ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Shaping China's rise: the reordering of US alliances and defence partnerships in East Asia

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Abstract

The US-led system of alliances and defence partnerships in East Asia has undergone profound change since the end of the Cold War. The so-called "hub-and-spokes" system of bilateral alliances has been gradually supplemented by a "networked security architecture"—a network of interwoven bilateral, minilateral and multilateral defence arrangements between the US and its regional allies and partners, in which China is also included through a variety of cooperation channels. This paper shows that, from Washington's perspective, the networked security architecture is not merely a means to externally balance a revisionist China, as Structural Realist analyses contend. Rather, the US has sought to broaden the composition of the US-led hegemonic order in East Asia by diversifying the range of defence ties with and amongst its allies and partners, but also by seeking to include the PRC in it. Thereby, Washington aims to channel and shape the trajectory of China's rise within the US-led hegemonic order, from a position of pre-eminence, through a mixture of negative and positive incentives (resistance and accommodation) with the ultimate goal of upholding the existing hegemonic order. To empirically substantiate this argument, the paper relies on a large body of elite interviews with senior US policymakers.

Keywords English School · Hegemony · Alliances · Defence cooperation · United States · China · East Asia

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The re-emergence of China in world politics constitutes the single most momentous challenge to the US-led rules-based international order since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Established at the end of World War II, this hegemonic order comprises a set of norms and institutions which reflect US preferences and interests and the underlying post-war power distribution.[1] Such order is sustained and underpinned by the US-led global system of alliances and defence partnerships. Whereas Washington developed a multilateral alliance (NATO) in Europe, in East Asia it put in place a system of exclusive bilateral alliances in the early Cold War. Commonly referred to as the "hub-and-spokes" system, it comprises five bilateral relationships (with Australia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines), whereby the different allies (or "spokes") are connected to the US "hub" but with almost no interaction amongst them (Cha 2009, 2016; Ikenberry 2001, 2011). Nonetheless, since the end of the Cold War, this system of strictly bilateral alliances has been gradually and cumulatively supplemented by a network of interwoven bilateral, minilateral and multilateral arrangements, in which China is also included, that we label a "networked security architecture".[2] This networked security architecture is characterized by greater connectivity through variable geometries of defence cooperation amongst different allies and a broadening range of non-allied partners as well as with China.

What explains this major reconfiguration of the US-led system of alliances and defence arrangements in East Asia? Mainstream Structural Realist analyses would interpret the emergence of a networked security architecture as a form of external balancing by regional powers against a revisionist China.[3] As discussed in greater detail in the Introduction to this *Special Issue*, this argument is misleading for three main reasons: first, it overstates the magnitude of the PRC's contestation of the existing East Asian order since China is not a revisionist state but rather engages in a selective contestation of the regional order; second, it mischaracterizes the reaction by regional powers to such challenge given that most regional states (with the exception of Japan) are hedging between the US and the PRC rather than balancing against the latter; third, and relatedly, with its focus on regional balancing strategies against Beijing, Structural Realists analyses cannot make sense of China's inclusion in the networked security architecture through a variety of channels of bilateral, minilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Consistently, with the theoretical framework presented in the Introduction of this *Special Issue*, this paper proposes an alternative explanation to this Structural Realist account by drawing from the English School of International Relations. Its central argument is that China's selective contestation of the material and normative

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[1] Specifically, these norms are the recognition of great power status, respect of sovereignty, free trade, deterrence and international law (Buzan and Zhang 2014; Khong 2014)—and specifically, freedom of navigation and overflight and the multilateral, rules-based system of dispute resolution.

[2] See the definition of 'networked security architecture' in the Introduction to this *Special Issue*. On the interweaving of formal alliances, bilateral partnerships, minilateral groupings and multilateral security arrangements in East Asia, see also Cha (2011), Cronin (2013), Fontaine et al. (2017), Green (2014a, b), and Simón et al. (2019). For a review of the various strands of the literature on the changing alliance dynamics in East Asia, and their shortcomings, see the Introduction to this *Special Issue*.

[3] For a discussion of how the different strands within Structural Realism—despite their differences—concur on this point, see the Introduction to this *Special Issue*. For an overview of the key propositions of Realist scholars on the response by regional powers to China's rise, see Mastanduno (2014).

pillars (or "primary institutions") of the US-led hegemonic order in East Asia has sparked a process of renegotiation of such order amongst East Asian regional powers, which has resulted in a reconfiguration of the underlying alliances and defence arrangements (or "secondary institutions") through which regional powers seek to uphold that order.[4] Specifically, the US has 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, Washington aims to channel and shape the trajectory of China's rise within the US-led hegemonic order, from a position of pre-eminence, through a mixture of negative and positive incentives (resistance and accommodation) with the ultimate goal of preserving and upholding the existing hegemonic order.

In order to empirically substantiate this argument, the paper proceeds as follows. First, it examines the main building blocks of the networked security architecture in East Asia as it was incrementally developed by subsequent post-Cold War administrations. Second, by focusing on the Obama administration's policy in East Asia, the paper brings to light the rationale, from the perspective of the senior government officials, of fostering the development of this networked security architecture. To do so, it relies on a broad range of elite interviews (with senior officials in the White House, State Department, Pentagon and the intelligence community) as well as a comprehensive analysis of the public statements and Congressional testimonies by the administration's political appointees.[5] In conclusion, the paper assesses the elements of continuity and discontinuity between the Obama and Trump administrations' policies in East Asia—and the role of alliances therein—as well as their implications for the durability of the US-led rules-based order.

The building blocks of the East Asian networked security architecture

As shown in the Introduction and in Rosemary Foot's contribution to this *Special Issue*, since the end of the Cold War, the PRC has engaged in a "selective contestation" of the normative and material pillars of US-led hegemonic order in East Asia. Across different issue areas (trade, finance, environment, defence, etc.), the PRC has combined the acceptance of certain elements of the existing order with the contestation of others (Foot and the Introduction to this *Special Issue*; Foot and Walter 2013; Goh 2019: 2; Mazarr et al. 2018). Building upon initiatives launched by previous

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[4] See the definition of primary and secondary institutions in the Introduction to this *Special Issue*.

[5] Between January 2016 and December 2018, seventy-five interviews were conducted with former political appointees and career officials in charge of political-military and East Asian affairs in the White House (National Security Council/NSC Staff), the Department of State (DoS) and the Department of Defence (DoD). In the NSC, the positions of the interviewees include senior directors and advisors to the President; in the DoD and DoS, the positions range from assistant secretary to the deputy secretary level. In addition to political appointees, interviews were conducted with lower-level officials, such as policy advisors to the political appointees and country directors. The information provided by the interviewees has consistently been triangulated with other interviews in order to ensure the contextualization and reliability of the empirical evidence. All interviewees quoted in this article have given their prior approval to being quoted. Those who have not given their approval to being quoted have been anonymized.

administrations (Blair and Hanley 2001; McDevitt and Kelly 1999; Silove 2016; Green 2017: ch. 13–14), the Obama administration sought to respond to such challenge by reordering the US-led system of alliances and defence partnerships in East Asia. The initiatives undertaken under the Presidencies of William J. Clinton and, in particular, George W. Bush, to move beyond the hub-and-spokes system by networking US allies and partners—as well as the PRC—into an overarching architecture were continued and further consolidated under the Presidency of Barack Obama.[6]

In coordination with its allies and partners, the US thus gradually and cumulatively supplemented the Cold War hub-and-spokes system of bilateral alliances in East Asia through the development of a networked security architecture, namely a dense network of overlapping bilateral, minilateral and multilateral defence arrangements between and amongst the US and a broadening range of regional allies and partners—and that also includes the PRC. In the words of David Helvey, former Acting Assistant Secretary of Defence for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, the US fostered the "maturation of the strict and rigid hub-and-spokes—bilaterally developed, bilaterally managed defence relationships between the U.S. and our treaty allies—towards a much richer and more robust set of relationships that we have and that our security partners have with themselves, oriented on a set of common goals, objectives and interest, such as maintaining freedom of navigation, freedom of access, commerce and peaceful resolution of disputes" (interview, 6 March 2017). As detailed in the Conclusion, despite inconsistent signals in its foreign policy and a more competitive approach to China, the Trump administration has continued to foster the development of this networked security architecture, thus displaying substantial continuity in the management of the US-led alliance system in East Asia.

The analysis below provides an overview of the key constitutive elements of the networked security architecture (examined in-depth by the individual contributions to this *Special Issue*). First, it focuses on the consolidation and diversification of US alliances and defence partnerships in the region and, second, on the ways in which China has been included in this architecture through multiple cooperation channels. In the subsequent section, the paper turns to examine the underlying rationale that drove the senior officials in the Obama administration to foster the development of such networked security architecture in East Asia.

U.S. Allies and partners in the networked security architecture

Through the so-called Rebalance to Asia, the Obama administration aimed to readjust the thrust of US foreign policy, after a decade of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, in light of the shifting centre of strategic and economic gravity of world politics towards Asia (Bader 2012; Campbell 2016; Meijer 2015). This policy consisted of four central components: bolstering of existing bilateral alliances; developing new partnerships with emerging regional players; fostering minilateral cooperative initiatives (such as trilaterals and quadrilaterals); and strengthening multilateral

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[6] On the initiatives undertaken by the Clinton and Bush administrations, see Blair and Hanley (2001), McDevitt and Kelly (1999), Silove (2016); Green (2017: ch. 13–14).

institutions in East Asia (Russel 2014a). Gradually, the interweaving of these different arrangements with US allies and partners—coupled with China's inclusion through a variety of cooperation pathways (detailed below)—led to the emergence of a networked security architecture.

First, the US sought to bolster the credibility of its five formal bilateral alliances in East Asia in order to reassure its regional allies of American resolve and to deter China from engaging in assertive behaviour and from probing the solidity of individual alliances (Russel 2015; Shear 2015). By doing so, ultimately, Washington also intended to uphold the rules-based order underpinned by these alliances. As explained by former Under Secretary of Defence for Policy, James Miller, strengthening US bilateral alliances provides "stronger warfighting capability [and] a stronger deterrent", but "the primary, the higher level objective is one of strengthening political unity and reinforcing the idea that any adversary will not be able to stick a lever between the United States and its allies or between partners or among those allies and partners. […] The highest order objective is the promotion and preservation of an international rules-based order" (interview, 5 April 2017).

As one of the flagship initiatives of US alliance management efforts, Washington signed with Tokyo the 2015 new guidelines for Japan–US defence cooperation that concurrently increased the US commitment to Japanese defence and assigned a greater regional security role to Japan (Japanese Ministry of Defence 2015; Satake 2016; see also Dian in this *Special Issue*). The US government also stepped up bilateral cooperation on ballistic missile defence with Japan, reaffirmed that the mutual defence alliance covered all territories under Japan's administration, including Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, and expressed support for the 2014 reinterpretation of Article 9 of Japan's constitution which allowed Tokyo, under certain circumstances, to engage in "collective self-defence"—thereby expanding its potential contribution to the alliance in case of conflict (Liff 2015; Rinehart et al. 2015; The White House 2015a).[7] Similarly, the US sought to reinforce its alliance with the Republic of Korea (ROK) through both diplomatic and military means. Washington and Seoul issued the 2009 Joint Vision for the Alliance, followed in 2013 by the Joint Declaration in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the US–ROK alliance, pledging for the thickening of US–ROK defence ties (The White House 2009, 2013). Washington also reinforced the US military footprint on the Korean peninsula with the deployment of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) missile defence system (Bong 2016). With Australia, it signed the Force Posture Initiative, providing for the deployment of a rotational force of 2500 marines at Darwin and increased air cooperation (Bisley in this *Special Issue*; Australian Department of Defence, 2018; Taylor 2016). In Southeast Asia, the administration sought to revive its alliances with the Philippines and Thailand (Quayle in this *Special Issue*). In 2014, it signed the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with Manila, a ten-year agreement that provided US troops with greater access to military bases, bolstered the rotational presence of US personnel, ship, aircraft and equipment and

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[7] The two countries also signed a new five-year package of host nation support for U.S. forces in Japan (US Department of State 2018).

expanded existing military facilities (Albert 2016; Lum and Dolven 2014; Misalucha and Amador 2016). In Thailand, domestic instability and the 2014 coup d'état constrained defence cooperation between Bangkok and Washington. The two countries signed the 2012 Joint Vision Statement for the Thai–US Defence Alliance, highlighting the importance of bilateral defence cooperation, albeit with little concrete progress (Chanlett-Avery et al. 2015; Pongsudhirak 2016).

In addition to existing formal bilateral alliances, the Obama administration also bolstered a range of bilateral defence partnerships with non-treaty allies, most notably in Southeast Asia (Capie in this *Special Issue*). It thereby aimed to expand US presence in this sub-region, which was deemed to be a crucial yet partly neglected area in US foreign policy in East Asia (Bader 2012: ch. 9). Since the end of World War II and the Korean War, US diplomatic efforts and military footprint had been largely concentrated in Northeast Asia. Through this "rebalance within the rebalance"—from Northeast to Southeast Asia (Russel 2014b)—Washington sought to adapt its political–military engagement to three developments: the rise of new economic powers in Southeast Asia (e.g. Indonesia or Vietnam) which required greater diplomatic attention; China's increasingly assertive behaviour in the South China Sea; and the consequent demand pull by Southeast Asian nations for greater US presence (interviews with former officials in the White House, Pentagon and State Department, March–November 2017; see also Campbell and Andrews 2013; Russel 2016).

To mention but a few examples, Washington and Hanoi significantly expanded their defence ties by signing a Memorandum of Understanding, in 2011, to broaden the areas of bilateral defence cooperation (potentially leading to the co-production of military equipment) and by elevating the bilateral relationship to a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" in 2013 (Thayer 2016). In 2014, the US also partially lifted the 1975 embargo on the provision of lethal equipment to Vietnam, increased its access to the strategic deepwater port of Cam Ranh Bay and enhanced its capacity building efforts through military education and training (IMET) programs, foreign military financing (FMF) and the so-called Maritime Security Initiative (MSI) (U.S. Department of State 2013; Liff 2016; Lohman et al. 2012; Manyin 2014).[8] The two countries then signed a Joint Vision Statement in 2015 to guide future bilateral defence cooperation and also expanded bilateral training and exercises (The White House 2015b, c, 2016).

With Singapore, the US increased military cooperation, arms sales and capacity building efforts and enhanced its military access to the city-state through the rotational deployment of four US littoral combat ships (LCS) and then signed an Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement in 2015 (Congressional Research Service 2016; Harris 2017; Green et al. 2016: 99; U.S. Department of Defence 2015). Other lesser regional players with which the US bolstered defence ties include, among others, Indonesia and Malaysia (Green 2016; Harris 2017; Kuik 2016; Muhibat 2016). Outside East Asia, the US considerably expanded defence ties also with India, which it designated as a Major Defense Partner, seeking to support a larger

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[8] For data on U.S. capacity building efforts, see Security Assistance Monitor (2018).

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role for the latter in the Indo-Pacific. Among other initiatives, the two countries established the Framework for the US–India Defense Relationship, they finalized agreements on information security and logistics, and they bolstered military exercises and maritime security cooperation (Pant and Joshi 2016; Rajagopalan 2016; Rosen and Douglas 2017; U.S. Department of State 2019).

Third, building upon initiatives undertaken under the Presidency of George W. Bush, the Obama administration encouraged the expansion of defence linkages amongst its allies and partners through both bilateral and minilateral arrangements. It sought to complement the hub-and-spokes system by developing a number of minilateral defence initiatives (i.e. trilateral and quadrilateral arrangements). In 2016, with the brokering role of the US, Japan and ROK signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) to facilitate trilateral intelligence sharing. The three countries also expanded cooperation through joint military exercises, including the 2016 trilateral missile defence informational link maritime exercises (Harris 2017). Other major trilaterals include the US–Australia–Japan Trilateral Strategic Dialogue and the US–Japan–India Trilateral Ministerial Dialogue (Dian and Bisley in this *Special Issue*; Brewster 2010; Curtis 2011; Hemmings 2017; Satake and Hemmings 2018; Tatsumi 2015). The administration also sought to revitalize the quadrilateral arrangement between the US, Japan, India and Australia that had emerged in the mid-2000s but had then lost momentum in the late 2000s (Chanlett-Avery 2018; Panda 2017).

In addition to expanded linkages amongst the "spokes" of the alliance system (i.e. the five formal treaty allies), Washington encouraged greater cooperation, coordination and capacity building efforts between its allies and partners. The trilateral cooperation between the US, Japan and Vietnam is a case in point. Encouraged by Washington, Vietnam–Japan defence ties grew significantly in the areas of capacity building efforts and ship visits, amongst other things (Kazianis 2015; Matsubara et al. 2012; Nishihara 2015). Other examples of emerging defence linkages amongst US allies and partners for capacity building purposes—that Washington helped coordinating—include the modest but expanding cooperation between Australia and the Philippines, Japan and the Philippines or between Australia and Vietnam (Australian Embassy in Vietnam 2018; Parameswaran 2015a, b, 2017a, b; Republic of the Philippines 2015; Tana and Takagi 2018). Minilateralism thus emerged as an important form of defence cooperation amongst US allies and partners in East Asia.

Finally, the networked security architecture encompassed multilateral regional security institutions and multinational military exercises (Ba in this *Special Issue*). The Obama administration strengthened the American presence in the multilateral institutions of the region, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (The White House 2015b, c). In the politico-military field, specifically, Washington joined the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+) to facilitate regional cooperation in a variety of areas, such as maritime security, counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operations or cybersecurity, amongst others (ADMM+ 2017; Tan 2015, 2016). For the US, the ADMM+ became an important platform for multinational defence cooperation and capacity building in East Asia (interviews with former officials in the Pentagon and State Department, March–November 2017). In addition to greater

engagement in regional multilateral structures, Washington also sought to spur defence ties across the region through multinational military exercises, such as the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC), the world's largest maritime exercises, or Cobra Gold which is held in Thailand and includes 29 participating states (Rapp-Hooper 2015).

Summing up, a first central feature of the networked security architecture in East Asia was the enmeshment of multiple geometries of defence cooperation pathways (bilateral alliances and defence partnerships, minilateral groupings and multilateral institutions) between and amongst the US, its allies and a broadening range of non-allied partners.

China in the networked security architecture

The second central feature was the inclusion of China in the networked security architecture through bilateral, minilateral and multilateral channels (Carter 2016). At the bilateral level, China participated in this architecture through a variety of diplomatic and military consultation mechanisms with the US and other regional players. Washington and Beijing developed a robust bilateral institutional structure with regular meetings (e.g. the US–China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, or S&ED, which included a diplomatic/military track) for addressing the broad range of issues on the bilateral agenda at all the levels of their respective governments.[9] As a result, US–China military-to-military relations, including high-level visits, functional exchanges, academic exchanges, ship visits and military exercises, dramatically expanded during the 2010s (Saunders and Bowie 2016). Washington also encouraged its allies and partners to develop diplomatic and military ties with the PRC through the development of bilateral partnerships and institutionalized defence consultative mechanisms (interviews with former White House, Pentagon and State Department officials, January 2017–March 2018; see also Feng and Huang 2014).

At the minilateral level, the Obama administration supported and encouraged the inclusion of the PRC in the networked security architecture through trilateral arrangements. It supported, for instance, the China/South Korea/Japan trilateral that originated in the 1990s and the establishment of the permanent Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) in Seoul in 2010 (interviews with former State Department officials, 20 October 2017 and 24 October 2017). The TCS is meant to enable trilateral cooperation through joint summits and meetings amongst Chinese, South Korean and Japanese foreign ministers and senior officials (Sakaki and Wacker 2017; TCS 2017).

Finally, China was included in the networked security architecture also through multilateral regional security institutions and multinational exercises. Through the ADDM+ Beijing cooperated with the US and other regional players on a variety of non-traditional security challenges (e.g. humanitarian assistance and disaster relief).

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[9] On the S&ED, see U.S. Department of Treasury (2016) and U.S. Department of State (2016). The S&ED was relabelled Comprehensive Dialogue under the Trump administration. See The White House (2017).

Furthermore, starting in 2014, the US invited China to participate in RIMPAC, the region-wide biennial military exercise, as a way to develop confidence building measures between regional navies (Erickson and Strange 2014; Gady 2017; Rapp-Hooper 2015).

Accordingly, the Obama administration developed a regional networked security architecture that was (at least partly) open to China's inclusion through these variable institutional geometries.[10] As demonstrated below, enmeshing both allies and partners as well as the PRC in a common overarching architecture was not merely a means to externally balance a revisionist China, but rather had a different rationale.

Upholding the rules-based order through resistance and accommodation

In response to China's selective contestation of the regional order, the development of this networked security architecture was meant, from Washington's perspective, 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. On the one hand, coalescing a broader range of allies and partners was intended to dissuade China from adopting a more revisionist stance and to exert leverage over Beijing, from a position of strength, so as to resist Chinese actions that could undermine such order. On the other hand, by including the PRC in the networked security architecture, Washington sought to accommodate China within the rules-based order, to the extent possible, and to encourage Beijing to develop a vested interest in the stability and durability of the regional order. Through this two-pronged policy, rather than externally balancing against the People's Republic of China, Washington aimed to channel and shape the trajectory of China's rise within the US-led hegemonic order, from a position of pre-eminence, through a mixture of negative and positive incentives (resistance and accommodation) with the ultimate goal of preserving the existing hegemonic order while seeking to enable China's integration in it.[11]

Resisting China's contestation of the hegemonic order

Bolstering and diversifying defence ties amongst a larger range of allies and partners would strengthen Washington's position and leverage vis-à-vis China in the negotiations over the future of the rules-based order and would thereby allow resisting Beijing's actions deemed to be disruptive for such order.

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[10] China is 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 U.S. bilateral mutual defence treaties.

[11] On how this argument relates to, and differs from, the decades-long debate on whether the U.S. should engage or contain China, see the Introduction to this *Special Issue*.

As explained by Jeffrey Bader, former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for East Asian Affairs at the National Security Council, by reordering its alliance system in East Asia, the US sought "to maintain its military preeminence and to demonstrate its continued resolve to reassure allies and partners and to deter China. The U.S. need[ed] to be able to prevail in any military situation in which we have security interests—and that require[d] being the preeminent military power" (interview, 7 March 2017). In particular, developing a network of defence arrangements between and amongst US allies and a broadening range of partners aimed to signal to Beijing that "the more China acts aggressively, the more the network will be tightened" (interview, 7 March 2017).

Then-Assistant Secretary of Defence for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, David Shear, eloquently explains the role of this networked security architecture in the ongoing negotiation with the PRC over the future of the East Asian regional order; he deserves being quoted at some length:

> We are engaged in a protracted issue-by-issue negotiation over the future order in East Asia. A negotiation in the sense of the achievement of understandings about the way the region works and what the Chinese role is and what the American role is. […] We are not going to sit down at the table with the Chinese, in a Congress of Vienna style meeting, and determine what the region looks like, plotting out a grand bargain. It is a negotiation on the ground about what the future order is going to be. It will be negotiated piece by piece. […] Our job [was] to make sure that we maintain[ed] maximum leverage in the course of these negotiations. […] And networking gives you the mass, it gives you the diplomatic lap mass, it gives you the leverage that you need to shape outcomes that are in your favour. The networking generally takes place among like-minded countries who want to maintain the current rules-based order to the greatest extent possible by generating the leverage that we need to better influence the Chinese and to better maintain a regional order that reflects our interests (interview, 13 October 2017).

Another former Pentagon official corroborates this point: reorganizing the hub-and-spokes alliance system into a networked security architecture "allows to have more influence at a time that […] China becomes more assertive. It allows to have additional leverage through new partnerships, to shape the rise of China and to exercise steerage more effectively given that you have more countries coalescing together" (interview, 16 February 2017).

Accommodating China within the hegemonic order

At the same time, however, Washington also sought to accommodate China within the rules-based order, to the extent possible. In particular, including the PRC in the networked security architecture through bilateral, minilateral and multilateral venues was meant to convey positive incentives and signals to Beijing and to encourage China's integration in the existing regional order.

As explained by Nirav Patel, then Senior Adviser to the Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and later Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs,

> China is included in the overall architecture in a bilateral context but also in minilateral and multilateral arrangements. When you think about networked solutions or networked architecture, the reality is that the components are bilateral, minilateral, multilateral permutations. […] China is an inherently critical part of the strategy that the administration had and certainly an inherently critical part of a networked strategy. […] The reason why it is important to include the Chinese and some of these 'networked solutions' is that they are also an important part of solutions to a range of issues. And we wanted to make it clear to the Chinese that they needed to be part of these solutions and architecture and simultaneously make it clear that these were not efforts to contain them (interview, 24 October 2017).

Then-Under Secretary of Defence for Policy, James Miller, confirms that these initiatives were meant to signal to Beijing that the US sought "to work with China, to facilitate its rise as a great power and to encourage China's participation and leadership as a key stakeholder in the international system. […] As a rising great power in the international system, it is very much in U.S. and others' interests to chart a path for China to take on a role as a responsible stakeholder in that system. Fundamentally, that is a core objective" (interview with James Miller, 5 April 2017).[12]

By including China in the networked security architecture, Washington thus sought to accommodate China's rise within the US-led regional order and to entice Beijing to develop a vested interest in the stability of such order.

Shaping the trajectory of China's rise

This combination of negative and positive incentives (of resistance and accommodation) was purposefully intended to channel and shape the trajectory of China's rise within the US-led hegemonic, rules-based order with the ultimate goal of upholding such order while seeking to enable China's integration in it.[13]

For the White House, according to President Obama's Deputy National Security Advisor (and later Deputy Secretary of State), Anthony Blinken, by "developing new kinds of relationships among critical countries in the region not just through the multilateral institutions but through trilateral, quadrilateral processes of one kind or another, […] the big goal was […] to continue to try to shape and channel its emergence. […] The engagement of these other major countries and their increasing cooperation through minilateral and multilateral arrangements on a whole host of issues had the benefit of creating a more effective vehicle to actually deal with these

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[12] The term "responsible stakeholder" in relation to China was first coined by former Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick (2005) in the George W. Bush administration. See also U.S. Department of State (2015).

[13] On this point, see also Christensen (2015).

problems and challenges. But it also created some greater opportunity to try to channel the direction that China was taking; to shape its own engagement in the region" (interview, 21 March 2018).

Likewise, for former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for East Asian Affairs at the National Security Council, Jeffrey Bader, the administration "felt it was important to shape China's behavior as it grew stronger and as its economy and its military developed. […] So, we tried to be as clear as possible with the Chinese about the ways in which the U.S. alliances in the region were going to evolve" (interview, 7 March 2017).

From the perspective of the political appointees in the Pentagon, as explained by then-Acting Assistant Secretary of Defence for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, David Helvey, the networked security architecture was

> Open to anyone that want[ed] to participate, including China, although China could certainly self-isolate or choose not to participate. To a certain extent, this is about encouraging cooperative behaviour on the part of China, to work with U.S. and with others to support and uphold the rules-based regional order that has benefited everybody. The flip side of that is if China chooses not to participate or to cooperate with U.S. and others to uphold this system, and instead works against it, then you have this network that can constrain China's choices. So I would not characterize the network as being oriented towards China or about China, but certainly it has the effect of shaping China […] by providing open doors for cooperation but also by providing a network to maintain the system and defend it against those that would seek to overturn it (interview, 6 March 2017).

Similarly, according to former Under Secretary of Defence for Policy Michèle Flournoy, the larger policy goal was to "reinforce the rules-based order and to shape China's decision-making with regard to abiding by those rules and resolving conflicts peacefully rather than through coercion or the use of force" (interview, 13 March 2017).

Michael Fuchs, former Special Advisor to Secretary Hillary Clinton and then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, confirms that, for the State Department, the overarching goal of US policy was "to shape China's own policy calculus and to encourage them to play constructively whether on security issues, trade, economic issues or others; but also to construct both bilateral and regional contacts that would show them that if they were going to take action that might undermine U.S. interests, or regional or international stability, we were going to have the ability to push back on China in those areas. And so shaping China's foreign policy decision making in the long run was a very big part" of US policy (interview, 20 October 2017).

In the process of negotiation, contestation and resistance between the US and China over the content and legitimacy of the existing rules-based order, Washington's overarching objective for developing the networked security architecture was therefore to channel and shape the trajectory of China's rise—from a position of preeminence—through a combination of resistance and accommodation so as to uphold the US-led hegemonic, rules-based order.

Conclusion

Drawing from the English School of International Relations, this paper has sought to provide an alternative explanation to dominant Structural Realist accounts of the emergence of the East Asian networked security architecture. The shifting alliance dynamics in East Asia are not merely the result of external balancing against a revisionist China. Rather, in response to China's selective contestation of the East Asia rules-based order, Washington has sought to broaden the composition of such hegemonic order by fostering defence ties with a larger range of regional powers while enmeshing the PRC through a variety of cooperative channels. By doing so, and building upon initiatives undertaken under the Clinton and Bush presidencies, the Obama administration combined a mixture of resistance and accommodation—seeking to integrate China in the existing regional order while deterring coercive actions deemed to be disruptive for such order—so as to preserve and uphold the existing hegemonic order.

By empirically substantiating this argument through a wide range of elite interviews with senior administration officials, public statements and Congressional testimonies, this paper has sought to demonstrate that an English School perspective—and, specifically, the framework presented in the Introduction to this *Special Issue*—has greater analytical value than dominant Structural Realist accounts for grasping the transition of the US-led hub-and-spokes alliance system in East Asia into a networked security architecture

Yet, the findings of this paper raise the question of whether, and to what extent, they will be confirmed (or disproved) by the Presidency of Donald Trump. The statements and the policy initiatives of the Trump administration—coupled with the President's "tweet diplomacy" and the rapid turnover of political appointees (Lu and Yourish 2018; Shepp 2018)—have conveyed contradictory signals. They bring to light a seeming bifurcation within the administration over the main thrust of American foreign policy vis-à-vis China and the rules-based order.

On the one hand, President Donald Trump appears to be adopting a more sceptical view of the legitimacy of the rules-based order as well as a more assertive and competitive stance towards the PRC.[14] He repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction with central pillars of the rules-based international order, such as the US global system of alliances and free-trade agreements (Ikenberry 2017), as concretized in the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. With regard to the PRC, the 2017 National Security Strategy suggests that China is a "revisionist power" that seeks to "challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity" through political, economic and military means (The White House 2017b: 2, 25). The 2018 National Defence Strategy therefore calls for expanding "the competitive space" in US relations with rising powers such as China (U.S. Department of Defence 2018: 4;

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[14] Concomitantly, a number of scholars and former policymakers have begun to critically assess the underlying assumptions that had guided the policies of previous administrations (see among others, Campbell and Ratner 2018; Friedberg 2018a, b).

see also Pence 2018). Furthermore, while previous American administrations had consistently sought to integrate China in the post-World War II rules-based order, the National Security Strategy appears to suggest that the US could be departing from such goal (The White House 2017b: 25). One strand of the Trump administration's foreign policy thus signals a shift in US threat perception vis-à-vis China and indicates a departure from the policy of previous administrations towards a more competitive stance vis-à-vis the PRC.

On the other hand, a competing strand within the administration's foreign policy continues to stress that the US maintains a "deep and abiding commitment to reinforcing the rules-based international order" (Mattis 2017), to encourage China's integration in the rules-based international order and to emphasize the importance of the underlying alliance system in the context of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" (Harris 2017; Mattis 2017, 2018: 17; Pompeo 2018a, b; Schriver 2018; Wong 2018). Furthermore, and crucially, the management of the US-led system of alliances and defence partnerships in East Asia by the Obama and Trump administrations is characterized by very substantial continuity.

Under the rubric of the so-called Indo-Pacific Strategy, the administration continues to foster what itself has begun to refer to as a "networked security architecture" (U.S. Department of Defence 2018: 9; U.S. Department of Defence 2018: 44–45). As explained by former Secretary of Defence Mattis (2018), the US "will continue to strengthen our alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific to a networked security architecture capable of deterring aggression, maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains. With key countries in the region, we will bring together bilateral and multilateral security relationships to preserve the free and open international system". Similarly, his successor, Patrick Shanahan, unambiguously states that the US is "strengthening and evolving U.S. alliances and partnerships into a networked security architecture to uphold the international rules-based order" (U.S. Department of Defence 2019: foreword). The 2019 Pentagon's Indo-Pacific Strategy Report goes at great length to detail the range of partnerships, minilateral groupings and multilateral fora in the Indo-Pacific through which the US will continue to develop a networked security architecture in the region (U.S. Department of Defence 2019). The networked security architecture that the Trump administration is cultivating is characterized by the very same constitutive elements as under previous administrations: strengthening mutual defence alliances; consolidating and diversifying bilateral and minilateral (tri/quadrilateral) defence arrangements; and strengthening the US engagement in multilateral institutions in East Asia, in which China is also included (Schriver 2018: 2; see also Davidson 2018).

Accordingly, notwithstanding the vagaries in its overall foreign policy, the Trump administration's approach to alliance dynamics in East Asia displays considerable continuity when compared to previous administrations. Despite a greater emphasis on the competitive dimension of US–China relations, Washington de facto continues to foster the development of a networked security architecture and to confront the rise of China through a mixture of resistance and accommodation. Nonetheless, in light of the conflicting strands at play in the decision-making process of the Trump administration, it remains to be seen whether US policy in East Asia, and the

related alliance dynamics, will remain on course or whether they will gradually drift towards a one-sided focus on Sino-American competition.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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