing consequences. The pattern of U.S.-China hedging, along with varying degrees of competition and cooperation among other Asian powers, underscores the importance of regional diplomacy that recognizes mutual interests and begins to delineate the roles and responsibilities of all major powers in Asia, in particular between the United States and China. With the six-party talks ongoing, the East Asia summit approaching, and bilateral security dialogues proliferating in Asia, opportunities currently exist to create mechanisms that could halt a drift toward a U.S.-China strategic rivalry that would force the entire region to confront unnecessary choices and avoidable conflict.

Notes

1. The term “hedging” is highly underdeveloped both in the international relations theory and the security studies literatures. This article’s conceptualization of the U.S. and Chinese hedging strategies is drawn from recent work on European hedging strategies after the end of the Cold War. See Robert J. Art, “Europe Hedges Its Security Bets,” in *Balance of Power Revisited: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, eds. T. V. Paul and James Wirtz (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 179–213. For a comprehensive analysis of the variety of possible responses to rising powers, see Randall L. Schweller, “Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory,” in *Engaging China*, eds. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1–32. For a different use of hedging, see Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, “Japan’s Dual Hedge,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 5 (September/October 2002): 110–121.
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 8. U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Military Training in Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005, Volume I," April 2005, <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/rpt/fmtrpt/2005/>.
 9. Jason Sherman, "In QDR, DOD Considers Capabilities Needed to Manage Relations With China," *InsideDefense.com*, May 12, 2005, <http://www.insidedefense.com>.
 10. Joel Brinkley, "In New Tone, Rice Voices Frustration With China," *New York Times*, August 20, 2005, p. 1. See "Interview With the *New York Times*: Secretary Condoleezza Rice," Washington, D.C., August 17, 2005, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/51312.htm>.
 11. Condoleezza Rice, "Remarks at Sophia University," Tokyo, March 19, 2005, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/43655.htm>.
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38. See Eric Heginbotham and Christopher P. Twomey, "America's Bismarckian Asia Policy," *Current History* 104, no. 683 (September 2005): 243–250.
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