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Geopolitical Competition Among Great Powers and ASEAN's Policy Preference

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Abstract

The United States has long been a security ally and economic partner of ASEAN members. The strengths of the U.S.-ASEAN partnership include cooperation on regional security, economic growth, and people-to-people ties. The United States also supports ASEAN's efforts to promote regional cooperation and integration through mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit. Moreover, the United States has demonstrated its commitment to maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region, which is consistent with ASEAN's own desire for a rules-based regional order. Due to its strategic presence in the Asia-Pacific region, the United States is considered to play a very important role in ASEAN's soft balance against China. ASEAN's hedging approach and bandwagoning are no longer relevant in the context of rising competition between China and the United States. This paper will explain the causes of China and ASEAN's lack of political and security cooperation. By combing and evaluating current literature discussing the political and security cooperation between ASEAN and ASEAN countries with China and the United States. ASEAN's security policy against China, in particular. This paper's main research method is to explain the adjustment of ASEAN's policy toward China in the context of great power geopolitics through the soft balance theory by analyzing the political and security cooperation between ASEAN and China and the United States, as well as the weapons imported by ASEAN countries from China and the United States.

Keywords: Geopolitical Competition; ASEAN; Policy Preference

1. Introduction

The Asia-Pacific area received significant attention from the Barack Obama administration. Barack Obama, who was president at the time, spoke to the Australian Parliament in July 2011. The "Asia-Pacific rebalancing" plan has officially been launched by the United States with the delivery of this speech. The "Indo-Pacific Strategy" was introduced by President Donald Trump at a time when China's "Belt and Road Initiative" was growing in importance in Southeast Asia. The United States has taken several actions to improve collaboration with ASEAN since 2011. The US-ASEAN Strategic Partnership, which intends to improve economic, political, and security ties with ASEAN, was announced by President Barack Obama in 2015. This alliance improves U.S.-ASEAN collaboration in numerous of fields, such as trade, investment, defense, counterterrorism, and emergency preparedness. U.S. engagement in regional fora governed by ASEAN: In regional gatherings organized by ASEAN, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the ASEAN-U.S. Summit, the U.S. has increased its participation. In addition to joint military exercises, these forums foster cooperation and dialogue on security, economic development, trade, and other regional issues. The United States has shown that it is committed to enhancing cooperation with ASEAN by forming strong and all-encompassing partnerships in a few sectors. Since Joe Biden took office as president, the US has worked to further solidify ties with ASEAN and Southeast Asian nations as well as its alliance and partnership by advocating for "free development" in the Indo-Pacific region. With the improvement of ASEAN's international status and its geopolitical importance, it is of great value to study ASEAN's handling of major power relations. Existing literature offers different interpretations of ASEAN's policy preference.

2. Literature review

(1) Hedging strategy for Southeast Asia's strategic choice

ASEAN's hedging strategy, which aims to maintain the balance of power in the region through alliances with external powers. ASEAN's hedging strategy is driven by the unstable security environment in Northeast and Southeast Asia, where power competition among major powers such as the United States, China, and Japan has intensified in recent years. The challenges and limitations of ASEAN's hedging strategy, such as the risk of getting caught up in a power struggle among major powers and the potential negative impact on ASEAN's cohesion and centrality. ASEAN's external hedging strategy is an adaptive response to the turbulent regional environment, and it

is also an important means of trying to maintain its autonomy and protect its own interests (Emmers and Kivimäki's,2018). Southeast Asian countries are simply promoting the continuation of U.S. military superiority in the region as a counterweight to the growing of Chinese power, and they will strive to create a regional distribution of power that mirrors U.S. hegemony or a bipolar system in which China and the U.S. balance each other's power. Instead, they strive to maintain a regional balance based on U.S. dominance. But it is not U.S. hegemony that they are after, because all-round integration and a complex balancing strategy will inevitably encourage the formation of a hierarchy of regional powers under the umbrella of this superpower, starting with the critical assimilation of China into a lower-level America's regional power status. This is in line with the goal pursued by the classic engagement strategy, that is, "to minimize conflicts and avoid wars without compromising the integrity of the existing international order." Rather than forming balancing alliances, established powers "seek to restore balance to the system by adjusting international prestige levels and territorial divisions to the new global balance of power, while maintaining the system's formal institutional arrangements and informal rules". Southeast Asian countries seek to bring China and other rising regional powers into a regional hierarchy below the United States, while strengthening the scope of regional institutions and consolidating U.S. dominance, with economic hopes and China remaining tightly coupled. The post-Cold War strategy of Southeast Asian countries is to involve all major powers with interests in East Asian security in regional security affairs, which helps to promote a hierarchical regional order that approximates the following priority distribution of power: (1) super Superposition of great powers: the United States; (2) regional powers: China; (3) regional powers: Japan and India; (4) major players in the region: ASEAN, Australia, and South Korea(Evelyn Goh,2005).Neilson and Thayer argue the concept of hedging in Southeast Asia and its implications for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations(ASEAN). The authors argue that hedging, or the strategic balancing of relations with great powers, has become a dominant approach to foreign policy in the region.This paper discussed a range of strategies adopted by ASEAN member states to guard against potential great power dominance, including building up military capabilities and diversifying economic relationships. The authors also examine the challenges and risks of hedging, including potential conflict and the difficulty of remaining neutral in a rapidly changing geopolitical environment.Overall, the paper aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on the future direction of ASEAN and the role of hedging in shaping regional dynamics. (Neilson, D., & Thayer, C. A,2019). Scholars such as Shafiah F.Muhibat and M.Waffaa Kharisma stated that ASEAN countries cannot avoid being influenced by external strategic forces. With the rise of competing Indo-Pacific strategies advocated by major

powers, ASEAN faces the challenge of maintaining its centrality. The existence of different views on connectivity strategies does not necessarily condemn strategic competition among ASEAN countries, as this is a spillover effect of competition from external rivals (Shafiah F. Muhibat and M. Waffaa Kharisma, 2022). These strategies are mutually reinforcing for the effective development of regional integration. ASEAN's principles, mechanisms, prospects, and vision need to effectively filter out the negative impact of excessive competition. The United States is paying more and more attention to ASEAN, and the economic and trade cooperation between the two sides is being further strengthened. However, the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) led by the United States, while bringing new development opportunities to relevant members of ASEAN, has also split ASEAN to a certain extent. Out of the consideration of the "balance of great powers" strategy and the "centrality of ASEAN", ASEAN not only further relies on the United States in terms of political security, but also actively strengthens economic and trade relations with the United States, trying to get rid of the situation of economic dependence on China. The relationship will not have a material negative impact on China. Once the TPP starts to operate, how much trade diversion effect it will have and what impact it will have on the trade between China and ASEAN need to be studied. Especially for Vietnam, TPP's rules of origin are unfavorable to Vietnam's import of raw materials from China (non-TPP member), which may lead Vietnam to reduce its imports from China and import from TPP member countries instead. The hedging strategy is suitable to explain the behavior of ASEAN in recent years, even if it refuses to "embrace" major powers. All hedging concepts cannot be fully designed to controllably reduce or eliminate uncertain risks. Some small countries use hedging strategies mainly to maintain the balance of great power. Because of its history, culture, and special relationship with both major powers, a small country has become a defender or challenger of the order of a great power, so it either chooses to take sides or balance (Wang Yuzhu, 2021).

(2) ASEAN countries' policy preferences

The United States is deeply advancing the "Indo-Pacific strategy" to contain China's influence in the region. Unlike Trump's "neglect" of ASEAN, During President Joe Biden administration has stepped up its strategic layout in the ASEAN region since he came to power. Based on geopolitical competition, the United States uses the "Quadruple Security Dialogue" mechanism to shape a small multilateral alliance, revive the partnership between the US government and ASEAN through high-level dialogue, and try to deal with China through multilateral and bilateral alliance partnership networks. In addition, the Biden administration Positively stated that the United States is willing to carry out international anti-epidemic cooperation

with ASEAN countries. The Biden administration has increased public health assistance to Southeast Asian countries and donated vaccines to ASEAN countries to counter China's efforts to help the region deal with the epidemic. The United States is upgrading its geopolitical confrontation, consolidating its partnership network with Southeast Asia, restoring its traditional influence in Southeast Asia, and intending to gain more support from its allies when implementing the "Indo-Pacific Strategy". Therefore, in at present and in the future, how to properly respond to the US "Indo-Pacific strategy" and the new situation in the South China Sea region is a strategic test for China and ASEAN countries (Fan Zuojun,2021). China and ASEAN There are three main challenges facing the political aspect: the "China Threat Theory", the South China Sea issue, and major power relations. Since the "China Threat Theory" was put forward, the United States, Japan and some European countries have begun to hype this issue and pay attention to it. The number of problems and areas is also increasing, and the content forms are various (Tu Niansong & Tu Qijun,2018). Western countries can always find excuses to put pressure on China, such as the Tibet issue, human rights issues, South China Sea issues, military threats, and economic threats. It seems that the common problems facing the world are all related to China's rise. In the 1990s, with the rapid development of China's economy and the continuous improvement of political influence, some ASEAN countries had "warning and doubts" about China. in the past 10 years, South China Sea disputes have been attracting attention. As China builds islands in the middle of the South China Sea, in less than two years, China has turned seven islands into seven military bases, making the South China Sea one of the most disputed waters in the world. Before the conflict is resolved, the South China Sea claimants in Southeast Asia hope to usher in more external intervention, and the United States is one of the most important participants. Even the formation of AUKUS and QUAD later made China more aggressive. Tensions are also increasing in the region (Yunus Erbas,2022). The growing of China threat theory in Southeast Asia. but it is still difficult to eliminate the inherent fear of China in small Southeast Asian countries. Southeast Asian countries Some governments and people are full of doubts about the "Belt and Road" proposed by China and full of insecurity about strengthening the interconnection construction project with China, which has affected the implementation of the "Belt and Road" construction project. Vietnam and the Philippines, which have maritime disputes with China, hope to reduce their economic dependence on China and diversify their foreign economic relations to reduce economic security risks (Quan Yi, Yin Zhu,2017).

2.1 Limitations and deficiencies of existing research

First, ASEAN countries have traditionally used hedging strategies to balance relations with China and the United States, as these two countries are important economic and strategic partners of ASEAN. But in recent years, the tension between China and the United States has escalated, and the United States has been more active in pushing its allies to take a tough stance against China. This has created a difficult situation for ASEAN, because the United States wants its allies to support it to balance China. In addition, the rise of China in recent years has made Southeast Asia more and more economically dependent on China, but at the same time, some Southeast Asian countries and China have the South China Sea dispute. The dispute over the issue presents ASEAN with a dilemma between not wanting to anger China and risk economic retaliation, but also don't want to give up its territorial claims in the South China Sea. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult for ASEAN countries to use hedging strategies to balance their relations with China and the United States. They face pressure from both sides to take sides, forcing them to make difficult choices about alliances and policies.

Second, previous studies mainly focused on the South China Sea issue or cooperation between Southeast Asian countries and China. Some scholars focused too narrowly on specific countries or problems. Some scholars also try to analyze ASEAN's behavior of balancing China through the theory of balance of power. For example, institutional balancing and other perspectives, but Southeast Asia is an organization with complex and diversified behaviors. At the same time, institutional balancing is sometimes difficult to distinguish from traditional foreign policies. ASEAN's institutional balancing toward China may not be as expected by previous scholars. Obviously then, because ASEAN operates on consensus-based decision-making, which makes it difficult for the organization to take a unified and tough stance against China. ASEAN also places importance on maintaining good relations with all major powers in the region, including China, to avoid escalating tensions. Thus, institutional balancing against China may not be as evident in ASEAN's actions as in other regions or organizations, through more explicit alignments with certain major powers. Furthermore, the notion of institutional balancing in ASEAN's actions toward China may also be exaggerated, as it assumes that all ASEAN members have the same level of concern about China's actions, which is not necessarily the case. ASEAN members have varying degrees of dependence, interests, and threat perceptions on China, which may affect their approach to institutional balancing.

Finally, some scholars try to explain the ASEAN dialogue policy from the perspective of exceptionalism. One possible explanation is that ASEAN is a diverse region, and member states have different priorities and interests, which may be reflected in their foreign policies toward China. In addition,

ASEAN may be pursuing a hedging strategy, that is, adopting a strategy of combining engagement and deterrence against China, rather than balancing. However, although ASEAN's behavior does not clearly show its balancing against China, this does not mean ASEAN's behavior is bandwagon rather than balancing. Regarding the use of exceptionalism to explain this phenomenon, individual member states may have their own exceptionalism beliefs or tendencies, which may affect their foreign policy toward China. It may not be fully applicable.

3. Methodology

This paper collects a large amount of research information by searching for domestic and foreign literature to deeply understand the historical background, current situation, and trend of the research topic, and then analyzes and compares these findings to better find and solve the weaknesses and deficiencies in the existing research, which can serve as a reference and guidance value for future research and ASEAN research. Secondly, this paper will explain ASEAN's behavior toward China through the soft balance theory. By comparing the political and security cooperation between ASEAN and China and the United States, as well as ASEAN's arms import from China and the United States, ASEAN has soft balancing toward China.

4. Balancing of Major Power by ASEAN

4.1 Soft Balancing Theory

Kenneth Waltz describes balance of power as a stabilizing factor in international politics. He believes that a balance of power in international politics can help prevent a superpower from monopolizing global politics and economics. Through mutual balancing the interests of various countries can be balanced, and wars and conflicts can be avoided. In Waltz's perspective, soft balancing is a kind of insurance mechanism for the distribution of power in international politics, so that even if one country becomes stronger, it will not pose a threat to others. Through alliances, diplomacy, and the balance of force, though not necessarily a balanced distribution of power, but hopefully some improvement on the status quo (Mearsheimer, J. J. ,2006). Stephen M. Walter a well-known scholar in the field of international relations, explained the concept and purpose of balance in his book *The Origin of Alliances*. According to Walter, the balance of power is actions taken by one state or group of states to offset the growing power of another state or group of states. The purpose of balancing is to maintain a stable distribution of power and prevent any one country or group of countries from dominating the international system. Mearsheimer argues that states will seek either internal or external equilibrium according to the distribution of power in the

international system. When one country or group of countries becomes too powerful, others seek to balance of power. Mearsheimer argues that this behavior is driven by the anarchy of the international system, with no higher authority to guarantee the security of individual states (John J., 1994). According to Wolfers, the core condition of the international system is the just and balanced distribution of power. He stressed the importance of balancing as key to maintaining international order and stability. He further divides the conditions of balancing into two types: internal balancing and external balancing. Internal balancing refers to the control of the balance of power through the internal systems of the state, such as the implementation of democratic institutions and the rule of law. External balancing refers to the balance of power control through international organizations, treaties, agreements, and other international multilateral cooperation mechanisms (Wolfers, Arnold,1962).

However, because "hard balancing", has a certain threshold for a country's power, some scholars point out the concept of soft balancing. Robert A believes that in a unipolar system, the cost to balance the great powers is too high, states usually use the strategy of soft balance to counter the unipolar powers, by establishing military alliances, strengthening arms trading, and cross-regional economic cooperation to achieve the purpose of balance (Robert A.Pape,2005). Another representative of soft balancing theory T.V.Paul believes that soft balancing can be achieved through strategic balancing, specifically through diplomatic decisions, so as to effectively check the monopoly of distribution by great powers without directly challenging the military superiority of major powers (T.V.Paul,2005).

4.2 ASEAN Soft Balancing Toward China

China and ASEAN have significantly increased their degree of political exchange and cooperation since the 21st, and they have grown closer as partners in Asia-Pacific international affairs. Both sides' international standing has greatly improved. The status of China and ASEAN has been upgraded to "Strategic Partnership" from "Comprehensive Dialogue Partner". However, in the context of major power competition, ASEAN is facing many challenges, which require careful consideration and strategic action. One of ASEAN's most pressing challenges at a time when great power competition is intensifying is the need to balance its relationship with these two major powers.

According to the official information, since 2009, China has continued to maintain the status of ASEAN's largest trading partner. ASEAN-China trade has more than doubled since 2010 (accounting for 18% of ASEAN's total trade) and has almost quadrupled since the 2005 China-ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement came into force. From 2010 to 2019, ASEAN's exports to

China grew at an average annual rate of 10.4%, while ASEAN's imports from China increased at an average annual rate of 12.5%. ASEAN's trade deficit with China increased from US\$10.4 billion in 2010 to US\$102.9 billion in 2019. According to preliminary data from ASEAN, China's FDI (foreign direct investment) in ASEAN reached US\$9.1 billion in 2019, accounting for 5.7% of the total FDI in the region. In terms of the economy, China and ASEAN's collaboration is significant, but when it comes to political security, it primarily takes two different forms. First, via peaceful negotiations, China and ASEAN were able to resolve the South China Sea dispute. Guidelines for the application of the DOC, or Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, were agreed upon by the parties in July 2011. Consultations on a code of conduct for the South China Sea were started in September 2013. The two parties released a joint statement in July 2016 regarding the complete and successful implementation of the DOC. The framework of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea was adopted at a meeting of the foreign ministers of China and ASEAN on August 6, 2017, in Manila. A single draft of the "Guiding Opinions" was created in June 2018. The first reading of the Guidelines text was finished earlier than expected in July 2019, and the second reading was finished in May 2022. Second, China conducted cooperative maritime exercises with nations in Southeast Asia in 2018 and 2019. The ADMM-PLUS Counter-Terrorism Expert Group was co-chaired in 2019 by China and Thailand, who also hosted the mechanism's first major military drills.

As a comparison, ASEAN and the United States have more varied methods and more in-depth material for their political and security cooperation. At the U.S. Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta, the United States became the first nation to have a dedicated military adviser officer in 2011. The United States joined the East Asia Summit in November 2011, giving it a forum for discussion of problems relating to regional security and enhancing strategic communication between ASEAN and the United States. The Secretary of Defense first hosted ASEAN Defense ministers in the US in 2014 as part of the Southeast Asia Maritime Law Enforcement Initiative (SEAMLEI), 2014 (Shield of Partnership Exercise 2014, SOPEX 14), which was formed in 2013. In 2015, the United States announced the appointment of a new ASEAN Technical adviser. The Sunny Lands Summit was the first summit between the US and ASEAN to be held solely in the US, and it was hosted by the US. At the informal US-ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting in the Philippines in October 2017, James Mattis proposed the development of the ASEAN-US Defense Partnership Maritime Exercise (AUMX). President Donald Trump signed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018 on December 31, 2018. During the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting held in Singapore in October 2018, the ASEAN defense ministers accepted the

execution of the agreement, which was reviewed and proposed by the ASEAN Chiefs of Naval Staff in August 2018. Following that, Thailand and the US decided to co-organize AUMX. The first naval drills between the United States and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have taken place. More than 1,000 military personnel from the US and ASEAN countries participated in the 2019 ASEAN-US exercise. Focused on advancing maritime safety and security via shared awareness, technical cooperation, and the exchange of information and skills between the United States and ASEAN, the current U.S.-ASEAN Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) exercise in September 2019 to implement the AUMX. The ASEAN Vision for the Indo-Pacific Maritime Pillar would be implemented with the cooperation of the United States, it has been made clear. The U.S. announced \$60 million for a new regional maritime project, with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) serving as the initiative's primary coordinator. To increase USCG assistance to Southeast Asian maritime law enforcement organizations, the State Department and USCG will send a training team to the area. This team will receive further committed support from US-based trainers. These technical specialists will help regionally affiliated maritime law enforcement agencies enhance their institutional, readiness, equipment, and staff capability. The U.S. Coast Guard and the State Department will provide ASEAN with new training on energy security, protection of critical maritime infrastructure, and response to all hazards.

4.3 ASEAN countries' s arms trade

China's arms exports to ASEAN countries (unit: millions of US dollars)

Year/ Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
CAM	4			16	39					2	1		23	14	99
LAO				16	16		1		2	51	9				95
MYM	19	5	277	251	185	63	180	215	115	98	50	4	54	102	1622
IDN		2	8	64	73	34	38	40	34	66	14	17	2		343
THL	1		2	18	22	7	1	77	131	52	97	6	29	2	453
VET															None
PHI															None
MLS	5										28		55	28	115
SGP															None
BRU															None

Resources : SIPRI Arms Transfers database,
<https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php>

U. S.'s arms exports to ASEAN countries (unit: millions of US dollars)

Year/ Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
CAM															None
LAO															None
MYM															None
IDN			0	35	84	150	83	94	246	89	21	87	101	14	1004
THL	4	1	50	21	54	32	27	46	29	49	10	24		49	396
VET									54				54	0	108
PHI	0		60	6	55	12	46	82	23	2	10	60	92	16	463
MLS	10	12	2		6	10	4	10	4		1	1		26	84
SGP	720	691	453	432	623	23	75	557	113	57	22	6	106	266	4150
BRU					15	36	36						0		87

Resource : SIPRI Arms Transfers database,
<https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php>

The Cold War and the subsequent ASEAN-China ties are largely to blame for Southeast Asia's behavior toward China and the US. Land Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar) did not profit from the then-dominant U.S. order during or after the Cold War. The United States fought at various levels during the Cold War to stop the growth of the Communist Party in the Cambodian Civil War, the Vietnam War, and the Laos Crisis. While Burma has chosen a self-isolationist stance, neither U.S. aid nor markets matter to these nations. According to the General Trend Index (TIV) of China and US military trade with these three countries, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos are obviously highly dependent on China. China has played a significant role in the development of these countries, so they have generally developed close relations with China. However, only Myanmar (1,622 million) has a strong overall trend indicator, whereas Laos (99 million) and Cambodia (95 million) have poor indicators.

Second, South China Sea claimants like the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia are significant elements influencing how ASEAN nations interact with the US and China. These nations are keener to use American might ensure their own security and have tighter security cooperation with the United States as the South China Sea problem heats up. (Thailand, Philippines) The Philippines relies heavily on the United States for its weapons imports and there is some military cooperation between the two nations as well as a mutual defense treaty. Vietnam would increase military collaboration in some sectors, despite not directly asking the US for security help. In this regard, US

weaponry sales to the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei are crucial to their economies.

However, Singapore has always been able to uphold positive relations with China and the United States among ASEAN nations due to its significance as an economic and financial hub of ASEAN and its considerable political and diplomatic influence in ASEAN. However, TIV data shows that Singapore has been the top ASEAN importer of US weapons from 2009 until now, and Singapore has no records of military trade with China during this time. Since 2009, the ASEAN nations of Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia have traded military goods with both China and the United States. The target amount for China and Indonesia to purchase US weaponry is 343 million and 1004 million, respectively. Target dollar amounts for Thailand's arms purchases from the US and China are 396 million and 453, respectively. Although the trend value of Malaysia's arms trade with the United States is \$84 million and that with China is \$115 million, Malaysia has been aggressively fostering excellent relations with China in recent years. And many of China's imports are small guns and equipment. According to the aforementioned information on the arms trade between China and the United States and ASEAN nations, the military dependence of ASEAN nations on the United States is still very significant. This is another example of how ASEAN is soft-balancing actions towards China.

Conclusion

Since the US suggested rebalancing its power in the Asia-Pacific, ASEAN organizations' attitudes toward China have changed subtly and covertly. The relationship between ASEAN member states and major powers differ in some ways. However, with China's rapid rise, ASEAN member states recognize that China's influence may jeopardize the region's steady development, but ASEAN's might be still insufficient to oppose China. Therefore, the best approach for ASEAN to balance China is to deepen security cooperation with another major power. ASEAN continues to rely on the strength of the United States to protect its own interests in the face of an intensifying rivalry among global nations. It aims to intensify political and security cooperation with the US, particularly in South China Sea concerns and security. This article discovers the political and security cooperation between ASEAN countries with China and the United States after searching and studying the current literature. The argument is supported by data on the arms imports of ASEAN countries from China and the United States as well as the analysis of the political security cooperation between China and the United States with ASEAN. ASEAN adopts a balanced strategy toward China in the form of soft balancing by strengthening relations with the United States, expanding the scope of joint military exercises between the two countries,

accepting military assistance from the United States, and importing a large number of American-made weapons and military hardware. ASEAN will still be forced to decide which side to support in the ongoing rivalry between China and the United States. To overcome obstacles, ASEAN must advance its international standing and accelerate its integration.

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