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Institutional Platforms and Resources: ASEAN and Asia's Large Power Mix

Discussion Paper Draft

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Introduction

With the intensification of what is shaping up to be a comprehensive strategic rivalry between the United States and China, especially in Asia, small and middle powers can be easily overlooked or dismissed as peripheral players. On the particular question of Southeast Asia, these states – which count among the smallest powers in Asia – the additional challenges posed by their relative need for developmental investment, a greater sense of political and domestic insecurity, and higher vulnerability to strategic pressure or imposition can also suggest starker choices (e.g., between “balancing” and “bandwagoning”) especially at times of heightened great power competition. Yet, investigations into different Southeast Asian cases also highlight more complicated realities, involving a mix of simultaneous state engagements that neither fully embrace nor fully deny both status quo and rising powers. Studies on individual Southeast Asian states highlight, for example, how strategies typically involve a mix of approaches aimed at more than one effect and at the same time. Such desired effects include “constrainment”, “enmeshment”, the provision of public goods, reassurance, and even more transformative changes in the social structure of both bilateral and regional relations.¹

In fact, an expanding literature on small and middle powers has been theorizing the different ways that such states might influence specific bilateral relations with larger states, redirect strategic trend lines, and reframe bilateral, regional and global challenges.² While these powers' structural condition undoubtedly means they have more limited access to

¹ See, Evelyn Goh, (2007) “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order. *International Security* 32(3): 113–157; Cheng-Chwee Kuik (2016), “How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States' Alignment Behavior Towards China. *Journal of Contemporary China* 25(100): 500–514; Alice D. Ba (2018) “Beyond Dichotomous Choices: Responses to Chinese Initiative in Southeast Asia,” in *Regional Powers and Contested Leadership*, eds., Hannes Ebert and Daniel Flemer (Palgrave MacMillan): 189-227.

² Examples include discussions on hierarchy, asymmetry, small powers, middle powers, and regional powers.

coercive tools, it does not necessarily follow that such states lack either agency or influence as regards the policies of larger powers, especially at local and regional levels. This said, shifting great power dynamics do affect opportunities and constraints in the pursuit of state and regime goals.

One question is the extent to which regional organizations and frameworks can mediate great power dynamics and pressures, especially under conditions of growing tension and rivalry. For Southeast Asian states, importance is especially attached to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has provided a range of processes by which to negotiate not just intra-Southeast Asian relations, but also states' relations with other regionally vested actors. Consequently, for Southeast Asian states, more so than for other small and middle powers, regional organization has generally been accorded some prominence in most states' conceptualization of strategy, notwithstanding some variation in their orders of prioritization.

In this discussion paper, I outline some of the different ways that regional institutions and especially ASEAN have been conceptualized as responding to Asia's changing great power conditions. Despite a broad acknowledgement that institutional strategies feature more prominently in Southeast Asian strategies compared to other regional powers, more focused attention to the conditions under which institutional strategies operate in Asia has been relatively recent. Such conditions include not only Asia's changing great power configurations but also institutional and normative contexts that additionally bear on institutional strategies and the kinds of effects they have.

The discussion here offers some starting points for thinking about the role of regional institutions in Southeast Asian strategies. It considers the distinctive attributes of regional institutions in service of state interests as regards the challenges posed by US-China tensions in Asia – that is, what do institutions add to the mix of strategies available to Southeast Asia's small and middle powers, as well as the features distinctive to Asia's geopolitical space. In its examination of Asia's great power conditions, it highlights both continuities and changes with an eye to drawing connections between the past and the present as regards the different strategic effects associated with institutions in past periods. It concludes with some additional observations about institutional strategies at a time of intensifying competition between the United States and China.

Starting Points for Thinking About Regional Institutional Strategies in Southeast Asia

Regional institutions have distinct attributes that make them of continued and particular value to smaller states, compared to larger ones. Three observations offer starting points for thinking about the role of regional institutions in Southeast Asian strategies in the current period:

- **Multiple Actor Platforms.** A defining distinction between institutional strategies versus other kinds of state-strategies is that they involve working with other actors. Four related points follow. First, and perhaps most important, multilateral institutions as multi-actor platforms, often reinforced by post-World War II principles of sovereign equality, tend to ameliorate power differentials, reducing the distance between small and large states. In Asia, moreover, consensus mecha-

nisms, as reflective of both ASEAN states' initiative and ASEAN's prioritized institutional values, also characterize the most prominent and established of Asia's institutional frameworks, giving smaller states even greater standing than what they typically enjoy in multilateral institutions at the global level.

Second, the multilateral character of institutions offers ways to amplify the concerns of small states that might not have happened in purely bilateral settings; however, third, precisely because institutional strategies depend on other partners, they can also be complicated by the varied priorities of fellow members – ASEAN and non-ASEAN. For ASEAN states, the challenge of a unified position among its own ten members has been a persistent challenge and recurrent source of anxiety. Efforts to categorize some of ASEAN's internal great power differences, for example, have correlated differences with states' date of joining of ASEAN, ASEAN's maritime core (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) and the rest, the China-oriented/China-proximate and the US-oriented, and most recently, how vested they are in the South China Sea dispute. This institutional anxiety about Southeast Asian unity is part of ASEAN's institutional ideology that makes disunity its starting point. In so doing, that ideology has served to legitimize states' differences, but it has also mobilized more institutional initiatives at times of stress.³ Both effects can be observed in the current period of great power tension.

Finally, fourth, the fact that regional institutions, by definition, include others beyond the United States and China, they create opportunities for other regional states to play larger roles in offering broader, less zero-sum visions of regional security. The potential of this dimension or value-added has become more prominent with the heightened prominence of zero-sum dynamics between the United States and China.

- **“ASEAN Centrality” as a Strategic Principle.** In Southeast Asia, institutional strategies have been made more prominent by the presence of ASEAN and the existence of a larger ASEAN-linked network of institutions. Further, guided by the strategic principle of “ASEAN centrality” – a principle that is now regularly invoked and codified – states have relied on these ASEAN-linked institutions to mediate their great power relations, though, as highlighted below, we also see shifts in the kinds of desired effects attached to institutional strategies.
- **Platforms for Omni-Engagement.** A particular distinction of ASEAN's institutional approach (in contrast to the institutional approaches adopted by some other states) has been the importance attached to inclusion as a strategic principle and as a means of assuring Southeast Asian states some degree of autonomy. In practice, this has meant 1) ensuring that frameworks do not exclude any one major power and/or 2) openness to pursuing similar cooperative frameworks with multiple powers at the same time. Southeast Asian states' commitment to inclusive, omni-directional engagement of different actors has served to reinforce the multi-actor dimension of institutional strategies.

³ See Alice Ba (2009) *(Re)Negotiating East and Southeast Asia: Region, Regionalism, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

Institutional Strategies at a Time of Uncertain Great Power Competition

Currently, many have chosen to characterize the current era as one of “power transition”. As others have noted, there are several challenges to this conception, including the difficulties of pinpointing the point of “transition”.⁴ Further, the term can both presume too much and overstate the great power changes and order-level effects that follow. In Asia, furthermore, the “rise of China” has been associated with integration as much its “selective contestation”⁵ of existing arrangements.

A better way to conceptualize Asia’s geopolitical conditions may thus be to think about Asia’s shifting great power conditions in terms of “strategic uncertainty” and “great power competition”, rather than “transition”. Both “uncertainty” and “competition” capture something important about the current strategic context, but at the same time, offer more fluid ways to think about the strategic context and without biasing conclusions about what will or should follow.

For example, emphasizing great power competition, as opposed to “power transition”, allows for more mixed (rather than either/or) and more dynamic (rather than deterministic) great power outcomes. Similarly, emphasizing “uncertainty” expands the range of choice and agency on the parts of small and middle powers. Again, an important objective of institutional strategies has been to expand opportunities to engage multiple large powers at the same time and in ways that also amplify the concerns of smaller states. Characterizing conditions in terms of both uncertainty and great power competition thus broadens conceptualizations of the kinds of strategic effects that might follow from regional institutional strategies. Further, Asia’s has distinct regional features that can lend to the region’s greater strategic fluidity (see below).

Adding to the conceptual and policy utility of both terms is that they also expand opportunities to compare/contrast current strategies and strategic effects with past periods. Both uncertainty and great power competition, for example, have been used to characterize Asia’s larger post-Cold War strategic context in which regional institutions first emerged and developed over time in Asia. “Uncertainty” gained particular analytic traction as the Cold War transitioned into a more uncertain post-Cold War era – often as a response to more deterministic “ripe for rivalry” arguments about Asia.⁶ The primary sources of uncertainty moreover were traced less to the prospect of great power war, so much as the dual uncertainties associated with US economic and strategic commitments and with China strategic intentions in broader Asia. These sources of uncertainty remain as true today, as they did in the early and mid-1990s when ASEAN states first began to expand ASEAN frameworks beyond Southeast Asian states, even if fears of destabilizing great power conflict have become more prominent.

Meanwhile, focusing on “great power competition” allows us to consider how the current moment may not be as distinct as sometimes portrayed. After all, this is not the first time that Southeast Asian states have faced the challenge of major power competition – with

⁴ Steve Chan (2008) *China, the U.S., and the Power-Transition Theory: A Critique* (London and New York: Routledge); Richard Ned Lebow and Benjamin Valentino (2009) “Lost in Transition: A Critical Analysis of Power Transition Theory”, *International Relations* 23(3): 389-410.

⁵ See, for example, Matteo Dian and Hugo Meijer (2019) “Networking Hegemony: Alliance Dynamics in East Asia,” *International Politics* (16 October 2019 – online version of record).

⁶ The illustrative example being the widely cited article by Aaron Friedberg. See Aaron Friedberg (1993) “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in Multipolar Asia.” *International Security* 18(3).

the most notable example of the post-World War II era being the Cold War's conflicts between the United States, China, and the Soviet Union. Viewed thusly, current US-China tensions and dynamics may be seen as distinct expressions of more historically enduring conditions.

Making connections to past periods is also additionally useful in that it draws attention to a historical-developmental context that continues to inform and condition current institutional approaches. Put another way, attention to this historical-developmental context allows for greater consideration of how Asia's institutions and ASEAN, especially, have also co-evolved with the region's changing conditions.

Asia's Geopolitical Features and Conditions

Institutional strategies and their effects can vary depending on the geopolitical setting in which they operate. It is thus useful to begin by identifying some of the more defining attributes of Asia's geopolitical space – attributes that help give institutional strategies the character they have in Asia. Doing so also offers some baselines for thinking about current geopolitical changes and challenges. Among the more important include:

- **The presence of more than one major power, and more than one competitive large power dyad:** During the Cold War, the operative dyads were that between the United States and Soviet Union, between the United States and China, and between China and the Soviet Union. Today, the two competitive dyads of note are between the United States and China but also between China and Japan. Of these two, the US-China rivalry is of greatest and most comprehensive importance, while the China-Japan rivalry has been of secondary strategic consequence.

Jürgen Haacke, for example, has noted that the presence of multiple competing large powers may be a defining condition of Southeast Asian strategies.⁷ Such conditions extend to institutional strategies and shape Southeast Asian responses in ways that may not be true of other regions where there may be, for example, only one major power of relevance or only smaller competing regional actors.

Further, while discussions on current US China tensions have tended to play up the destabilizing effects of great power competition, the presence of multiple competing powers can also expand opportunities for strategic and economic diversification, an outcome that may be especially appealing to smaller states.

- **The presence of several other significant non-major powers:** In addition to Indonesia in Southeast Asia, Australia and South Korea may be counted among these. More recently, India's heightened regional engagement has also made it a power of increasing note. Asia's distinctive mix of small, middle, and large powers has critically shaped institutional dynamics, purposes, and trendlines.

⁷ Jürgen Haacke (2011) "The Nature and Management of Myanmar's Alignment with China: The SLORC/ SPDC Years." *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 30(2): 105-140; see also, Mohammad Salmon (2017) "Strategic Hedging and Unipolarity's Demise: The Case of China's Strategic Hedging." *Asian Politics & Policy* 9(3): 354-377.

- **The importance attached to autonomy in Southeast Asia and especially with the creation of ASEAN:** As a normative, not material feature, an interest in autonomy is not typically emphasized as a geopolitical feature, but it is as important as the prior two points in that it reflects the distinct positionality of Southeast Asian states. For ASEAN states, more so than for other non-great power actors – e.g., Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea – institutional strategies remain one of the more important ways to offset the extreme asymmetries that characterize some bilateral relations, as well as to expand, diversify, and multiply Southeast Asia’s relations with various regional powers in support of autonomy preferences.

In addition to affecting institutional membership, institutional agendas, and institutional design, Southeast Asia’s interest in autonomy can also limit the efficacy of institutional strategies pursued by major powers. For example, Southeast Asian states’ pursuit of similar arrangements with competing major powers can offset the desired oppositional and “balancing” effects desired by some major powers.

Continuity and Change

The above thus offer starting points for thinking about both institutional strategies and the geopolitical space in which those strategies operate. They also offer starting points for thinking about what current geopolitical challenges might signify for those strategies. As noted above, the condition of major power competition is not unique to the current moment, though it has varied in structure and content. For example, during the Cold War, as states achieved independence, great power competition between the United States, China, and the Soviet Union posed comprehensive threats to Southeast Asian security. For ASEAN’s founding states, regional organization provided a platform from which to assert principles of regional and national autonomy. It is important to underscore here that states’ assertion of autonomy principle was more than normative; it was also a strategic response to competing great power pressures. Thus, while decidedly non-communist and Western-leaning, the creation of ASEAN nevertheless offered states a way to project a more neutral or at least, more non-confrontational position between contending powers. For ASEAN’s newer members, as well, and especially Vietnam, joining ASEAN offered a way to navigate the consequences of US-China-Soviet dynamics (competition and rapprochement).

Meanwhile, in different periods of the post-Cold War era, the prospect of major power competition has similarly informed institutional strategies, though this prospect has also varied and intensified. In the first post-Cold War period, the prospect of rivalry was present but more abstract. It was in this period that ASEAN states first pursued an institutional strategy beyond Southeast Asia and when institutions first really emerged as a different kind of approach by which to promote major power certainty under conditions of increasing major power flux in broader Asia.⁸ The ARF, for example, responded to the dual uncertainties associated with US economic and strategic commitments and with China

⁸ See, for example, Yuen Foong Khong (2004) ‘Coping with Strategic Uncertainty: The Role of Institutions and Soft Balancing in Southeast Asia’s Post-Cold War Strategy’, in A. Carlson, P.J. Katzenstein and J.J. Suh (eds), *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power and Efficiency* (New York: Cambridge University Press); see, also, Alice Ba (2014) “Asia’s Regional Security Institutions” in *Oxford Handbook on the International Relations of Asia*, eds. Rosemary Foot, John Ravenhill, Saadia Pekkanen (Oxford University Press): 667-689.

strategic intentions in broader Asia with its omni-engagement of both the United States and China and all the other key regional players. Institutional engagement served to broaden China's integration beyond economics, while at the same time expanding and regularizing US diplomatic attention beyond its bilateral alliances and military priorities.

In the current era of heightened US China competition, institutional strategies remain very much means by which to promote greater strategic certainty with each by expanding opportunities for cooperation in a range of issue areas. At the same time, great power competition has become a much more prominent dynamic and with that, has come some shifts in strategic emphasis. While the heightening of tensions was already visible with Xi Jinping's coming to the helm in China and during the Obama administration in the United States, relations have entered into a new stage of explicit "comprehensive rivalry" under the US Trump Administration. The erosion of the economic pillar of US-China relations, once a reliable foundation for relations, poses a particular challenge for Southeast Asian states that may even exceed the challenges highlighted in the more well-known maritime realm. Those comprehensive competitive dynamics today challenge Southeast Asian security in more ways than one. In addition to the specter of military incidents and conflict posed by US-China maritime tensions, the US-China "trade war" also threatens to destabilize economic arrangements, including complex production networks and supply chains, on which domestic and strategic livelihoods depend. Current dynamics are also distinguished by the rapidity by which US China relations have been deteriorating as a result of their intensified competition. This comprehensive and rapid deterioration of US-China relations make for a much more "dangerous" set of challenges for all.⁹ In Southeast Asia, moreover, the comprehensive challenge pose by US-China tensions threatens security at all levels – domestic (e.g., regime interests) and regional (e.g., the challenge to ASEAN unity as especially exemplified by past challenges to fashion an ASEAN consensus on the South China Sea), as much the international-systemic great power level.

In this different strategic setting, we see shifts of emphasis, as well as an expansion of possible effects states seek from institutional strategies. First, ASEAN's institutional frameworks have provided ASEAN's small-to-middle powers important platforms from which to negotiate major power initiatives. States' association with ASEAN can also facilitate economic engagements in states' bilateral negotiations.

Second, there has been greater attention to the ways that institutions or institutional platforms might be used to stabilize and moderate, even if not completely neutralize, more destabilizing consequences of major power competition. This is a shift from the initial post-Cold War period where institutional strategies tended to be aimed at stabilizing the United States' and China's respective engagements with Southeast Asia, rather than the potential strategic consequences of their great power interactions with each other.

For example, these uncertainties have helped expand security cooperation within institutional settings in the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) and ASEAN+1 frameworks with both the United States and China, as well as other regional powers. The multiplicity of ASEAN's "Plus One" initiatives diffuses exclusionary or oppositional dynamics that might be attached to Southeast Asian states bilateral and ASEAN-collective engagements. Both the ADMM-Plus and the ASEAN-China frameworks have offered opportunities to work with China on security-implicated fronts

⁹ David M. Lampton (2019) "Reconsidering U.S.-China Relations: From Improbable Normalization to Precipitous Deterioration," *Asia Policy* 14(2): 43-60.

like Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and other areas of “non-traditional security”. Such opportunities have become more important given Chinese insecurities about heightened US strategic activities and engagements with Southeast Asian states and others under the Obama administration’s “Re-balance” and now the Trump Administration’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” strategies.

Meanwhile, the EAS and ADMM-Plus remain important platforms for omni- and simultaneous engagement of both the United States and China, as well as Asia’s other key actors in multilateral settings. Again, Asia’s mix of multiple larger and middle powers may make strategic omni-engagement more prominent in Asia’s institutional strategies than some other regions.

Most importantly, how small and middle powers respond to these different initiatives can also play up or downplay competitive versus more compatible/complementary dynamics. Thus far, the roles played by ASEAN frameworks remain mostly consistent with what we would expect – that is, we see ASEAN being used as a platform for assuring a mix of relations (and, by extension, guarding against efforts to marginalize some or to actively divide regional states by drawing lines in the seas). ASEAN platforms have also – as they also did in the past – continue to offer a resource for projecting alternative, more “in-between” “middle” paths and positions¹⁰.

Asia’s mix of institutions and the expectations of summitry creates normative pressures on large states to consult and outreach to Southeast Asian states, as well as to accommodate their core concerns when other states pursue new frameworks that is, if they are to have meaningful influence. In this sense, institutional platforms offer opportunities for an expanded role for small and middle powers who provide target populations for major power initiatives to play more active roles in defining or reframing the region’s security challenges. For example, despite its challenges, the principle of ASEAN Centrality has taken on different significance in the current context of heightened US-China tensions. Specifically, it has become more than just a means of defending ASEAN’s privileged voice in existing arrangements, it is now also being invoked – by both ASEAN states and other middle powers (e.g., India and South Korea) as a way to promote an alternative, less fraught organizing principle in response to rival initiatives from the United States and China. A few examples serve to illustrate:

- 1) ASEAN’s role in launching and then facilitating Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations. These negotiations became more strategically important as an offset, for example, to the Obama-era pursuit of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) widely perceived divisive economic strategy that marginalized several economies and most notably, China. Today, RCEP offers a regionally inclusive framework offers a possible path to offset some of the disruptive consequences of the various trade conflicts pursued by the Trump Administration.

¹⁰ See, for example, Cheng-Chwee Kuik (2008) “The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore’s Response to a Rising China.” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30(2): 159-185; Evelyn Goh (2016) “Southeast Asian Strategies Toward the Great Powers: Still Hedging After All These Years?” *The Asan Forum*, February 22. <http://www.theasanforum.org/southeast-asian-strategies-toward-the-great-powers-still-hedging-after-all-these-years/>.

- 2) States' turn to ASEAN as a platform for encouraging defense diplomacy and non-traditional cooperation with both the United States and China. This inaugural launch of states' first ASEAN-China maritime exercises in 2018, which followed China's being disinvitation from US-led biennial RIMPAC exercises, as well as the inauguration of the first ASEAN-US Maritime Exercises in 2019 offer illustrations of how ASEAN has used its Plus-One frameworks assert more neutral positions via multiple, non-exclusive engagements.

- 3) ASEAN's and Indonesia's efforts to offer a more "open and inclusive" conception of the Indo-Pacific.¹¹ Despite intra-ASEAN debate about its specifics, it remains an example of how some states see ASEAN as a means to push back against more confrontational dynamics as associated with "the Free and Open Indo-Pacific", which (to the great concern of most Southeast Asian states) has made "full-spectrum strategic competition with China" its "central organizing principle".¹² They offer examples of the ways that ASEAN might provide a platform for more pro-active diplomatic interventions in efforts to recast divisive major power initiatives along less dangerous and divisive lines.

Additional Observations about Regional Institutions in Southeast Asian Strategies

In short, building on the two starting observations above, recent developments also serve to illustrate the following additional points about how regional institutions are conceived as responding to the challenges posed by large power competition and its resultant strategic uncertainty:

- Southeast Asian states have explicitly rejected either/or, exclusivist conceptions of regional order. ASEAN's regional frameworks that have prioritized inclusiveness as a strategic principle and value have played critical roles in: 1) promoting simultaneous engagement with both the United States and China; and 2) facilitating more comprehensive and regionally-sensitive approaches from both the United States and China as a way to mitigate the regional spill-over effects associated with the bilateral dynamics of relations (cooperative and competitive). These goals remain defining in states' current approach to the intensified dynamics of competition.

- The challenges posed by current major power competition point to both continuities and changes. The biggest difference regards the rapid intensification of rivalry between the United States and China across multiple realms. This creates a different challenge for Southeast Asian states and, in turn, a somewhat different emphasis when it comes to institutional strategies. The strategic imperative behind institutional strategies shifts from the emphasis on simultaneous engagement (though still important) to a greater emphasis on how to contain the spill-over effects from US China competition.

¹¹ See ASEAN, "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" (June 23, 2019), accessed at <https://asean.org/asean-outlook-indo-pacific/>. See also discussion in Ha, H.T. (2019) ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific: Old Wine in New Bottle? ISEAS Perspective 51 (June 25).

¹² See Storey, I., and M. Cook (2018) The trump administration and Southeast Asia: America's Asia policy crystalizes. ISEAS Perspective (29 November).

- As an institutional strategy and response, ASEAN remains a focal point in Southeast Asian states collective responses to intensified US-China competition. We can expect continued importance attached to regional frameworks as means to maximize Southeast Asian audience effects, though anxiety about ASEAN unity will also persist. ASEAN's numbers allow them to speak more loudly as smaller states in regional frameworks than they would otherwise be able to do on their own. As in earlier periods, how effective they are remains practically constrained by the challenges of ASEAN's internal consensus process. Nevertheless, the privileged role enjoyed by ASEAN in agenda-setting gives states a particular stake in institutional arrangements when dealing with larger powers. For this reason, we are also likely to see a continued defence of "ASEAN centrality" as a means by which to assure Southeast Asian voices are heard.
- In the current era, "ASEAN Centrality" has provided states more than a means of defensive security management; they have offered states also paths by which to take more proactive roles in reframing current great power challenges. This has become more important but also more challenged in the face of current major power challenges and tensions. In the current environment, ASEAN, for example, has provided a conceptual focal point by which reframe and redirect initiatives like the Indo-Pacific that many states see as destabilizing. More so than in past periods of major power uncertainty, ASEAN Centrality is offered as an alternative, less fraught organizing principle in response to rival initiatives from major powers.

To conclude, while the geopolitical conditions of uncertainty and large power competition are not unique to the current era, the current geopolitical moment is distinguished by features that both tax and expand opportunities for institutional strategies. These include the comprehensiveness of the competition, with the economic pillar especially destabilized and the rapidity of the deterioration of US China relations. These are not insurmountable challenges but they will require vigilance and proactive coordination with other states. Regional institutional strategies cannot solve the problems associated with intensified US China competition and rivalry, but they remain important platforms from which to assert alternative, more region-sensitive agendas; they also still offer different kinds of resources by which to both negotiate and reframe major power initiatives.

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