

Cooperation, Alignment, and Alliance: Defining Security Relationships for the 21st Century Strategic Environment

Michael MacArthur Bosack¹

The Indo-Pacific is destined to be the region of the world with the most great-power competition in the 21st century. States will be seeking to align with others, but conventional models for alliances are outmoded in the context of modern competition. This paper provides a necessary update to core concepts associated with alliances and other security relationships. It examines strategies that underwrite competition and cooperation to provide better understanding of emerging trends in the Indo-Pacific's security relationships. The nature of conflict and competition has evolved in ways that has made traditional conceptions of alliances obsolete, forcing a necessary reexamination of security relationships in the present era. Although conventional and nuclear conflict are still considerations, the broader application of diplomatic, information, and economic power in interstate competition means that traditional military alliances are ill-suited for the current strategic environment. Instead of focusing simply on the binary "ally" or "non-ally," this paper clarifies security relationships in the context of modern competition by employing six key indicators: (1) *common interests* among states; (2) *unilateral policies* directed at security relationships; (3) *routine security engagement*; (4) *negotiated policies*; (5) *negotiated instruments*; and (6) *negotiated alliance treaties*. The paper concludes that these indicators serve both as measures for security relationships as well as tools for crafting strategic ends, ways, and means. It then uses examples of relationships in the region, including those among the United States, Japan, Sri Lanka, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and China to illustrate key points. It isolates a taxonomy of security relationships under *cooperation*, *alignment*, and *alliances*, and suggests that *alignments* will be the most important in shaping the Indo-Pacific in the 21st century. This research provides key findings for states searching to build strategies for shaping security relationships in an increasingly contested region

Keywords: *Security, Alliance, Cooperation, Strategy, Indo-Pacific*

¹International University of Japan
bosack@iuj.ac.jp