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Networking hegemony: alliance dynamics in East Asia

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Networking hegemony: alliance dynamics in East Asia

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Abstract

This *Special Issue* aims to explain the transition from the Cold War US-led system of exclusive bilateral alliances in East Asia (or “hub-and-spokes” system) into a “networked security architecture”, i.e. a network of interwoven bilateral, minilateral and multilateral defence arrangements between the US and its regional allies and partners, and that also partly includes China. Drawing from the English School of International Relations, it challenges dominant Structural Realist explanations which interpret such development as a form of external balancing against a revisionist China. By contrast, this *Special Issue* submits that China’s selective contestation of the US-led hegemonic order in East Asia has sparked a renegotiation of such order among regional powers, which has resulted in the restructuring of the underlying alliances and defence partnerships into a networked security architecture. Specifically, regional powers have sought to broaden the composition of the US-led hegemonic order in East Asia—by diversifying the range of defence ties between US allies and partners, but also by seeking to include the PRC in it. Thereby, rather than merely balancing the People’s Republic of China, they have sought to channel the trajectory of China’s rise within this hegemonic order through a mixture of resistance and

accommodation. This introductory paper develops the theoretical framework and central argument of the *Special Issue*.

Introduction.

In the aftermath of World War II, the US put in place a hegemonic, rules-based order in East Asia that was underpinned by the so-called hub-and-spokes alliance system, composed of exclusive bilateral alliances (Cha 2014, 2016). It comprised five bilateral treaty alliances (with Australia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines) whereby the different allies (or “spokes”) were connected to the US “hub” but displayed almost no interaction among themselves.¹ Since the end of the Cold War, however, the hub-and-spokes system has been substantially revisited. It has been supplemented through a broadening range of defence partnerships with non-allied partners, new forms of minilateral cooperation, a new emphasis on multilateral security institutions as well as through the development of variable geometries of cooperation with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (Cha 2011; Fontaine et al. 2017; Pempel and Lee 2012; Tan 2015; Tow and Taylor 2010). What has emerged gradually and cumulatively since the mid-1990s is what we label a “networked security architecture”, namely a network of interwoven bilateral, minilateral and multilateral defence

¹ Two exceptions to the bilateral structure of the “hub-and-spokes” alliance system were the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS). However, not only was SEATO largely ineffective, but it was dissolved in 1977. New Zealand was suspended from ANZUS in 1986. See Cha (2016).

arrangements between the US and its regional allies and partners, and that also partly includes China.²

Drawing from the English School of International Relations, this *Special Issue* aims to explain the reconfiguration of the US-led hegemonic order in East Asia through the transition from the Cold War hub-and-spokes alliance system into a networked security architecture—and China’s role as a driver of change. To do so, we combine country-based and thematic analyses by established and emerging scholars in the field of security studies and East Asian regional dynamics. The country-based contributions first investigate the perspectives of the US, of each of its five treaty allies in East Asia (Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand), and of the main nonallied US partners in the region (Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam) on the development of such networked security architecture, as well as China’s role and interactions with and within it. The subsequent thematic contribution then zooms out on the crossregional patterns in the emergence of minilateralism and multilateralism—and their relationship with the underlying bilaterally focused alliance system—as interwoven forms of defence cooperation in the East Asian network security architecture.

This *Special Issues* challenges dominant Structural Realist explanations which interpret the reordering of the US-led system of alliances and defence

² The concept of “networked security architecture” introduced in this *Special Issue* partly draws on Victor Cha’s work on the East Asian “complex patchwork” (Cha 2011, 2014). Cha’s (loosely defined) concept referred to an incoherent assemblage of “bilateral, trilateral and other plurilateral configurations” (Cha 2011, 28). A networked security architecture specifically entails the purposeful intent—on the part of regional powers—of participating in, and fostering growing connectivity through, a network of overlapping bilateral, minilateral and multilateral arrangements. Partly building upon Tow and Taylor (2010, 96), we define a security architecture as an overarching security structure for a geographically defined area which facilitates the resolution of that region’s policy concerns. Unlike that of Tow and Taylor, however, this definition does not assume *ex ante* the overarching coherence of this structure. This is because a variety of often competing priorities and interests (i.e. multiple agencies) shape and mould the organizational make-up of a security architecture.

arrangements in East Asia as a form of external balancing against a revisionist China. We argue that China's selective contestation of the material and normative pillars (i.e. the "primary institutions") of the rules-based order in East Asia has sparked a process of renegotiation of that order among regional powers.³ Specifically, they have sought to broaden the composition of this regional hegemonic order in two different ways: on the one hand, a larger range of US allies and partners has been included in such order with the aim of strengthening the collective capacity to resist the potentially disruptive impact of China's rise. On the other hand, the PRC has been partly integrated within the order itself as a way to encourage Beijing to develop a vested interest in its stability and durability. This, in turn, has translated into a reconfiguration of the alliances and defence arrangements (i.e. the secondary institutions) underpinning such order into a networked security architecture. Thereby, rather than engaging in external balancing against a revisionist China, regional powers have sought to channel and shape the trajectory of China's rise within the rules-based order through a mixture of resistance and accommodation so as to preserve the US-led hegemonic order in East Asia. In order to substantiate this argument and to present the empirical and theoretical contribution of the *Special Issue*, this introductory paper proceeds as follows. First, it outlines the key constitutive (bilateral, minilateral and multilateral) components of the networked security architecture and then shows, through a critical review of the existing literature, that it remains a crucial yet under-explored facet of East Asian security dynamics. Second, it evaluates the dominant competing hypothesis stressing how Structural Realist analyses fail to make sense of the rise of this networked security architecture.

³ The normative pillars of the US-led hegemonic order in East Asia are the recognition of great power status, respect of sovereignty, free trade, deterrence and international law (Buzan and Zhang 2014b)— and specifically freedom of navigation and overflight and the multilateral, rules-based system of dispute resolution. A definition of primary and secondary institutions is provided below.

Third, drawing from the English School of International Relations, it proposes an original theoretical framework that sheds light on how the processes of negotiation and contestation between rising and established powers over the normative and material pillars of hegemonic orders influence the alliance dynamics that underpin such orders, and thereby explains the emergence of the East Asian networked security architecture.⁴

The networked security architecture in East Asia

Despite its substantial academic and policy relevance, the development of an increasingly dense and diversified network of interwoven bilateral, minilateral and multilateral defence arrangements, and the role of China therein, remains—as detailed below—strikingly under-explored. This *Special Issue* aims to fill this gap.

Since the early 1990s, the US-led system of bilateral alliances in East Asia (or hub-and-spokes system) has been complemented and revisited in four ways. Firstly, new forms of defence cooperation have been established, not only between the US and its allies, but also, importantly, among US allies. In fact, not only have the US and its five treaty allies in the region strengthened their bilateral alliances, but there has been a trend towards greater defence cooperation between the different “spokes” of the alliance system, bilaterally and/or “minilaterally” (e.g. US/Japan/South Korea, US/Japan/Australia or Japan/Philippines). Second, the network of defence arrangements has expanded to include cooperation with, and among, a variety of non-allied US partners, such as Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam, again both bilaterally and minilaterally. These multifaceted defence arrangements have taken different forms, including capacity building, logistical support, joint patrols, military exercises or intelligence sharing agreements. Third, greater emphasis

⁴ In this *Special Issue*, “alliance dynamics” refers to the reordering of alliances and defence partnerships among states in a given region. This can entail the development of bilateral, minilateral and/or multilateral forms of defence cooperation. The “networked security architecture” that has emerged in East Asia is one possible configuration of alliance dynamics.

has been placed on the role of multilateral security institutions in the region, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)'s Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS) and, in particular, the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+). Finally, the US and its allies and partners have broadened the range of cooperative pathways with China through the development of bilateral partnerships, minilateral arrangements (e.g. China/Japan/South Korea) and multilateral venues, such as the ADMM+ or multinational regional military exercises, e.g. the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) or Cobra Gold.⁵ As a consequence, the East Asian regional order is moving towards a much denser network of cooperation pathways (bilateral, minilateral and multilateral) between the US and a broader range of allies and partners as well as with the PRC. The confluence of these four dynamics has resulted in the transition from the hub-and-spokes system into the East Asian networked security architecture.

In the burgeoning scholarly literature on East Asian security, a rich body of works has investigated US bilateral alliances in East Asia (Blackwill and Dibb 2000; Cha 2016; Tow 2016) and, in particular, the evolution of US defence ties with Japan, South Korea and Australia (Bisley 2013; Calder 2009; Dian 2014; Shin 2010; Schoff 2017; Tow 2014). Similarly, the evolving US grand strategy in the region (Friedberg 2011; Green 2017; Meijer 2015), the cooperative/competitive dynamics at play in US–China relations (Manicom 2014; Shambaugh 2013), the regional ramifications of China's rise (Ikenberry and Liff 2014; Lee 2017) or the evolving East Asian multilateral security institutions (Tan 2015; Tow and Taylor 2013) have been extensively explored. An expanding body of the literature has also focused

⁵ China is thus included in some of the initiatives constituting the networked security architecture (e.g. bilateral partnerships with individual regional powers, minilateral arrangements and multilateral fora), but not in others, i.e. the system of five US bilateral mutual defence treaties.

specifically on minilateralism (i.e. tri-/quadrilateralism) as a new form of defence cooperation in the region (Green 2014; Nilsson-Wright 2017; Wuthnow 2019). However, only very few academic studies have examined the broader trend of interweaving formal alliances, bilateral partnerships, minilateral groupings and multilateral security arrangements in East Asia (Cha 2011; Cronin et al. 2013; Fontaine et al. 2017; Green et al. 2014; Simón et al. 2019) and, when doing so, they have tended to focus exclusively on the US perspective (Silove 2016) while neglecting the role and agency of the other regional powers in East Asia. This *Special Issue* therefore provides the first geographically and thematically comprehensive analysis of the cross-regional drivers and patterns in the emergence of the US-led networked security architecture in East Asia.

Making sense of it: IR theory and the networked security architecture

What accounts for this major reconfiguration of the US-led system of alliances and defence arrangements in East Asia? This *Special Issue* contends that an English School perspective has greater analytical value than dominant Structural Realist approaches in elucidating the advent of the East Asian networked security architecture.

Most existing studies of defence policies and of alliance relations in East Asia tend to be based on Structural Realist assumptions, focusing on material factors such as military capabilities and relative power considerations. To be sure, scholars from different strands of Structural Realism—e.g. Defensive, Offensive and Power Transition Realists—differ in their assessment of China's intentions, namely on whether the PRC seeks to maximize power or security, and on whether Beijing aims for territorial expansion or not.⁶ Nonetheless, they concur on two central propositions. First, China is seen as

⁶ On Defensive Realism and the rise of China, see, for instance, Beckley (2017), Friedberg (1993, 2011), Fravel (2010), Glaser (2015) and Liff (2016). For an Offensive Realist perspective, see Mearsheimer (2001, 2006, 2010). On Power Transition Theory as applied to the rise of China, see Allison (2017), Lemke and Tammen (2003) and Tammen and Kugler (2006).

a revisionist power that seeks a regional hegemonic position and whose rise is bound to alter the regional balance of power in East Asia. Second, they agree on the fact that the US-led system of alliances and defence arrangements in East Asia is being leveraged by Washington and by its allies and partners to externally balance China's growing might. Ultimately, from a Structural Realist perspective, the development of a networked security architecture—through the consolidation of existing bilateral alliances and the diversification of bilateral, minilateral and multilateral defence ties in East Asia—would be interpreted as a form of external balancing against a revisionist China.⁷

This argument is misleading for three main reasons: it overstates the magnitude of the PRC's contestation of the existing East Asian order; it mischaracterizes the reaction by regional powers to such challenge; and it cannot make sense of China's inclusion in the networked security architecture. First, Structural Realists accounts assume that the PRC is, for structural reasons, a revisionist power. However, as shown below, the empirical record demonstrates that across different issue areas (trade, finance, environment, defence, etc.), China has combined the acceptance of certain

⁷ Other variants of Realism put forward partly different perspectives. Neo-Classical Realists introduce domestic intervening variables, such as nationalism, domestic mobilization or leaders' perceptions of threats and interests that can impact the degree of China's revisionism and the counter-balancing strategies of regional powers (Christensen 1996; Schweller 2018; Sørensen 2013). For their part, Classical Realists focus on a larger range of state goals than mere survival (e.g. fear, honour, prestige), on the role of both domestic and international politics in shaping state behaviour as well as on the importance of contingency (Kirshner 2010, 2018). On these grounds, they dispute the fact that China is a revisionist power that will inevitably bid for regional hegemony and that it should therefore be counterbalanced. On the contrary, they argue that the US can and should avoid conflict by accommodating China's rise. For an overview of the key propositions of Realists on the consequences of China's rise and the response by regional powers, see also Mastanduno (2014).

elements of the existing order with the contestation of others (Foot in this *Special Issue*; Foot and Walter 2013; Goh 2019, 2; Mazarr et al. 2018). Rather than being a revisionist power, Beijing has engaged in a “selective contestation” of the existing regional order. Understanding the extent to which China is contesting the US-led rules-based order, and the regional reactions to such challenge, requires moving beyond materialist explanations and uncovering the degree of acceptance or contestation by China of the normative content of such order. Second, the literature on alignments in East Asia has shown that, with the notable exception of Japan, most regional states are not displaying balancing behaviour against China but rather some variation of hedging, i.e. a strategy aimed at preserving some form of equidistance between Beijing and Washington (Chen and Yang 2013; Ciorciari 2010; Chung 2004; Goh 2007; Jackson 2016; Shambaugh 2018).⁸ Given that most regional powers engage in hedging (rather than balancing) strategies, the networked security architecture can hardly be seen as a result of a region-wide, anti-China balancing coalition. Third, given that they consider the reordering of alliances and defence partnerships in East Asia as a result of a collective balancing effort against the PRC, Structural Realist analyses cannot explain the inclusion of China in the networked security architecture through a variety of channels of bilateral, minilateral and multilateral cooperation (detailed below). Given these three misconceptions, conceiving the networked security architecture as a form of external balancing by regional states against a revisionist China is therefore, at best, unconvincing.

Selective contestation, hegemonic order and alliances: an English School perspective

In the light of the limitations of the above-mentioned Structural Realist accounts, this *Special Issue* proposes an alternative explanation that draws

⁸ Lim and Cooper (2015) argue that the range of hedging states in East Asia is smaller than usually assumed in the literature.

from the English School of International Relations. We contend that, rather than collectively balancing against a revisionist China, regional powers have sought to broaden the composition of the US-led hegemonic order by widening and diversifying the range of defence ties between and amongst US allies and partners, but also by seeking to integrate the PRC in such order through variable geometries of cooperation. Through the development of this networked security architecture they have sought to preserve and uphold the US-led hegemonic order in East Asia through a mixture of resistance and accommodation vis-à-vis China.⁹

What follows (this section) elucidates the building blocks of this *Special Issue*'s theoretical framework and central argument. First, it defines the key concepts of an English School approach to alliance dynamics, namely hegemonic order as well as the primary and secondary institutions of international society. Second, it introduces the concept of “selective contestation” of a regional order which helps theorizing—beyond the rigid revisionist/status quo dichotomy that is currently entrenched in the IR

⁹ This argument differs substantially from the debate over whether the US should engage or contain the PRC (or a combination thereof) (e.g. Friedberg 2011, ch. 4; Khalilzad 1999; Shambaugh 1996; Tellis 2013). First, as Silove (2016) stresses, these two components (engagement and containment) are possible means, rather than the primary goal, of US policy—that she identifies as the enhancement of its overall power in the region. Secondly, previous analyses neglected to link these various components of Washington's policy to the overarching goal of upholding the US-led hegemonic rules-based order in East Asia. We contend that the US does not merely seek to contain the PRC or to expand its power position in East Asia. Rather, together with its allies and partners, Washington aims to shape the trajectory of China's rise within such order—from a position of pre-eminence—through a combination of positive and negative incentives (i.e. accommodation and resistance), with the ultimate goal of upholding the existing regional rules-based hegemonic order (see Meijer in this *Special Issue*). Third, whereas the engagement/containment debate has largely revolved around the US–China bilateral relationship, this *Special Issue* takes into account the role and agency of all regional powers in developing the policy response to China's rise.

literature—the modalities of Chinese contestation of the existing hegemonic order in East Asia. China’s selective contestation of the regional order has determined the specific way in which the US regional alliances and defence partnerships in East Asia have been reordered, i.e. the development of a networked security architecture. Finally, we present a theoretical framework that, by bringing together these different concepts, shows how the processes of negotiation and contestation among great powers over the normative and material pillars of hegemonic orders shape the underlying alliance dynamics, and thereby explains the emergence of the East Asian networked security architecture.

An English School approach to hegemonic orders and alliance dynamics: key concepts

The English School has traditionally focused on the historical evolution of international orders (Bull 2002; Buzan and Little 2000; Watson 2000), on the protection of human rights (Dunne and Wheeler 2000; Vincent 1986) as well as, more recently, on issues like global governance and globalization (Little and Williams 2006; Dunne 2006) or the management of “non-traditional” security challenges such as, for instance, environmental change (Bellamy and MacDonald 2004; Palmujoki 2013). While some of the classic studies focused on collective security and arms control (Bull 1961, 1966, 1980; Butterfield 1966; Hudson 1966), the contemporary English School scholarship has largely neglected the core of Strategic Studies and, in particular, defence policies and alliance dynamics (Buzan 2015).¹⁰ This *Special Issue* aims to contribute to redressing this imbalance.

¹⁰ Only very few authors have analysed East Asian security dynamics through the lenses of the English School (e.g. Buzan and Zhang 2014b; Goh 2013). These works, however, do not examine the relations between the contestation of regional order by rising powers and the shifting regional alliance dynamics.¹¹ Given that this *Special Issue* seeks to explain the changing alliance dynamics in East Asia since the end of the Cold War, we focus specifically on regional (rather than international) order. On the conjunctions of the regional and global levels of analysis, see Foot and Goh (2019).

In particular, the English School provides a rich conceptual toolkit for understanding how the contestation by rising powers of the normative and material pillars of the international order drives the process of adaptation of the underlying alliances and defence arrangements. A core assumption of the English School is that the domain of international politics is an *anarchical society* characterized by a dialectic between the fragmenting logic of anarchy and the integrating logic of international society (Bull 1966, 2002). Because of its anarchic character, the anarchical society is a “necessarily thin and fragile society” (Hurrell 2007, 3).

In such a thin anarchical society, “international order” can be conceived as rulegoverned interactions among states in which “shared norms, rules, and expectations constitute, regulate, and make predictable international life” (Goh 2013, 7). *Order* refers to “the norms, practices, and processes that ensure the satisfaction of the basic needs of [a] social group” (Hoffmann 1987, 85). *International order* is defined by Bull as a pattern of activity between and among states that sustain the basic goals of the international society, which are the preservation of the society of states itself, the maintenance of the independence of individual states, and the regulation—but not elimination—of war and violence among states and societies (Bull 2002, 8; Hurrell 2007, 3). Regional orders are constitutive elements of the international order which, at the sub-global level, encompass distinctive primary institutions (as defined below) (Buzan 2018, 6; Buzan and Schouenborg 2018, 96–120; Buzan and Zhang 2014a, 3).¹¹

International (and regional) orders comprise several “primary institutions” (or deep rules)—namely “durable and recognized patterns of shared practices” that are “constitutive of actors and their patterns of legitimate activity in relation to each other”—such as diplomacy, great power management, war and trade (Buzan 2004, 164–181). Primary institutions are enduring yet

evolving norms that shape and regulate interstate relations. The primary institutions of the US-led rules-based order in East Asia include the recognition of great power status, respect of sovereignty, free trade, deterrence and international law (Buzan and Zhang 2014a; Khong 2014)—and, specifically, freedom of navigation and overflight and the multilateral, rulesbased system of dispute resolution. “Secondary institutions” refer to the organizational manifestation of such deep rules (Buzan 2014, 17; Spandler 2015). They include, among others, alliance treaties, defence arrangements (e.g. strategic partnerships) and multilateral regional security institutions—such as, in East Asia, the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus.

A *hegemonic order* is a distinct type of order which can be classified on a spectrum ranging from collective to singular hegemony (Clark 2011). From this perspective, hegemonic orders can be more (or less) inclusive depending on their composition. The composition (or membership) of a hegemonic order refers to the small club of powers that contribute to shaping its primary institutions. Accordingly, the English School’s approach to hegemony substantively differs both from Realist analyses of hegemony, such as hegemonic stability theory (Gilpin 1981; Kindleberger 1973), and from neo-Gramscian conceptualizations of hegemony (Cox 1983; Hopf 2013). While Realist approaches largely equate hegemony to primacy (i.e. preponderant material capabilities),¹¹ neo-Gramscian perspectives consider primarily the ideological dimension of hegemony, regarding it as a form of power deployed by ruling elites to present their interests as universal (Cox 1983; Hopf 2013). In contrast, the English School conceives hegemonic order as both material preponderance and the capacity to shape the normative underpinning of regional (or international) order. A hegemonic order is a hierarchical social arrangement—characterized by a set of primary institutions (or deep rules)—

¹¹ Realists such as Gilpin (1981) do consider the role of norms and institutions, but they conceive them as a mere superstructure of the existing distribution of material capabilities (see Ikenberry 2014, 6–7; Kupchan 2014, 52).

whose content and legitimacy are defined through processes of negotiation, contestation and resistance (Goh 2013, 12). Specifically, a hegemonic order is defined from an English School perspective as “an institutionalized practice of special rights and responsibilities, conferred by international society or a constituency within it, on a state (or states) with the resources to lead” (Clark 2011, 4); it therefore “refers not just to a set of material conditions in which one state is predominant, it is not, in other words, primacy alone. Rather than something unilaterally possessed by the hegemon, it is a status bestowed by others, and rests on recognition by them. This is in return for the bearing of special responsibilities in the management of international order” (ibid, 35). Partly building on Goh’s taxonomy (2013, 202–226), we posit that the East Asian hegemonic order is organized hierarchically with the US at the top. China and Japan are the great powers, while Australia and South Korea are medium powers. The lesser powers include US allies and partners in Southeast Asia.

Building upon these concepts, this *Special Issue* argues that China’s selective contestation of the primary institutions of the US-led hegemonic order in East Asia—and the ensuing renegotiation of such order among regional powers—has sparked the reconfiguration of the underlying secondary institutions (i.e. the regional alliances and defence arrangements) into a networked security architecture. Through an English School perspective, it aims to contribute to the third wave of hegemonic scholarship which, as G. John Ikenberry and Daniel Nexon put it, focuses on the “politics of hegemonic orders”; in particular, we examine how “the bargaining, contestation, and cooperation that operate within hegemonic [orders]” (Ikenberry and Nexon 2019, 398) influence the alliance dynamics that underpin and sustain such orders.

Table 1 China's selective contestation of the rules-based, hegemonic order in East Asia

Contestation		Acceptance
Primary institutions	Secondary institutions	
Diplomacy	<p><i>Multilateral system for peace/full resolution of disputes</i></p> <p>Rejection of the 2016 ruling of the Permanent Tribunal for Arbitration "Republic of the Philippines vs People's Republic of China" The South China Sea Arbitration</p>	<p>Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea Participation in East Asia summit, ASEAN regional forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus</p>
Sovereignty	<p><i>Respect of sovereignty</i></p> <p>Violation of sovereignty of neighbouring states (e.g. land reclamation) Oil rig dispute with Vietnam (2014)</p>	<p>Adherence to the principle of non-interference Scepticism toward humanitarian interventions</p>
(International law	<p><i>Freedom of navigation and overflight multilateral system for peace/full resolution of dispute</i></p> <p>Air defence identification zone Land reclamation Rejection of 2016 ruling by Arbitral Tribunal on the South China Sea</p>	<p>Signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Parties in the South China Sea</p>
Great power management	<p><i>Recognition of status (among great powers) and conflict limitation mechanisms</i></p> <p>Driving a wedge in the US alliances "New Type of Great Power Relations"</p>	<p>Six-party talks (before 2009) US-China strategic and economic dialogue/comprehensive dialogue</p>
War (limitation of conflict, escalation prevention)	<p><i>Extended deterrence</i></p> <p>Island building and land/seas reclamation Hybrid warfare</p>	<p>Confidence building mechanisms Hotlines and mil-to-mil contacts</p>

China's selective contestation of regional order

We contend that China is neither a revisionist nor a status quo power; rather Beijing has engaged in a *selective contestation* of the primary institutions of the US-led rules-based order in East Asia (Table 1). Selective contestation refers to the process whereby a state displays a combination of acceptance and contestation of the different primary institutions of regional (or international) order and of their derivative secondary institutions. In East Asia, China has neither fully rejected nor flatly embraced the primary institutions (or deep rules) of the regional rules-based order. For each of these primary institutions (e.g. diplomacy, trade, sovereignty, law and war), the PRC has displayed a mixture of acceptance and contestation of their related secondary institutions (see also Foot in this *Special Issue*; Foot and Walter 2013; Goh 2019, 2; Mazarr et al. 2018).

On the one hand, Beijing has adhered to or even helped consolidating some of the primary institutions (and of their related secondary institutions) of the existing rules-based order, across a variety of issue areas. Examples abound. For instance, China has expanded its participation in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Paris Climate Change Agreement, as well as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (Kennedy 2017; Zeng and Liang 2013). Similarly, Beijing has participated in East Asian multilateral security regimes such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit and other “ASEAN-led” fora such as ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM+) (Foot in this *Special Issue*; Tan 2015). In other instances, the PRC has resisted certain developments towards a normative evolution of the international order, thereby demonstrating a conservative bias vis-à-vis the existing order (Foot and Walter 2010, 278–279). Such instances include Beijing’s scepticism towards humanitarian interventions, the violations of the principle of non-interference in favour of protection of human rights, and the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (Foot and Walter 2013; Zheng 2016).

On the other hand, the PRC has contested elements of other primary institutions of the East Asian order—and of associated secondary institutions. For example, Beijing has contested sovereignty claims in the South China Sea through large-scale land reclamation or by moving an oil rig to waters near islands disputed with Vietnam in violation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Dolven et al. 2015; Stubbs and Stephens 2017). Beijing has also contested, for instance, international law (and specifically, freedom of navigation and overflight) as well as the multilateral system for dispute resolution by establishing an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) and by rejecting the 2016 ruling by the Arbitral Tribunal on the South China Sea (Rinehart and Elias 2015; Mazarr et al. 2018, 39–48; Zhao 2018).

The concept of selective contestation helps to refine our understanding of both the modalities of China’s contestation of the US-led regional order as well as the reaction by regional powers to such contestation through the reordering of their defence ties. First, it helps to avoid the rigid dichotomy “revisionist vs status quo” powers that remains deep-seated in the existing literature and that prevents the comprehension of those cases in which a rising power is neither fully revisionist nor privileges the status quo.¹² “Selective contestation” captures the ways in which a state can display a combination of acceptance and contestation of the various primary institutions of a regional (or international) order and of their related secondary institutions. Furthermore, and relatedly, China’s *selective* contestation of the existing order helps to explain, as detailed below, the specific reconfiguration of alliance dynamics in East Asia, i.e. the emergence of a networked security architecture.

Renegotiating regional order and the evolution of secondary institutions

¹² For early attempts at moving beyond this dichotomy, see Johnston (2003) and Schweller (1994, 1999). On the revisionist/status quo dichotomy, see also Chan et al. (2018).

We argue that it is China’s selective contestation of the primary institutions of the rules-based order in East Asia that, by sparking a process of renegotiation of such order among regional powers, has resulted in the restructuring of the underlying secondary institutions into a networked security architecture. Specifically, what emerges from the contributions to this *Special Issue* is that regional powers have sought to broaden the composition of the US-led hegemonic order in East Asia— by diversifying the range of defence ties between US allies and partners, but also by seeking to include the PRC in it—as a way to preserve and uphold such order through a mixture of resistance and accommodation vis-à-vis China.

On the one hand, compared to the Cold War era, a broader range of US allies and partners have coalesced to protect the US-led hegemonic order from China’s selective contestation of its material and normative pillars. In the Cold War hub-and-spokes system of bilateral alliances, US allies (the spokes) had very little defence ties between one another. By contrast, since the mid-1990s and up to the Trump administration, several changes occurred. First, as the incumbent hegemon, the US has promoted and enabled a greater role for its regional allies and partners in upholding the regional order by fostering the development of greater defence ties amongst them (see Meijer in this *Special Issue*).¹³ Second, for their part, several US treaty allies have actively

¹³ As shown by Meijer in this *Special Issue*, the Trump administration has displayed contradictory impulses vis-à-vis China and in managing its alliances in East Asia. On the one hand, in contrast to all its post-Cold War predecessors, it has labelled China as a “revisionist” power and displays greater scepticism on the prospects of integrating the PRC in the US-led rules-based order. On the other hand, the Trump administration’s defence policy in the region—and its approach to alliance dynamics—has displayed very substantial continuity. Under the rubric of the so-called Indo-Pacific Strategy, it continues to foster what itself has begun to refer to as a “networked security architecture” (U.S. DoD 2019, 9, 44–45). In short, compared to previous post-Cold War administrations, the Trump administration has displayed patterns of both continuity and discontinuity in its approach to alliance dynamics in East Asia. Furthermore, as detailed in the various contributions to this

sought a more active role in upholding the deep rules of that order by creating new bilateral, minilateral and multilateral channels of security cooperation. Japan and Australia have been the most active allies. Among other things, they have established a bilateral strategic partnership among themselves, promoted minilaterals such as the so-called Quad (with the US and India), bolstered defence ties and capacity building efforts in Southeast Asia and invested in multilateral fora such as the EAS, ARF and ADMM+ (see Dian and Bisley in this *Special Issue*). South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines have also played a significant, albeit more limited, role in the development of networked security architecture. In addition to bolstering their bilateral defence cooperation with the US, they have invested in new bilateral, minilateral and multilateral initiatives. Thailand and the Philippines, for instance, developed defence ties with regional powers (including with Japan and Australia), joined multilateral initiatives in the realm of maritime security, such as Japan's "Vientiane Vision", and participated in multinational exercises (e.g. RIMPAC and Cobra Gold) as well as in regional security regimes such as ADMM+ (Quayle in this *Special Issue*). South Korea developed, among other initiatives, bilateral channels of defence and/or intelligence cooperation with Australia, India, Indonesia and Singapore and promoted multilateral regional security fora such as the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative, NAPCI or the ADMM+ (Dian in this *Special Issue*). Third, regional powers in Southeast Asia that are not US treaty allies, such as Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore, have also increasingly participated in the development of the networked security architecture as a means to preserve the normative and material pillars of this rules-based regional order. Although to different degrees, the three countries have fostered closer defence ties both with the US as well as with other regional

Special Issue, the vast majority of US allies and partners in the region have not substantially revised neither their perceptions of the modalities of China's contestation of regional order nor their role in the development of the regional networked security architecture.

powers (e.g. Japan, Australia or India) through new bilateral, minilateral and multilateral arrangements (Capie in this *Special Issue*). In essence, by consolidating existing alliances and by diversifying the range of (bilateral, minilateral and multilateral) defence arrangements among regional powers, the networked security architecture interlaces US allies and partners in a web of political-military that strengthens their capacity to resist China's selective contestation of the regional order.

On the other hand, because the PRC has not been perceived as a full-blown revisionist power in East Asia—but rather as engaging in selective contestation—, the US and its regional allies and partners have sought to accommodate the rise of China within the regional rules-based order.¹⁴ Specifically, they have aimed to entice China to develop a vested interest in the stability of the existing order and to adhere to its normative underpinnings. They have done so by including the PRC in this architecture through a variety of bilateral, minilateral and multilateral cooperation channels. During the Cold War, China was largely isolated from the (secondary) institutions underpinning the regional order (Chan et al. 2018; Buzan and Zhang 2014a). By contrast, since the end of the Cold War, China has increasingly become part of a vast array of bilateral, minilateral and multilateral cooperative pathways within the networked security architecture. Beijing has developed extensive bilateral ties (including strategic partnerships) with a variety of regional powers. It has also taken part in minilateral groupings, such as the China/South Korea/Japan trilateral, and its permanent Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat. Finally, the PRC has participated in several multilateral regional security institutions such as the EAS, the ARF and the ADMM+, as well as multinational military exercises (such as RIMPAC) (Meijer and Ba in this *Special Issue*). The US and its allies and partners have thereby aimed to

¹⁴ On the continuities/discontinuities in the policies of the Trump administration and of those of its allies and partners in the region, see the previous footnote.

accommodate, to the extent possible, the rise of the PRC within the East Asian rules-based order. For its part, through its participation in, and engagement with, the networked security architecture, Beijing has sought to send “signals of reassurance and a commitment to regional norms of cooperative security” (see Foot in this *Special Issue*).

To sum up, the contributions to this *Special Issue* shed light on the role and agency of each regional power in the changing composition of the hegemonic order in East Asia and in the shifting alliance dynamics that underpin such order. The widening composition of the regional order does not entail a transition to a concert of equal powers since the US remains firmly at the top of the regional power structure. Yet, compared to the Cold War period, the hegemonic order in East Asia has become characterized by greater inclusiveness. Regional powers, also at the encouragement of Washington, have taken on more responsibilities and expanded their security roles in the region. At the same time, they have aimed to integrate China in the regional rules-based order through different cooperative channels. This renegotiation of the regional order has translated into a reordering of the underlying secondary institutions, i.e. the regional alliances and defence partnerships. What has emerged is a network of overlapping bilateral, minilateral and multilateral defence arrangements between and amongst the United States and a broadening range of regional allies and partners and that also partly includes the PRC.

Conclusion

Through an English School perspective, this *Special Issue* aims to show that the shifting alliance dynamics in East Asia are not merely the result of external balancing strategies by the US and its allies and partners in response to a revisionist China—as mainstream Structural Realist analyses contend. Through the development of a networked security architecture, the US and its regional allies and partners have sought to broaden the composition of the regional hegemonic order so as to channel the trajectory of China’s rise within that order through a combination of resistance and accommodation with the

ultimate goal of preserving the US-led hegemonic order in East Asia. We thereby contend that the English School has greater analytical value than mainstream Structural Realist accounts in explaining the shifting alliance dynamics in East Asia as it allows overcoming their three main, and interrelated, misconceptions (outlined above).

First, by unpacking the normative and material pillars of international order, this *Special Issue* shows that China is not a revisionist power that seeks to overthrow and replace the existing regional order. Instead, Beijing has engaged in a selective contestation of the primary institutions of the rules-based order, and of the related secondary institutions. To varying degrees, all regional players have perceived China as a rising power that displays a mixture of acceptance and contestation of the primary institutions of regional order, and of their associated secondary institutions.

Second, and relatedly, the reordering of alliances and defence arrangements in the region is not the result of a region-wide anti-China balancing coalition, as Structural Realists contend. In the light of their assessment that China is engaged in a selective contestation—rather than full-blown revisionism—of the rules-based order, regional powers in East Asia have fostered the development of a networked security architecture with the purpose of shaping the trajectory of China's rise within this US-led regional hegemonic order through a combination of resistance and accommodation.

Finally, whereas mainstream Structural Realist explanations cannot make sense of the inclusion of China in the networked security architecture (given their exclusive focus on balancing strategies), this *Special Issue* demonstrates that it is precisely this mixture of resistance and accommodation that explains the variety of bilateral, minilateral and multilateral cooperation channels that bolster defence ties among US allies and partners, on the one hand, and that interweave the PRC in the networked security architecture, on the other.

This *Special Issue* therefore hopes to shed new light on the changing alliance dynamics in East Asia since the end of the Cold War and on why the rise of China did not spark a region-wide counter-balancing coalition, but rather the advent of a networked security architecture. Networking hegemony is how regional powers have responded to the rise of China.

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