

US-CHINA COMPETITION FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

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The US considers China as a strategic competitor. The national security strategies of President Biden and former President Donald Trump reiterated this stance, and emphasised that China is seeking to reshape the international order.¹ However, the US-China competition is not just a bilateral issue but a geopolitical contest which includes military, trade, and technology. The latest conflict is on trade and technology in which the US seeks to deny the advantage of advancements in technology, especially in the semiconductor sector, to China. The US is trying to prevent China from getting access to advanced technology so that it can constrain China militarily, and launched de-risking from China a few years ago. China, on the other hand, is seeking self-sufficiency in advanced technology which will prop up its military superiority in the Western Pacific, and push back the US from the region. Now, this great power rivalry has been

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1. The White House, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," December 18, 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>; The White House, "National Security Strategy," October 12, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>. Accessed on June 24, 2023.

extended to Southeast Asia, and both are wooing these countries to take either side to bolster their position in Asia.

China considers the Southeast Asia region as its backyard, a replication of its ancient 'tributary' system. Southeast Asia received greater attention in China's 'good neighbour' diplomacy than any other region in its neighbourhood because of its geopolitical, security, and economic importance.² Geopolitically, China is heavily dependent on the sea lanes passing through the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea (SCS). In China's security strategy, the SCS is strategically vital compared with the eastern seabed of the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea (ECS) in its nuclear deterrence strategy because the SCS is more secure to deploy China's ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), as the average depth of the Yellow Sea is 40m and that of the ECS is 350m, while the average depth of the SCS is 1,200m. Economically, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is China's largest trade partner, having surpassed the European Union (EU) in 2020. Similarly, President Xi Jinping's maritime diplomatic initiative 'the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road' was announced in Indonesia in 2013, which suggests how important the region is in China's foreign policy strategy.³ Even though Beijing adopted a unilateral approach to the territorial disputes in the SCS and established its military presence in many of the small islands, it offered a conciliatory stance on various problems that affected the region, from the East Asian financial crisis of 1998 to trade concessions and health diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Washington also has considerable strategic and economic stakes in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia is sandwiched by the Pacific and Indian Oceans and the trade route connecting the two oceans comprises a lifeline for US allies such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia. The SCS waterbody is also crucial for the free movement of US forces between the two oceans. Importantly, to hunt China's

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2. John W. Garver, et al., "China's 'Good Neighbor' Diplomacy: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?" Asia Program Special Report, Wilson Center, January 2005, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/ASIAreport_No126.pdf. Accessed on June 25, 2023.
 3. Wu Jiao and Zhang Yunbi, "Xi in Call for Building of New 'Maritime Silk Road'", *China Daily*, October 4, 2013, https://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-10/04/content_17008940.htm.

SSBNs deployed in the SCS, the US' Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) planes need to cross the Southeast Asian air spaces, especially from Australia or from the aircraft carrier deployed in the Indian Ocean, while coming from the east would be vulnerable to tracking by the Chinese. Besides, ASEAN is the USA's fourth largest goods trading partner and a major destination for American foreign investment, as annual trade with ASEAN (excluding Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar) reached \$505.8 billion in 2022.⁴ Also, ASEAN featured in a central position in key strategic documents of both the Trump and Biden Administrations' Indo-Pacific strategy. The Biden Administration launched a non-military strategic document, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) in May 2022 to counter China comprehensively, which also features ASEAN as an important stakeholder.⁵

For Southeast Asia, China is important for economic prospects, while the US is considered as the guarantor of regional security. The region has deftly adopted a balancing strategy; it continues its increasing economic cooperation with China while relying on American military power for regional stability. The spillover effect of the US-China rivalry into Southeast Asia will destabilise the region politically. This can be seen from the statements of the Malaysian and Singaporean prime ministers in the latest Boao Forum held in March 2023 in China's southeastern city of Boao, where they expressed their anxiety about the spillover effects of the great power rivalry between the US and China into the region.⁶ They opined at the forum that US-China tension is the "most worrying" factor in the region and called for "healthy competition" between the two instead of

4. Office of the Spokesperson, "The United States-ASEAN Relationship: FACT SHEET", US Department of State, July 12, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-asean-relationship-2/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20U.S.%20Bureau,estimated%20%24505.8%20billion%20in%202022>. Accessed on September 27, 2023.

5. "Statement on Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity", The White House, May 23, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/23/statement-on-indo-pacific-economic-framework-for-prosperity/>. Accessed on June 13, 2022.

6. Laura Zhou, "Boao Forum: Singapore, Malaysian Leaders Voice Concerns Over Spillover Effects of US-China Rivalry", *South China Morning Post*, March 30, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3215413/boao-forum-singapore-malaysian-leaders-voice-concerns-over-spillover-effects-us-china-rivalry>. Accessed on April 3, 2023.

“zero-sum rivalry.”⁷ Even though the regional countries have been getting economic dividends from the US-China trade war, with large amounts of direct investment from China under its ‘China Plus One’ strategy,⁸ and also China being the largest trade partner of ASEAN, a bandwagoning of China will lead to loss of ASEAN’s centrality in the security narrative of Indo-Pacific affairs.

For a long time, China has been attempting to become an economic powerhouse in the region despite territorial disputes, starting with the agreement on investment and the free trade agreements launched in 2002 with individual states as well as with the ASEAN bloc, completed in 2014; thereby China has become the largest economic partner (trade and investment) of Southeast Asia.⁹ China’s creeping assertiveness in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea has received little resistance from other stakeholders, including against its unwillingness to accept the International Court of Justice’s verdict on Manila’s petition against Beijing’s position on the dispute.¹⁰

CHINA’S ECONOMIC INROADS INTO SOUTHEAST ASIA

The economic interaction between China and Southeast Asia has been growing strongly, in terms of both trade and investment. With free trade agreements and market access strategy by Beijing, the Chinese market has become more attractive for Southeast Asia than the US one. When the region grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, China considered the contagion as an opportunity to enhance its ‘feel-good’ diplomacy and proved to be a ‘friend-in-need’ for Southeast Asia. It responded to the needs of the region through diplomatic, medical, and material support, and its vaccine assistance helped the region stem the spread of the

7. Ibid.

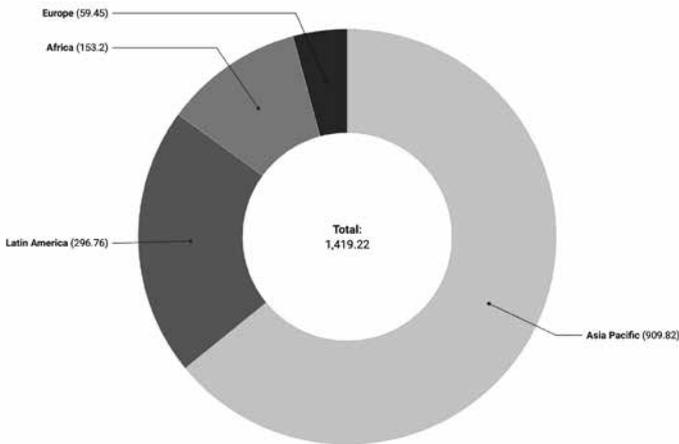
8. Bhaswar Kumar, “What is the China-Plus-One Strategy?” *Business Standard*, July 26, 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/podcast/international/what-is-the-china-plus-one-strategy-12207260052_1.html. Accessed on June 30, 2023

9. “ASEAN-China Free Trade Area”, Invest in ASEAN, ASEAN Secretariat, <https://investasean.asean.org/free-trade-areas/view/734/newsid/776/aseanchina-free-trade-area.html>. Accessed on June 15, 2023

10. Shi Jingtao and Jun Mai, “China’s Xi Jinping Rejects any Action Based on International Court’s South China Sea Ruling”, *South China Morning Post*, July 12, 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1988990/chinas-xi-jinping-rejects-any-action-based>. Accessed on June 20, 2023

disease.¹¹ Of the total global vaccine donations delivered by China, two-thirds went to Asia, and five of the ten top recipients were in Southeast Asia: Indonesia (1), the Philippines (5), Myanmar (6), Cambodia (9), and Vietnam (10) (Fig 1).¹² China’s contribution to the Southeast Asian region’s resilience to the pandemic was greatly appreciated by the regional elites and it was claimed by Beijing that China-Southeast Asia cooperation to fight the pandemic was a “new type” of cooperation in international relations and an “exemplary model” of how China views its neighbourhood under Xi Jinping.¹³

Fig 1: China’s Vaccine Deliveries by Geographical Regions (in Millions) by December 2022



Source: “China COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker”, December 28, 2022, https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-covid-19-vaccines-tracker/#China8217s_Vaccines_Across_Regions. Accessed on June 20, 2023.

11. Dominique Fraser and Richard Maude, “China Won Over Southeast Asia During the Pandemic”, *The Diplomat*, July 20, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/china-won-over-southeast-asia-during-the-pandemic/>. Accessed on April 4, 2023.
12. “China COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker”, *Bridge Consulting*, December 28, 2022, https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-covid-19-vaccines-tracker/#China8217s_Vaccines_Across_Regions. Accessed on May 2, 2023.
13. Richard Maude and Dominique Fraser, “Chinese Diplomacy in Southeast Asia During the COVID-19 Pandemic”, Asia Society Policy Institute, July 2022, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/chinese-diplomacy-southeast-asia-during-covid-19-pandemic>. Accessed on April 4, 2023.

Southeast Asia received the benefit of the festering trade war between the US and China, which started in 2018 when the Trump Administration imposed four waves of tariffs (as high as 25 per cent) against hundreds of billions of dollars worth of Chinese products. In a four-year period, after President Trump launched the trade war with China in July 2018, China's share in the US imports was reduced from 22 per cent to 18 per cent, while imports from the rest of the world in August 2022 became 38 per cent higher than in the pre-trade war period.¹⁴ In turn, the Chinese exporters shifted production locations to other developing countries, including Southeast Asia, and their exports to the US increased phenomenally.¹⁵ In this trade war, Vietnam is one of the largest beneficiaries: its share of US imports jumped from 1.9 per cent in 2018 to 3.4 per cent in 2020, and from 2020 to 2021, it jumped five places in the world rankings of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows, joining the top 20 list at number 19, supported by the Chinese investment.¹⁶

The US-China de-risking has also strengthened the China-Southeast Asia economic relationship. The 'China-Plus One' strategy adopted by Beijing to counter the US' trade war with China has helped attract large-scale Chinese investments into the Southeast Asian region. Under this strategy, Chinese companies retained their production facilities inside China to cater to domestic demands while setting up production centres in the Southeast Asian countries, especially Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam, for the international market.¹⁷ As a result, Southeast Asia became China's largest trading

14. Chad P. Bown, "Four Years into the Trade War, are the US and China Decoupling?" Peterson Institute for International Economics, October 20, 2022, <https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economics/four-years-trade-war-are-us-and-china-decoupling>. Accessed on June 25, 2023.

15. John Goyer, "US-China Tariff Fight Leaves SE Asia in the Winner's Circle", U.S. Chamber of Commerce, September 1, 2021, <https://www.uschamber.com/international/us-china-tariff-fight-leaves-se-asia-the-winners-circle>. Accessed on June 25, 2023.

16. Ian Coxhead, "The US-China Trade War and Prospects for ASEAN Economies", Institute of Developing Economies, Tokyo, May 2022, https://www.ide.go.jp/English/ResearchColumns/Columns/2022/ian_coxhead.html. Accessed on June 25, 2023.

17. Sara Hsu, "Which Asian Nations Can Benefit From the 'China Plus One' Strategy?", *The Diplomat*, June 11, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/which-asian-nations-can-benefit-from-the-china-plus-one-strategy/>. Accessed on April 1, 2023.

partner in 2020, replacing the European Union with 14.6 per cent of its total foreign trade.¹⁸ By July 2022, China-ASEAN bilateral investment exceeded US\$ 340 billion and was expected to increase further with the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).¹⁹

The US, with the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), is also wooing Southeast Asia to isolate China economically from the global supply chain network. The IPEF is a network of 12 countries from the Indo-Pacific region, excluding China, for “a free, open, fair, inclusive, interconnected, resilient, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.”²⁰ It primarily focusses on four areas: trade, supply chains, clean energy, tax, and anti-corruption. However, through the IPEF, the US wants to maintain its leadership in the region. Assistant US Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink, said in March that “the next 50 years is going to be written in Southeast Asia, and our relationship with ASEAN will shape the future that we all want to see”.²¹ However, the IPEF doesn’t offer greater access to the US market for Southeast Asian products, so it has received a lukewarm response from the region.²² Washington is going ahead with the ‘America first’ policy and the ASEAN countries have found that America is less attractive for the region’s economic prospects. On the other hand, China has become more attractive than the US in terms of market access for Southeast Asian products. For instance, a recent Asia Power Index survey by Australia’s Lowy

18. “ASEAN China’s Top Trade Partner, EU 2nd, US 3rd”, *Fibre2fashion*, May 13, 2022, <https://www.fibre2fashion.com/news/textile-news/asean-china-s-top-trade-partner-eu-2nd-us-3rd-280670-newsdetails.htm>. Accessed on April 14, 2023.

19. “China-ASEAN Two-Way Investment Exceeds \$340b by July Amid Active Cooperation”, *Global Times*, August 29, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202208/1274128.shtml>. Accessed on April 4, 2023.

20. “Statement on Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity”, The White House, May 23, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/23/statement-on-indo-pacific-economic-framework-for-prosperity/>. Accessed on June 13, 2022.

21. Robert Delaney, “Indo-Pacific is Focus of Washington’s Diplomatic Strategy, US Official says”, *South China Morning Post*, March 15, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3213532/indo-pacific-focus-washingtons-diplomatic-strategy-us-official-says>. Accessed on May 6.

22. Takatoshi Ito, “America’s Watery Indo-Pacific Alphabet Soup”, Project Syndicate, Jun 29, 2022, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/biden-indo-pacific-economic-framework-reaction-by-takatoshi-ito-2022-06>. Accessed on April 4, 2023.

Institute states that China tops the list for economic and diplomatic influence in Southeast Asia, even though the US tops six out of eight measures of the power index.²³

SOUTHEAST ASIA'S MILITARY RELIABILITY WITH THE US

Despite China's economic inroads into Southeast Asia and becoming Southeast Asia's largest economic partner, Beijing's stance on various territorial disputes brings the region closer to the US militarily. Countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Vietnam maintain close security cooperation with the US and believe that the US military presence is a "public good" for the region.²⁴ The regional countries believe that the US military preponderance is the only factor that can hold China back from military adventurism against the regional countries over the SCS dispute. They are worried about China's creeping assertiveness in the SCS, especially the 'grey-zone' tactics of Beijing. China uses the maritime militia, known as the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM), to harass the fishing trawlers of other countries, particularly those from Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia, and chases them down beyond the Chinese claimed "9 dash line".²⁵ The 'grey-zone' tactics could help Beijing gain control of the waterbody, which not only reduces the scope for a military clash between China and the other claimant states, but also prevents US intervention in support of the regional strategic partners. The US' external security umbrella has helped the region to sustain 'ASEAN centrality' in regional multilateral mechanisms that have been accepted across the spectrum. Summits like the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum take place in Southeast Asia only.

To withstand China's military action, the regional countries have been enhancing their defence capabilities in recent times with fighter aircraft and submarines sourced from foreign countries. Even though the

23. "Lowy Institute Asia Power Index 2013 Edition", Lowy Institute, <https://power.lowyinstitute.org/>. Accessed on April 28, 2023.

24. Dewey Sim, "As US Military 'Encircles' China, Does Asean 'Quietly Welcome' it?", *South China Morning Post*, February 11, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3209836/us-military-encircles-china-does-asean-quietly-welcome-it>. Accessed on April 6, 2023.

25. Derek Grossman and Logan Ma, "A Short History of China's Fishing Militia and What It May Tell Us", *RAND Commentary*, April 6, 2020, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/04/a-short-history-of-chinas-fishing-militia-and-what.html>. Accessed on June 26, 2023.

US is still the largest supplier of arms to the region, the Southeast Asian countries have widened their sources of arms to other countries, which include France, Russia, Israel, and South Korea²⁶ (Table 1). Singapore, in 2020, decided to purchase 12 Lockheed Martin F-35B Joint Strike Fighters (JSFs) to replace the older F-16CD fighter jets, and the F-35B delivery will start in 2030.²⁷ Recently, Manila and Washington agreed to allow the US military access to four new bases in the Philippines territory—three on the main island of Luzon, close to Taiwan, and one in Palawan province in the South China Sea (SCS)—as part of the 2014 Enhanced Defence Cooperation Arrangement (EDCA) between the two.²⁸

Table 1: Major Arms Importers from Southeast Asia and Their Main Suppliers, 2018-22

Rank (World)	Importer	Share of global arms imports (%)		Per cent change from 2013-17 to 2018-22 (a)	Main suppliers and their share of importer's total imports (%), 2018-22					
		2018-22	2013-17		1st		2nd		3 rd	
20	Singapore	1.3	1.4	-14	France	52	USA	26	UK	7.6
21	Thailand	1.0	0.7	-1.1	South Korea	33	China	14	USA	15
23	Philippines	0.9	0.5	64	South Korea	42	Israel	22	USA	15
24	Indonesia	0.9	2.7	-69	South Korea	32	USA	26	France	12
27	Vietnam	0.8	2.8	-72	Russia	55	Israel	16	Belarus	10
30	Myanmar	0.8	0.8	-3.0	Russia	42	China	29	India	14

*Figures show the change in the volume of the total arms imports per importer between the two periods.

Source: "SIPRI Fact Sheet: Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2022", March 2022, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/2303_at_fact_sheet_2022_v2.pdf. Accessed on June 30, 2023.

26. Pieter D. Wezeman, Justine Gadon and Siemon T. Wezeman, "SIPRI Fact Sheet: Trends In International Arms Transfers, 2022", SIPRI, March 2022, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/2303_at_fact_sheet_2022_v2.pdf Accessed on April 8, 2023.

27. Mike Yeo, "How the F-35 Could be a Game-Changer for Singapore," *Defence News*, February 10, 2020. <https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/singapore-airshow/2020/02/11/how-the-f-35-could-be-a-game-changer-for-singapore/>. Accessed on April 7, 2023.

28. "US Gets New Philippine Bases with South China Sea, Taiwan in Mind", *Al Jazeera*, March 22, 2023, [https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/22/us-gets-new-philippine-bases-with-south-china-sea-taiwan-in-mind#:~:text=The%20US%20has%20committed%20%2480,Lumbia%20Air%20Base%20in%20Mindanao](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/22/us-gets-new-philippine-bases-with-south-china-sea-taiwan-in-mind#:~:text=The%20US%20has%20committed%20%2480,Lumbia%20Air%20Base%20in%20Mindanao.). Accessed on April 8, 2023.

Besides, the US has committed US\$ 80 million in investments to improve infrastructure at the five current bases: Antonio Bautista Air Base in Palawan, Basa Air Base in Pampanga, Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, Benito Ebuena Air Base in Cebu, and Lumbia Air Base in Mindanao.²⁹ In response, China warned Manila against closer defence ties with the US and becoming a “chariot of geopolitical strife.”³⁰ However, the current Philippines President, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., has been attempting to lean towards the US to counter China’s maritime assertiveness in the SCS, a major shift from the policy of his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte, who wanted close ties with China.

INDIA’S DEFENCE PARTNERSHIP WITH SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Southeast Asian nations see India and Japan as other reliable strategic partners to balance China’s aggressiveness in the region and seek assistance to bolster their defence capabilities. The countries have been enhancing their aerial capabilities to withstand the Chinese military dominance in the region. Countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia have sought aerial systems and equipment from India, including training for their air force personnel. In December 2022, India and Vietnam started negotiations for the purchase of India’s BrahMos cruise missiles to counter the threat from China.³¹ Besides, India has agreed to set up capacity-building facilities at the Air Force Officers Training School in Vietnam for the Vietnamese armed forces. The Indian Air Force has also provided training for enhancing the air reconnaissance capacity of the personnel of the Malaysian Air Force using Russian-made SU-30 MKM aircraft. India’s defence aircraft maker, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Malaysia’s Ministry of Defence to set up an office in Kuala

29. Ibid

30. Shi Jiangtao, “China Slams Manila Again Over Closer US Military Ties, Warns Against ‘Drawing Wolves into the House’”, *South China Morning Post*, March 12, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3213270/china-slams-manila-again-over-closer-us-military-ties-warns-against-drawing-wolves-house>. Accessed on April 8, 2023.

31. Vu Anh, “BrahMos Aerospace Offers to Sell Supersonic Missile to Vietnam”, *VNExpress*, December 10, 2022, <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/brahmos-aerospace-offers-to-sell-supersonic-missile-to-vietnam-4546613.html>. Accessed on April 19, 2023.

Lumpur for upgrading SU-30 MKM and British Hawk aircraft.³² Last year, India and the Philippines inked a US\$ 375 million contract for the BrahMos shore-based anti-ship missile system to be used against the enemy's territorial aggression in the SCS.³³ Indonesia has evinced interest in establishing joint defence production facilities with Indian companies in the Indonesian territory to boost Jakarta's defence preparedness amid China's expansionism towards the Indonesian territorial waters in the SCS. In lieu of China's attempt to embrace the low-income Southeast Asian countries to prevent ASEAN's 'jointness' to withstand China on territorial disputes, India is enhancing its cooperation with Cambodia to avoid Phnom Penh's overdependence on China.³⁴ Even though the contest is in the maritime domain in Southeast Asia, deterrence is taking place in the aerial domain, and India's increased presence in Southeast Asia's defence market will help to thwart China's attempt for geopolitical dominance in Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSION

In the US-China rivalry for regional supremacy, Southeast Asia plays its cards carefully to maintain its importance in the geopolitical framework of the Indo-Pacific. It wants to maintain its centrality in the Indo-Pacific geopolitical framework by closely working not only with China and the US but also with other regional stakeholders such as India, Japan, Australia, and Russia. India, too, gives ASEAN centrality in its Indo-Pacific strategy, which was announced by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue in

32. "HAL to Open Office in Kuala Lumpur to Support Malaysian Defence Forces", *Business Standard*, August 18, 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/hal-to-open-office-in-kuala-lumpur-to-support-malaysian-defence-forces-122081800272_1.html. Accessed on April 12, 2023.

33. "India, Philippines Ink \$ 375 Million Deal for BrahMos Missiles", *The Economic Times*, January 29, 2022, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-philippines-ink-375-million-deal-for-brahmos-missiles/articleshow/89188501.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst. Accessed on May 1, 2023.

34. Bunty Tyagi, "Vice President Wraps up 'Successful and Productive' Visit to Cambodia", *The Telegraph*, November 13, 2022, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/world/vice-president-jagdeep-dhankhar-wraps-up-successful-and-productive-visit-to-cambodia/cid/1897874>. Accessed on May 2, 2023.

Singapore.³⁵ Southeast Asia's leaning towards either side will lead to a strategic loss for India.

In the Southeast Asian countries' efforts to enhance deterrence against China, India can be a major defence partner for countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, and Singapore. If India's 'Make in India' programme in the defence sector has to succeed, it has to find a market for India-made arms, and Southeast Asia can be a good market for the Indian defence industry. Besides, the regional countries can participate in the annual quadrilateral Malabar Naval Exercise: when it happens in the Indian Ocean, the littoral countries of Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia can be invited, while Vietnam and the Philippines can join its Pacific edition. Similarly, air force cooperation can also be strengthened; Singapore is the only one among the regional countries that India has conducted an air force exercise with them. Strong India-Southeast Asia defence cooperation will help to achieve the objectives of the region's balancing strategy in the US-China competition.

35. "Text of Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri-La Dialogue", Press Information Bureau, Prime Minister's Office, June 1, 2018, <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=179711>. Accessed on April 18, 2023.