

CHAPTER 1

Hedging as a Policy Without Pronouncement: A Tale of Three Defense White Papers

Kuik Cheng-Chwee

Hedging is a *prevalent* alignment behavior, a *persistent* choice, but also a *puzzling* phenomenon in contemporary international relations. It is the prevalent post-Cold War alignment pattern in Southeast Asia and other regions, where the vast majority of “middle states”—the sovereign actors sandwiched between two or more competing powers—have rejected the straightforward strategies of “balancing” (e.g., siding with Washington to counter-balance Beijing) and “bandwagoning” (siding with and showing subservience to Beijing to maximize profits and/or minimize security loss).¹ Instead of completely aligning and siding with a major power against the other, most of the middle states (including some U.S. allies like Brazil, Hungary, Qatar, Thailand, Türkiye, UAE) have insisted on pursuing a middle and opposing position—i.e., a mixed approach with mutually-counteracting measures—with an eye to hedging against multiple risks and keeping options open.² As an alignment choice, hedging typically involves three insurance-seeking approaches: *active neutrality* (actively making efforts to signal a “not-taking-sides” stance), *inclusive diversification*, and *adaptive offsets* to ensure fallback options in case things go awry in the anarchic international system.³

By the mid-2020s, it has become clear that hedging is a persistent decision for many middle

¹ On “balancing” and “bandwagoning”, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 1979); Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 3–43; Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Randall L. Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 72–107.

² See, for instance, Mehran Kamrava, *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Atul Kumar, “Sino-Turkish Strategic Partnership: Prudent Hedging or Irreversible Shift?,” *China Report* 49, no. 1 (2013): 119–41; Cheng-Chwee Kuik, “How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States’ Alignment Behavior towards China,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 100 (2016): 500–14; Ann Marie Murphy, “Great Power Rivalries, Domestic Politics and Southeast Asian Foreign Policy: Exploring the Linkages,” *Asian Security* 13, no. 3 (2017): 165–82; Matias Spektor, “In Defense of the Fence Sitters: What the West Gets Wrong About Hedging,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 18, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/global-south-defense-fence-sitters>; Hussein Kalout and Feliciano de Sá Guimarães, “Hedging Between the US and China: Brazil Protecting Itself to Survive,” *CEBRI-Journal* 1, no. 4 (2022): 18–36.

³ For a conceptualization of hedging as a neutrality-plus, insurance-seeking behavior under uncertainty aimed at minimizing and mitigating risks while maximizing returns and maintaining fallback options, see Cheng-Chwee Kuik, “The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore’s Response to a Rising China,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30, no. 2 (2008): 159–85; Cheng-Chwee Kuik, “Getting Hedging Right: A Small-State Perspective,” *China International Strategy Review* 3, no. 2 (2021): 300–15; Cheng-Chwee Kuik, “Explaining Hedging: The Case of Malaysian Equidistance,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 46, no. 1 (2024): 43–76. On alternative definitions of hedging, see Evelyn Goh, *Meeting the China Challenge: The U.S. in Southeast Asian Regional Security Strategies*, Policy Studies 16 (Washington, DC: East-West Center Washington, 2005); Darren J. Lim and Zack Cooper, “Reassessing Hedging: The Logic of Alignment in East Asia,” *Security Studies* 24, no. 4 (2015): 696–727; Jürgen Haacke, “The Concept of Hedging and Its Application to Southeast Asia: A Critique and a Proposal for a Modified Conceptual and Methodological Framework,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 19, no. 3 (2019): 375–417; John D. Ciorciari, “The Variable Effectiveness of Hedging Strategies,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 19, no. 3 (2019): 523–55; David Martin Jones and Nicole Jenne, “Hedging and Grand Strategy in Southeast Asian Foreign Policy,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 22, no. 2 (2022): 205–35; Kai He and Huiyun Feng, *After Hedging: Hard Choices for the Indo-Pacific States Between the US and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

states. Despite the dramatic changes in power configurations at the global and regional levels over the past decade (i.e., the intensifying U.S.-China rivalry, the increasing activism of the next-tier powers in turning the Indo-Pacific construct into geopolitical and geoeconomic realities, and the gradual institutionalization of BRICS and other non-Western groups across the Global South), most regional states in Asia and beyond have continued to stick to, rather than depart from, their hedging approaches. This is especially so among the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a group of small- and medium-sized states at the center of intensified Great Power competition and courtships.⁴ With the advent of the second Donald Trump Administration (hereafter Trump 2.0) in the United States in January 2025, the already heightened rivalries and associated uncertainties are likely to further escalate across the military and non-military chessboards. These heightened uncertainties, in turn, are likely to deepen and widen middle-state hedging in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere globally.⁵

Hedging, however, is an intriguing phenomenon in world politics. That is, even though many countries practice and pursue some form of hedging, very few (if any) governments and leaders ever explicitly label—let alone announce—their policy as “hedging”. Almost all hedger states prefer using such terms as “independent”, “neutral”, “non-aligned”, “equidistant”, “multi-vector”, “multi-aligned”, or “bamboo diplomacy” to describe their alignment position.⁶ Why do hedgers “just do it” without proclaiming it? How do we know if hedging is in play? Put differently, since a hedger state typically hedges without announcing it, what then are the indicators of hedging?

This paper addresses these issues by focusing on the Defense White Papers (DWP) and related documents of three middle states in the Indo-Pacific—namely Australia, Malaysia, and Vietnam—as

⁴ Alice D. Ba, “Beyond Dichotomous Choices: Responses to Chinese Initiative in Southeast Asia,” in *Regional Powers and Contested Leadership*, ed. Hannes Ebert and Daniel Flemes (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 189–227; See Seng Tan, “Consigned to Hedge: South-East Asia and America’s ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ Strategy,” *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 131–48; David Shambaugh, *Where Great Powers Meet: America and China in Southeast Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Jun Yan Chang, “Not between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Singapore’s Hedging,” *International Studies Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2022): 1–12; Dewi Fortuna Anwar, “Indonesia’s Hedging Plus Policy in the Face of China’s Rise and the US-China Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific Region,” *The Pacific Review* 36, no. 2 (2023): 351–77; Cheng-Chwee Kuik, “Shades of Grey: Riskification and Hedging in the Indo-Pacific,” *The Pacific Review* 36, no. 6 (2023): 1181–1214; Hunter S Marston, “Navigating Great Power Competition: A Neoclassical Realist View of Hedging,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 24, no. 1 (2024): 29–63.

⁵ Graham Allison, “Trump Is Already Reshaping Geopolitics,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 16, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/trump-already-reshaping-geopolitics>; Cheng-Chwee Kuik and Nur Shahadah Jamil, “The Feasibility and Future of Middle-State Hedging,” *East Asian Policy* 16, no. 4 (2024): 7–28; Matias Spektor, “Rise of the Nonaligned: Who Wins in a Multipolar World?,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 7, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/rise-nonaligned-multipolar-world-matias-spektor>.

⁶ Reuel R. Hanks, “‘Multi-vector Politics’ and Kazakhstan’s Emerging Role as a Geo-strategic Player in Central Asia,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 11, no. 3 (2009): 257–67; Carlos Fortín, Jorge Heine, and Carlos Ominami, “Latin America Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Second Cold War and the Active Non-alignment Option,” *Global Policy* (2020): 1–18; Ang Guan Teo and Kei Koga, “Conceptualizing Equidistant Diplomacy in International Relations: The Case of Singapore,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 22, no. 3 (2022): 375–409; Kuik, “Explaining Hedging”. Some of these behavioral patterns are associated with “middle power” statecraft. See Thomas Parks, *Southeast Asia’s Multipolar Future: Averting a New Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023); Sarah Teo, *Middle Powers in Asia Pacific Multilateralism: A Differential Framework* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2023); Pongphisoot Busbarat, “Bamboo Stuck in the Chinese Wind,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 46, no. 1 (2024): 125–146.

empirical cases to illuminate how states choose to respond to intensifying Great Power rivalry.⁷ We pay particular attention to whether these states are pursuing hedging or non-hedging policy approaches.

There are several reasons to focus on DWPs. To begin, a DWP is a government's official statement of strategic intent vis-à-vis target audiences, both internal and external, concerning matters of national defense. This key policy document *signals* how a country perceives its security environment; how it positions itself vis-à-vis competing powers, neighbors, and external actors; and how it plans to defend its national interests, preserve regional stability, and promote international security. Reading between the lines, one can discern signs, sentiments, and indicators that combine to reflect a country's outlook on, *inter alia*: (a) whether it perceives the presence of an imminent and direct threat, and if so, its magnitude and manifestation; (b) whether it perceives the availability, reliability and suitability of a principal patron, preferred partner, or pertinent platform to tackle the perceived danger(s); and (c) how its self-image and other domestic factors shape its choices in determining its prioritized interests and primary instruments of statecraft to defend these interests. These dimensions are among the most important indicators to infer whether, to what extent, and in what ways a country chooses to hedge (even without announcing it as such), balance, or adopt other approaches.

Why focus on Australia, Malaysia, and Vietnam? There are three reasons. First, the three countries represent different parts of the Indo-Pacific region: Oceania (Australia), maritime Southeast Asia (Malaysia), and mainland Southeast Asia (Vietnam). Second, they represent different types of alignment choices: hedging (Malaysia and Vietnam) versus non-hedging, and more specifically, balancing (Australia). These differences will be elaborated upon below. Third, the countries' different choices reflect intriguing puzzles: Why do the two ASEAN states—who are claimant states in the multi-nation disputes about the South China Sea—opt to hedge, while Australia, a non-claimant state, opts to balance? These choices seem counter-intuitive. Furthermore, why do the ASEAN states insist on hedging even as the Philippines, a fellow ASEAN member and claimant state, steps up its balancing strategy against China? Why do they persist in hedging even as the United States and fellow Quad members (i.e., Australia, India and Japan) deepen their counter-balancing measures against China and offer to partner with ASEAN states to jointly push back Beijing in the face of China's growing assertiveness?

To address these interrelated puzzles, the paper proceeds in four parts. The first part defines “what” hedging is in international relations, before enunciating the key differences between hedging, balancing, and bandwagoning. The second part explains “why” hedging is, in practice, a policy without pronouncement: a middle state's silent, seemingly incoherent but *strategically instinctive*

⁷ This study distinguishes between “middle states” and “middle powers”. Middle states, a broader term, refers to sovereign states who are sandwiched between two or more competing big powers. Middle powers refers to those middle states with three “I” agency: an ability to advance one's own *initiative* or idea; an ability to work with others for *institutionalizing* that initiative into regular cooperation; and an ability to promote that institutionalized initiative into an *impactful* cooperation that shapes contemporary inter-state interactions.

behavior to survive under conditions of high stakes and high uncertainty. The third part deals with the “how” issues by identifying the defining indicators of hedging which distinguish it from non-hedging behavior, such as balancing. It examines the empirical evidence of various alignment behaviors in the Indo-Pacific by focusing on the DWPs and related documents, contrasting Vietnam and Malaysia’s hedging approaches with Australia’s balancing strategy. The conclusion provides a summary and offers preliminary observations on the implications of hedging as an instinctive strategic behavior for middle states and emerging partners like Japan.

WHAT is Hedging: A Survival-Driven Alignment Choice Under Uncertainty

Hedging is a common behavior in many domains of human activity—particularly agriculture, finance, academia, and politics.⁸ Sovereign actors hedge along a logic similar to that followed by financial fund managers, farmers, writers, lawyers, and politicians. Rational actors opt for hedging when the stakes (survival, profit, reputation) are high *and* when the situation(s) determining those stakes are highly uncertain (e.g., unpredictable weather conditions, price fluctuations, unknown facts, unstable power relations, a volatile power structure).

The logic of hedging is discernable from several commonly-used phrases and expressions that reflect the basic attributes of hedging as prudent human behavior under high-stakes, high-uncertainties conditions. These include: “Just in case”; “Better safe than sorry”; “Do not put all your eggs in one basket”; “Do not burn bridges”; “Never say never”; “Working for the best, preparing for the worst”, etc. Such precautionary insurance-seeking mindsets and behavioral inclinations underpin hedging as a survival-driven middle-state alignment choice at the international level.

With these cross-disciplinary insights and everyday phrases in mind, we can offer a conceptualization of hedging for the study of IR:

Hedging is defined as an insurance-seeking alignment behavior under the conditions of high-uncertainty and high-stakes where a sovereign actor concurrently pursues the three prudent approaches of active neutrality, inclusive diversification, and adaptive offsets, with an eye toward mitigating risks while maximizing returns and maintaining fallback options.⁹

⁸ Ralph D. Stiles, “The Effect of Hedging upon Flour Mill Control,” *Harvard Business Review* 1, no. 1 (1922): 64–70; Glenn G. Munn, F. L. Garcia, and Charles J. Woelfel, *Encyclopaedia of Banking and Finance*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991); Ken Hyland, “Writing Without Conviction? Hedging in Science Research Articles,” *Applied Linguistics* 17, no. 4 (1996): 433–54; Antoine Yoshinaka and Christian R. Grose, “Ideological Hedging in Uncertain Times: Inconsistent Legislative Representation and Voter Enfranchisement,” *British Journal of Political Science* 41, no. 4 (2011): 765–94.

⁹ Cheng-Chwee Kuik, “Hedging in Post-Pandemic Asia: What, How, and Why?,” The Asan Forum, 2020, www.theasanforum.org/hedging-in-post-pandemic-asia-what-how-and-why/; Cheng-Chwee Kuik and Chen-Dong Tso, “Hedging in Non-Traditional Security: The Case of Vietnam’s Disaster Response Cooperation,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 15, no. 4 (November 21, 2022): 422–42; Cheng-Chwee Kuik, “Southeast Asian Responses to U.S.-China Tech Competition: Hedging and Economy-Security Tradeoffs,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 29, 509–538.

Hedging is constituted and implemented by three insurance-seeking approaches, i.e., (a) actively signaling a neutral, not-taking-sides stance (thereby avoiding the twin strategic risks of entrapment and abandonment); (b) inclusively diversifying one's economic and strategic ties (thereby avoiding the dangers of economic dependence and political coercion, i.e., the danger of putting all one's eggs in one basket); and (c) adaptively pursuing mixed and mutually counteracting measures (e.g., concurrently pursuing engagement and containment, concurrently displaying selective deference and selective defiance) with an eye to offsetting multiple risks (all of the above-mentioned dangers and hazards), thereby ensuring fallback options in case things move in undesirable directions.

Table 1 below illustrates how hedging is distinguishable from balancing and bandwagoning. The distinctions cover several grounds: macro-level alignment positioning (avoiding siding with any power versus fully allying with a single power), primary ends/drivers, and primary means (tools and instruments).

Table 1. Balancing, Bandwagoning and Hedging Compared

	Balancing	Bandwagoning	Hedging
Macro-level alignment	Fully siding with one power against another (a rising power or a growing threat)	Fully siding with one power (a rising power or a growing threat)	Not taking sides / neutral / equidistance / non-alignment via multi-alignment
Primary ends	Security-seeking: Balancing the strongest power (Waltz) / Balancing the most threatening power (Walt)	Utility-seeking: Maximizing profits (Schweller) / Minimizing security threat (Walt)	Insurance-seeking: Mitigating and offsetting risks; Cultivating fallback options
Primary means (across micro-level domains)	Primarily military means (alliance and armament) + any other tools and instruments	Primarily political means (displaying full deference) + any other tools	All available instruments pursued in an opposite and mutually-counteractive manner * active * inclusive * adaptive

(Source: Kuik, "Explaining Hedging")

Describing hedging as a prevalent and persistent behavior is not to suggest that it is a permanent behavior. Like all other forms of alignment behavior, hedging emerges, evolves, and ends according to changing conditions.¹⁰

¹⁰ For further elaboration, see Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "Southeast Asia Hedges between Feasibility and Desirability", East Asia Forum, July 4, 2023, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/07/04/southeast-asia-hedges-between-feasibility-and-desirability/>; Kuik and Shahadah, "The Feasibility and Future of Middle-State Hedging".

WHY is Hedging An Unannounced Policy?

A policy typically involves policymakers consciously making an announcement or a series of statements, verbally and/or in a written format, regarding the policy's name, goals, and action plans. An explicit announcement, more often than not, is an essential element of a public policy. The announcement is necessary so that a policy's rationale, *modus operandi*, and intended results can be communicated clearly to all relevant targets, partners, and stakeholders to facilitate and ensure effective implementation.

However, this may not apply to hedging as an alignment behavior. Indeed, judging from how states have been pursuing hedging in the contemporary era, it is clear that in practice, hedging is a policy without pronouncement. That is, even though many governments have been implementing policies with the attributes of hedging, all of them have avoided admitting and announcing their policies as being such. Government leaders and policy officials have distanced themselves from using hedging as a term or label. There are several reasons why they have done so.

The first reason is perceptual. Nearly three decades after the term was brought into the study of IR from other disciplines, there are still common misperceptions and misunderstandings about hedging in foreign and security policy circles, where it is viewed as a negative word or behavior. Some equate hedging with a policy approach that is indecisive, inconsistent, or worse, two-faced. Some perceive hedging as an opportunistic and speculative act. Others dismiss hedging as an ineffectual and unworthy strategy. Still others blame it as a source of instability and unpredictability.¹¹ Given these negative misinterpretations, it is not surprising that no government wants to associate itself officially with hedging.

Another reason is pragmatic calculation: states want to reduce, not increase, risks. Since hedging is often associated with and understood as a precautionary act in response to uncertain intentions or unpredictable situations, proclaiming one's policy as hedging would be tantamount to signaling distrust of the target country. Such signaling would increase, not decrease, risks, thereby defeating its very purpose. A growing number of IR scholars have examined the links between "trust" and "hedging," arguing that in relationships that are trustworthy, there is "no need to hedge."¹² While this argument is not incorrect, it is incomplete, as it only covers trustful/ distrustful relationships between states, but overlooks that hedger states are not only cautious about uncertain intentions and less trustful

¹¹ For a brief discussion on these misperceptions and misunderstandings of hedging, see Kuik, "Getting Hedging Right"; Kuik and Shahadah, "The Feasibility and Future of Middle-State Hedging".

¹² See, for instance, Vincent Charles Keating and Jan Ruzicka, "Trusting Relationships in International Politics: No Need to Hedge," *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 4 (2014): 753–70. See also Van Jackson, "Power, Trust, and Network Complexity: Three Logics of Hedging in Asian Security," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 14, no. 3 (2014): 331–56; Kendall Stiles, *Trust and Hedging in International Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

relations, but are also unpredictability in circumstances *above and beyond intentions*.¹³ These include power dynamics at the systemic level that are beyond the control of any single state. For example, this is shown in the action-reaction between two competing powers that might lead to a direct military conflict no one wants but risks entrapping middle states for a range of possible reasons (e.g., geographical proximity, association, miscalculation, accidental encounters, etc.). It is this wide array of risks and uncertainties, rather than mere distrust or a lack of trust, that is the primary driver of hedging behavior.

Leaders who opt for hedging are mostly aware of such broader risks of uncertainty, but the imperative of wanting to send the right signal to reduce risks convinces them that the hedging policy is best executed without announcing it. This is especially so for countries that see themselves as highly vulnerable, in a hostile neighborhood, or are confronting heightened power rivalries and an intensified pressure to take a side.

The third reason has to do with the loose and uneven nature of hedging as a state behavior. While many observers and writers have regarded hedging as a “strategy” in the strict sense of the term, some scholars see hedging more as an “instinctive” behavior. From the latter perspective, hedging may not necessarily be a well-orchestrated strategy, if by “strategy” one means a coherently crafted grand plan linking clearly identified political *ends* with carefully calculated *means* (military and non-military) and coordinated *ways* (across agencies).¹⁴

Rather, hedging is very often more of a prudent, precautionary behavior driven by “just-in-case” instinctive reasoning, and is typically manifested in loose, incoherent, and even seemingly contradictory policy actions. Such less-than-tidy policy features and processes should not surprise anyone familiar with real-world policy formulation and implementation, especially in countries constrained by contested leadership and inter-elite dynamics, a fragmented bureaucracy, intense inter-agency rivalries, diffuse governance structures, a divided society, or competing socioeconomic and bottom-up demands. After all, while all states want to have a sound and sophisticated strategy, very few states actually possess the required capacity and competency to devise—let alone execute—a coherent strategy in the strict sense of the word.

¹³ On uncertainty in international relations, see Brian C. Rathbun, “Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (2007): 533–57; Jonathan Kirshner, *An Unwritten Future: Realism and Uncertainty in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), Chapter 7. On risks and uncertainty in various facets of human activity, see Peter L. Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996); Darryl SL Jarvis, “Theorising Risk and Uncertainty in International Relations: The Contributions of Frank Knight,” *International Relations* 25, no. 3 (2011): 296–312.

¹⁴ On “strategy,” see Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” *International Security* 25, no. 2 (2000): 5–50; Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Meridian, 1991); Michael Howard, “The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 5 (1979): 975–86; Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge: The Belknap of Harvard Univ. Press, 1987).

Hence, hedging is a strategic behavior which involves some use of means and instruments to pursue certain politically-defined ends. But it may or may not be a strategy depending on the *extent of coherence, calculation, and coordination* of the actual policy processes. Regardless, whether it is a “tightly-thought-through strategy,” or loose “strategic approach,” a state can hedge with or without making any announcements.

The assertion that hedging is a strategic behavior driven by precautionary, “just-in-case” instinctive reasoning does not mean that hedging is simply an inborn impulse without thinking. Rather, by “instinctive reasoning”, we refer to a state’s innate inclination to respond to external stimuli based on a combination of past *experiences, emotions, and political exigencies*. The logic of strategy is coherent calculations, whereas the logic of instinctive reasoning is gut reactions and existential needs; both of which are defined primarily by the governing elites of the day.

In sum, when the term “hedging” is used to describe state behavior, it simply suggests that the state’s actions exhibit a tendency—and indeed a choice—to hedge: a human inclination to offset risks when a situation is uncertain and the stakes are high. It does not imply that the country’s policymakers must have necessarily designed a cohesive, carefully crafted, and highly coordinated “strategy.” Nor does it suggest that a hedger state will always get what it wants through its hedging approaches. There is no panacea in the real world, and hedging entails its own set of limitations.¹⁵ Furthermore, hedging does not necessarily have to be a consistent choice. Indeed, the one consistency in all forms of hedging behavior is the inclination to be *consistently contradictory* for the purposes of adaptive offsets (counteracting exposure to risks) and fallback preservation (cultivating maneuverability and contingency).

Future studies should unpack the origins of hedging in terms of the sources underpinning a state’s instinctive strategic reasoning, e.g., *how* a country’s historical memories and experiences intersect with sociopolitical emotions at the societal level; *why* these dynamics are filtered by leaders and elites’ political needs the ways they are; and *why* the interplay of elite politics and societal DNA has come to drive and limit the country’s alignment choices to optimize security, prosperity, and autonomy the ways they have.

HOW Do We Know Whether A State Hedges?

Since hedging is a policy without pronouncement, how then do we know whether a state is hedging or pursuing something else? What are the key indicators that distinguish hedging from non-hedging acts, such as balancing? In the pages that follow, we examine the Defense White Papers (DWPs) of Australia, Malaysia, and Vietnam as empirical cases to identify the manners in which middle states

¹⁵ Kuik, “Getting Hedging Right”; Kuik and Shahadah, “The Feasibility and Future of Middle-State Hedging.”

opt to position themselves vis-à-vis Great Power rivalry.

Before we proceed, some conceptual clarifications are in order. Based on Table 1 above, the major differences between hedgers and non-hedgers are as follows. First, a non-hedger—in this case, a balancer such as Australia—makes a straightforward, clear-cut alignment choice: aligning completely with a big power (in this case, the United States) against another (in this case, China). A hedger (e.g., Vietnam, Malaysia), on the other hand, chooses not to choose—it insists on not taking sides between the competing powers. Second, a balancer holds a relatively black-and-white perception of threat and solution: China is seen as a direct threat, whilst Washington and its allies are seen as the principal solution to tackle that threat. A hedger, on the other hand, sees shades of grey (as opposed to a black-and-white perception), viewing both powers as sources not only of problems but also solutions across a variety of policy domains.¹⁶ Third, a balancer regards alliance as the cornerstone of its external policies, whereas a hedger is, by and large, allergic to alliance. A hedger prefers instead to leverage multi-layered partnerships with as many powers as possible as the anchoring foundation of its external posture, deepening traditional ties while continuously exploring additional layers of cooperative mechanisms depending on the relative convergences of interests as external environments evolve. The modus operandi of hedgers, in short, is about pursuing non-alignment (ends) via multi-alignments (means and ways).

On the basis of the above conceptual parameters, a comparison of the DWP and related official documents of Australia, Malaysia, and Vietnam indicates that while Canberra pursues a realist-styled “balancing” strategy, Malaysia and Vietnam have persisted in implementing a hedging policy in practice (although their degree of hedging varies). For Vietnam and Malaysia, we focus on their DWPs, released in 2019 and 2020, respectively. For Australia, we focus primarily on the *2016 Defence White Paper (2016 DWP)* and its *2020 Defence Strategic Update (2020 DSU)*, alongside the *2020 Force Structure Plan*, the *2023 Defence Strategic Review*, the inaugural *National Defence Strategy* in 2024, and the *2022 DSU* and related releases. These documents indicate that Canberra’s alignment choice differs sharply from that of Vietnam and Malaysia in at least three core aspects:

- a) openly emphasizing differences with China and explicitly expressing concerns about Beijing’s threatening behavior;
- b) making clear its macro-alignment position of siding and aligning with the United States (and its allies) across all major policy domains to counterbalance the perceived Chinese threat; and
- c) anchoring on military alliance (as well as such alignments as the Quad and AUKUS) as the cornerstone of its external policy.

¹⁶ Kuik, “Shades of Grey”.

Each of these aspects—among the trademarks of a “balancing” strategy—is continuously evidenced, albeit unevenly, in the Australian government’s major documents and statements on defense and security as listed above. A comparison between the *2016 DWP* and the *2020 DSU*, for instance, reveals that while the 2016 document still shied away from explicitly registering Canberra’s concerns about China’s coercive behavior, Australia was already directly noting the country’s differences with Beijing and narrating Canberra’s convergence with Washington in terms of values, interests, and actions. Examples abound. The *2016 DWP*, after stating that the United States and China “will continue to be the most strategically important factors in the Indo-Pacific region to 2035,”¹⁷ declared:

“For Australia, our relationships with both countries will *remain crucial in different ways*. The way the Government approaches our defense strategy reflects *these differences*. Australia’s alliance with the United States is based on shared values and will continue to be the *centerpiece* of our defense policy. The Government will continue to strengthen the alliance including by supporting the United States’ role in underpinning the stability of our region through its rebalance. The Government will also continue to work closely with the United States and *coalitions of like-minded countries* to address common global security challenges, such as in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan [italics added].”¹⁸

Australia’s direct and open emphasis on its differences with China on one hand, as well as its like-mindedness with Washington and Western allies on the other, is clearly absent in Vietnam and Malaysia’s DWP (to be discussed shortly). While ideological differences are a reason for such differentiation in relationships, a direct and public signaling of such differentiated preferences is *a matter of strategic choice*. (For instance, Vietnam could have emphasized its communist affinity with China in a way that made their ideological like-mindedness the centerpiece of alignment, but this clearly is not the case. Hedgers prefer to emphasize “equidistance”, not partial differences.)

While the *2016 DWP* (during the Malcolm Turnbull government) was still marked by a relatively benign assessment of the security environment and “the China factor”, the language and tone of the *2020 DSU* under the Scott Morrison government were vividly grim in substance. Describing the post-COVID-19 world as less benign “with greater potential for military miscalculation”, the 2020 document stresses that the Australian Defense Force (ADF) “must be better prepared for the prospect of high-intensity conflict”, and Australia must be able and be understood as willing “to deploy military power to shape our environment, deter actions against our interests and, when required, respond with military force.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Australian Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper* (Department of Defence, 2016), 41.

¹⁸ Australian Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, 44.

¹⁹ Australian Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update* (Department of Defence, 2020), 6.

Although the 2020 document did not use the word “threat” to describe China, it is more explicit than the 2016 DWP in revealing Australia’s perception of China as a major source of regional instability and insecurity: “Since 2016, major powers have become more assertive in advancing their strategic preferences and seeking to exert influence, including China’s active pursuit of greater influence in the Indo-Pacific. Australia is concerned by the potential for actions, such as the establishment of military bases, which could undermine stability in the Indo-Pacific and our immediate region.”²⁰ The 2020 DSU added: “Some countries will continue to pursue their strategic interests through a combination of coercive activities, including espionage, interference, and economic levers. Tensions over territorial claims and the establishment of new military facilities are rising and are involving the use of military or para-military forces more frequently than in the past, including coercive para-military activities in the South China Sea.”²¹

In his address to launch the 2020 DSU, Prime Minister Morrison said: “Tensions over territorial claims are rising across the Indo-Pacific region, as we have seen recently on the disputed border between India and China, and the South China Sea, and the East China Sea.” The words and tone in the 2020 Update had some observers commenting that the document was “all about China.”²² Peter Jennings, an expert at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) who led the External Expert Panel in preparing the 2016 DWP, concurred: “When [the 2020 Update] talks about the bad behavior that’s happening in the region, the annexation of territory, coercion, the influencing of domestic politics, the use of cyber-attacks – it’s really only one country which is doing that at industrial levels, and that’s the People’s Republic of China.”²³ Greg Jennett similarly wrote: “It is pretty much all about China these days.” He added: “Who else could [the Update] be referring to when it inserts the words ‘coerce’ or ‘coercion’ a dozen times in a document only 12 pages in length?”²⁴ Euan Graham observed that even though the update was not a white paper, “its influence on Australia’s strategic policy may prove to be more enduring”, in part because the document’s “acceptance of the severe strategic challenges” as well as the defense force that will emerge as a result of the required adjustments and sweeping changes “may be the one that Australia has to go to war with.”²⁵

Taken together, it is clear that the 2020 DSU and the subsequent defense documents reflect not only Canberra’s growing threat perception of China (as a principal source of Australia’s deteriorating

²⁰ Australian Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, 11.

²¹ Australian Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, 12.

²² Peter Layton, “Australia’s Defence Strategic Update: It’s All About China,” RUSI Commentary, August 3, 2020, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/australias-defence-strategic-update-its-all-about-china>.

²³ Jade Macmillan and Andrew Greene, “Australia to Spend \$270b Building Larger Military to Prepare for ‘poorer, More Dangerous’ World and Rise of China,” ABC News, June 30, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-30/australia-unveils-10-year-defence-strategy/12408232>.

²⁴ Greg Jennett, “The Hundreds of Billions Being Poured into Defence Shows Morrison’s Done with the Old World Order,” ABC News, July 1, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-01/defence-spending-scott-morrison-military-strategy-jennett/12410464>.

²⁵ Euan Graham, “Australia’s Serious Strategic Update,” International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), July 3, 2020, <https://www.iiiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2020/07/apacific-australia-defence-update/>.

security environment), but also an increasingly determined political will to step up deterrence and its resolve to respond with credible military force, while strengthening cooperation with “like-minded” partners across the Indo-Pacific region. Canberra’s vision of “Indo-Pacific” is attributable to Australia’s longstanding paradigmatic debate on defending continental Australia versus forward defense.²⁶ This vision is anchored in the U.S.’s preeminent global power, leveraging Australia’s location at the center of the Indo-Pacific arc connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans through Southeast Asia, and working side-by-side with “like-minded” nations—through Quad, AUKUS, and multi-layered partnerships with other countries—to maintain the rules based order and defend Australian interests.

Canberra’s policy choice is clearly a “balancing” policy, as evidenced by its direct expression of concern about China’s coercive actions, alongside its determination to forge stronger alliances with the United States and wider coalitions of “like-minded” countries targeting Beijing. This approach differs markedly from Hanoi’s and Putrajaya’s. The latter’s approaches—quintessentially a “hedging” policy—are indirect but not inactive, low-profile but not indecisive, non-confrontational but not subservient.

In contrast to Australia’s pro-U.S. and anti-China position, Malaysia and Vietnam have avoided publicly depicting China as a threat, avoided siding with either Washington or Beijing, and rejected alliance as a policy option, even though both were formerly in alliance (i.e., the Anglo-Malayan/Malaysian Defense Agreement 1957-1971, the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance 1978-1991).²⁷ Instead, both countries have opted to pursue the three insurance-seeking approaches of active neutrality, inclusive diversification, and adaptive offsets. Even during the 2014 China-Vietnam oil rig crisis, Hanoi still stuck to its simultaneous “cooperation and struggle” strategy towards China: criticizing China’s coercive acts but not sliding into complete confrontation, instead insisting on keeping dialogue channels open and continuing cooperation—thereby maintaining Vietnam’s hedging policy of not siding with one power against another.²⁸

²⁶ Paul Dibb, “Is Strategic Geography Relevant to Australia’s Current Defence Policy?,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 60, no. 2 (2006): 247–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357710600696167>; Paul Dibb, “The Self-Reliant Defence of Australia: The History of an Idea,” in *History as Policy: Framing the Debate on the Future of Australia’s Defence Policy*, ed. Ron Huiskens and Meredith Thatcher (Canberra: ANU Press, 2007), 11–26; Paul Dibb, “The Importance of the Inner Arc to Australian Defence Policy and Planning,” *Security Challenges* 8, no. 4 (2012): 13–32; Rory Medcalf, “Balancing Act: Making Sense of the Quad,” *Australian Foreign Affairs*, no. 10 (2020): 30–48. See also Hugh White, *How to Defend Australia* (Victoria: La Trobe University Press, 2019); Rebecca Strating, “Strategy at Sea: A Plan B for Australian Maritime Security?” *Security Challenges* 16, no. 2 (2020): 58–70.

²⁷ Alexander L. Vuving, “The Evolution of Vietnamese Foreign Policy in the Doi Moi Era,” in *Vietnam: Navigating a Rapidly Changing Economy, Society, and Political Order*, ed. Karl Börje Ljunggren and Dwight H. Perkins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023), 347–369; Elina Noor, “Foreign and Security Policy in the New Malaysia,” Lowy Institute, November 2019; Hunter Marston, et al., “Fair Winds and Following Seas: Maritime Security and Hedging in the South China Sea,” *Blue Security: A Maritime Affairs Series*, August 2023; Kuik, “Explaining Hedging”.

²⁸ Carlyle A. Thayer, “Vietnam’s Strategy of ‘Cooperating and Struggling’ with China over Maritime Disputes in the South China Sea,” *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2016): 200–220; Thuy T. Do, “Firm in Principles, Flexible in Strategy and Tactics: Understanding the Logic of Vietnam’s China Policy,” *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 2, no. 1 (2017): 24–39; Thi Bich Tran and Yoichiro Sato, “Vietnam’s Post-Cold War Hedging Strategy: A Changing Mix of Realist and Liberal Ingredients,” *Asian Politics & Policy* 10, no. 1 (2018): 73–99.

This does not mean that Hanoi's policy is static or rigid. Instead, Hanoi's policy is adaptive and dynamic. By the mid-2010s, in the aftermath of the oil rig crisis, Hanoi's longstanding "Three No's" policy (no military alliances, no foreign military bases on its territory; no siding with one country against another") was questioned by some within the Vietnamese establishment as a policy that "ties Vietnam's hands" and allows China to take advantage of Hanoi's accommodating posture.²⁹ Vietnam's 2019 DWP was largely a response to this and the wider changing dynamics at the regional and global levels. At the center of the 2019 document's adaptive statecraft was a recalibration of the Three No's policy to "Four No's and One Depends", i.e., adding the "4th No" ("no using force or threatening to use force in international relations") as well as "One Flexibility" guideline (the "Three No's" is subject to the 4th No: if Vietnam's sovereignty and security are threatened by any country's use or threat to use force, then Vietnam will promote defense ties with any power).³⁰

Vietnam's 2019 DWP, while singling out the South China Sea imbroglio and stressing its determination to defend its sovereignty and interests, attempts to underscore its core messages subtly and indirectly. As observed by Derek Grossman and Christopher Sharman, Vietnam's DWPs have traditionally served as "generic, non-offensive policy statements on external threats to Vietnamese security", which are typically wrapped "in Marxist-Leninist ideological narrative and steeped in subtlety, ambiguity, and coded language."³¹ Indeed, DWPs (of all countries) are significant not just for what is stated, but also for *what is not or is less stated* on paper but is actually taking place on the ground.

Hence, while Vietnam's 2019 DWP avoids describing China as a threat to Vietnamese security and territorial integrity, the 2019 DWP highlights the "East Sea" (South China Sea) 12 times in the 112-page document, acknowledging (but without emphasizing) the "[d]ivergences between Vietnam and China regarding sovereignty in the East Sea"³² (This is probably the only divergence with China stated by Vietnam in the document.) While doing so, the 2019 document also performs a strategic *offset* by unequivocally stating what Vietnam is against:

"Vietnam consistently advocates neither joining any military alliances, siding with one country against another, giving any other countries permission to set up military bases or use its territory to carry out military activities against other countries, nor using force or threatening to use force in international relations."³³

These statements are telling. At a time of intense major power rivalry, they reiterate Vietnam's position

²⁹ Personal conversation with a Vietnamese security expert, January 11, 2025, Putrajaya.

³⁰ Tu Lai, "Looking Beyond Symbolism in US-Vietnam Defence Cooperation", East Asian Forum, April 18, 2020, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2020/04/18/looking-beyond-symbolism-in-us-vietnam-defence-cooperation/>.

³¹ Derek Grossman and Christopher Sharman, "How to Read Vietnam's Latest Defense White Paper," War on the Rocks, December 31, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/how-to-read-vietnams-latest-defense-white-paper-a-message-to-great-powers/>.

³² Viet Nam Ministry of National Defence, 2019 Viet Nam National Defence (Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2019), 16.

³³ Viet Nam Ministry of National Defence, 2019 Viet Nam National Defence, 23–24.

of not taking sides vis-à-vis the Great Powers, thereby reassuring both parties. Significantly, the statements also serve to clarify that Vietnam's growing defense partnerships with multiple actors in recent years (which are *not* mentioned in the DWP) do not imply that Hanoi has departed from its no-alliance stance.

Having emphasized and clarified its bottom-line positions, the Vietnamese *2019 DWP* goes on to elaborate on the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) government's past and present accomplishments and strategies in defending Vietnamese security and interests. It also enumerates a wide range of perceived dangers and risks, both internal and external and military and non-military, particularly non-traditional security challenges such as cybercrime, terrorism, energy security, food security, climate change, natural disasters, epidemics, transnational crime, maritime piracy, etc.³⁴

Elsewhere in the *2019 DWP*, Vietnam's defense diplomacy, international integration, and multilateral defense cooperation were mentioned.³⁵ What is missing, however, is any mention of Vietnam's expanding defense partnerships with the United States, Japan, and other countries, which have been growing closer and stronger over the past decade. This contrasts with Malaysia's *DWP*, which devotes an entire chapter to Malaysia's defense engagements and partnerships with countries near and far at multiple levels, including the United States, Australia, China, and other Asian countries³⁶ (The defense alignments with the Western powers, which started during the Cold War, predated the rise of China and the U.S.-China rivalry.) The omission of this information in Vietnam's *2019 DWP* presumably highlights the CPV government's own capacity and efforts to defend Vietnamese security, while avoiding sending the wrong signal to any external actors.

Like Vietnam's *2019 DWP*, Malaysia's *2020 DWP* avoids identifying *any* country as a threat. The *2020 DWP*, Malaysia's first, instead identifies a wide range of perceived risks and challenges, while emphasizing a *multi-pronged approach and multifaceted partnerships* (as opposed to relying primarily on alliance and alignment) in managing and tackling the increasingly challenging security environment. In the "Strategic Outlook" chapter, instead of highlighting any particular country or issue as a principal danger, the *DWP* identifies three broad sources of actual challenges and potential risks: "Although Malaysia is not beset by military threats or conflicts at the present moment, the nation still faces three main security challenges. They are: (1) uncertain big power relations; (2) a complex Southeast Asian neighborhood; and (3) increasing non-traditional security threats."³⁷

Unlike Vietnam's *DWP*, however, Malaysia's *DWP*—like other Malaysian official documents and

³⁴ Viet Nam Ministry of National Defence.

³⁵ Viet Nam Ministry of National Defence.

³⁶ Malaysian Ministry of Defence, *Defence White Paper: A Secure, Sovereign, and Prosperous Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Defence, 2020), 64–74.

³⁷ Malaysian Ministry of Defence, *Defence White Paper*, 20.

statements—appears to downplay concerns about any one single power, but opts to highlight the action-reaction nature of big power politics and the wider geopolitical dangers of power polarization in Southeast Asia. Instead of pointing to any single actor, Malaysia's 2020 DWP states: "Tensions have sparked in the South China Sea with the arrival of warships from outside the region. The *growing rivalry and action-reaction* between the powerful nations have raised *the risk of regional polarization* [italic added]."³⁸ Malaysia's diffused perceptions of dangers—and its heightened vigilance about the risks of entrapment (and abandonment)—are rooted in its historical experiences as a victim of Great Power politics. The 2020 DWP states: "Malaysia's history is, in many ways, a history of big power politics."³⁹ It elaborates:

"While different big powers have come and gone, *the geopolitical challenges* of the country remain. Although the present-day Malaysia is not directly threatened by any militarily stronger powers the same way as its predecessor polities experienced during the age of European colonization and World War II, its interests have continued to be affected by *the actions and interactions* of the big powers of the contemporary era [italic added]."⁴⁰

Malaysia's choices in downplaying China-related concerns and delinking the China factor (at least publicly) from its strategic alignments with the Western powers—doing both while highlighting the action-reaction nature of Great Power politics—have to do with its mixed experience during the Cold War. On one hand, its 14-year-long alliance with its former colonial ruler, the United Kingdom from 1957 to 1971 served the security-maximization purpose of protecting Malaya/Malaysia from internal and external communist threats as well as *Konfrontasi*, a low-intensity conflict launched by Indonesia in 1963 to 1966 in opposition to the formation of the Federation of Malaysia. On the other hand, however, Britain's decision in 1968 to retreat "east of Suez" as well as the U.S.'s Nixon Doctrine in 1969 (which led to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from mainland Asia) exposed Malaysia to the risk of being abandoned, highlighting the unpredictable nature of alliances.⁴¹

In light of the historical memories and contemporary strategic circumstances, the 2020 DWP envisages Malaysia as serving as a "bridging linchpin" between the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean. Seeking to leverage Malaysia's regional activism and geographical centrality between the two ocean regions (and between the continental north and maritime south), Malaysia aspires to deepen its multi-level, multifaceted partnerships with fellow ASEAN members and other partners along the defense, development, and diplomatic spheres, thereby advancing Malaysia's current and future interests as "a maritime nation with continental roots" while contributing to regional security, prosperity, and

³⁸ Malaysian Ministry of Defence, 21.

³⁹ Malaysian Ministry of Defence, 13.

⁴⁰ Malaysian Ministry of Defence, 21.

⁴¹ Kuik, "Explaining Hedging", 44-45.

stability *without* taking sides with any major power.⁴² Such a self-image and external outlook underpin Malaysia's three-pillar national defense strategy (i.e., concentric deterrence, comprehensive defense, credible partnerships) and its external defense engagements. While Chapter Six illuminates Malaysia's defense ties with both newer (e.g., China) and longstanding partners (primarily the Western powers, i.e., the United States, Australia, the UK, and New Zealand), these defense partnerships are—for all intended purposes—alignments without alliance.

While Vietnam and Malaysia are both hedging states, there are signs (within and beyond DWPs) indicating that the former hedges more heavily than the latter. This is evidenced primarily in Hanoi's much more vigilant (albeit more implicit than explicit) perceptions of China-related dangers (e.g., maritime and military risks in the South China Sea; digital security over 5G Wi-Fi network) as compared to that of Malaysia.⁴³ It is also evidenced by Hanoi's greater tendency (than Putrajaya) to invest more in all conceivable risk-mitigation measures (armament and other self-defense readiness, strategic alignments with a wider range of Indo-Pacific powers, including 2+2 mechanisms) as well as Hanoi's greater readiness to defy Beijing (e.g., confronting China during the oil rig crisis; excluding Huawei in Vietnam's 5G networks; delaying some BRI ventures). Future studies should unpack the variations in hedging behaviors across Southeast Asia and beyond.

Conclusions: Implications of Hedging for Indo-Pacific Cooperation

To conclude, hedging is a prevalent and persistent middle-state foreign policy behavior and alignment pattern vis-à-vis the intensifying Great Power rivalry of our time. In essence, hedging is an insurance-seeking behavior under high-stakes, high-uncertainty conditions. In practice, hedging is a policy without pronouncement, for reasons analyzed above. Hedging is typically implemented by concurrent pursuits of active neutrality, inclusive diversification, and adaptive offset approaches. A state is clearly hedging (even when it doesn't announce it) when you see all three approaches in play.

So, what are the implications of such prevalent and persistent middle-state alignment choices for next-tier powers such as Japan who share Southeast Asian states' concerns about the hyper-uncertainties surrounding an increasingly assertive China and an increasingly unpredictable U.S. under Trump 2.0? Despite—and precisely because—most states in the ASEAN region and elsewhere in the “Global South” would continue insisting on their “not-taking-sides” stance, these middle states remain the swing states whose eventual choices will potentially determine the direction of world order and polarity in the 21st century. Japan should respect these states' neutral position, while recognizing that their hedging instinct may not be a bad thing. After all, when most states refuse to side with one

⁴² Malaysian Ministry of Defence, 17–31.

⁴³ For elaborated discussions on Vietnam's perceptions of, and responses to, China-related maritime and digital insecurity, respectively, see Kuik, “Hedging in Post-Pandemic Asia”; Kuik, “Southeast Asian Responses to U.S.-China Tech Competition.”

power against another, this helps to avoid regional polarization, while affording space for pragmatic countries to continuously forge cooperation in an inclusive manner. This brings benefits rather than destruction and creates solutions rather than harboring suspicions. This may not be ideal for some powers, but precisely because this is not the best scenario for any of the rival powers, it is the next-best scenario for all under the current uncertain circumstances.

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