

Russia in the South China Sea: Balancing and Hedging¹

ALEXANDER KOROLEV
University of New South Wales

Although on the surface Russia remains distant and disengaged from the South China Sea (SCS) dispute, its comprehensive strategic partnership relations and large-scale arms deals with China and Vietnam—Russia’s closest Asian allies but also major rival parties to the dispute—reveal that Moscow has strategic interests and goals that affect, directly or indirectly, the evolution of the dispute. Russia’s ambivalent stance toward the dispute in the form of supporting both China and Vietnam is the manifestation of two different modes of great power behavior that unfold at different levels but happen to intersect in the SCS. One is systemic balancing, which is aimed at checking and blocking the strongest power in the system—the United States. The other is regional hedging, which combines engagement and containment and helps to avoid taking one side at the obvious expense of another. These two different modes of great power behavior coexist in Russia’s behavior toward the SCS. Untangling the two levels sheds light on the essence and evolution of Russia’s policies in the region, which have created a win-win situation, however imperfect, for China and Vietnam and have contributed to the formation of a more manageable negotiation environment.

Introduction

Russia’s behavior in the South China Sea (SCS) dispute represents a puzzle for international relations scholars. On the surface, Russia’s official approach is to persuade the rival claimants and the broader international community that Russia is an extra-regional player that has no direct stakes in the SCS and, therefore, prefers not to be involved. However, behind the façade of disengagement are large-scale energy and arms deals with the major disputants. Most puzzling are Russia’s relations with China and Vietnam—the two major rival parties in the SCS and, simultaneously, Russia’s closest and most important Asian partners. According to some assessments, having close ties with both countries places Russia in a difficult position (Portyakov 2015, 84); Russia must eventually choose a side. However, in parallel with the intensification of China-Vietnam territorial tensions since 2010, Moscow has pursued a policy

Dr. Alexander Korolev is a lecturer in politics and international relations in the School of Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. His research interests include international relations theory and comparative politics with special reference to China and Russia. His recent articles have appeared in various peer-reviewed journals, including *Critical Review*, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, *International Studies Review*, *Pacific Affairs*, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *The China Review*, and others.

¹An earlier version of this paper was presented at the “South China Sea: Impact on Major Power Relations and Regional Stability” conference, co-organized by the Centre on Asia and Globalisation (CAG) of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, and the Australia–China Relations Institute (ACRI), University of Technology Sydney in Sydney, Australia, on 10–11 February, 2017. I am grateful to the organizers for inviting me to this conference and to the participants of the conference for providing valuable feedback.

of enhancing military and economic cooperation with both countries. Russia's partnership with China has progressed substantially but so has Russia-Vietnam cooperation. The simultaneous enhancement of military cooperation with both Beijing and Hanoi inevitably makes Russia a factor in the geopolitical configurations surrounding the SCS dispute, revealing that although Moscow has no territorial claims, it has strategic goals and interests that can have a direct effect on the dispute.

Most of the existing assessments interpret Russia-China-Vietnam relations in zero-sum terms.² Thus, the resumption of the Russia-Vietnam partnership is pictured as a means for Russia to contain or balance against the alleged Chinese threat (Rinna 2016; Tran, Vieira, and Ferreira-Pereira 2013). According to this narrative, Russia worries about overdependence upon an increasingly influential China and tries to arm or conclude economic deals with Vietnam and other actual or potential adversaries of China in the SCS and in Asia more broadly. The converse side of such an interpretation is based on the evidence of a growing military entente between China and Russia. It pictures Russia as siding with China at the cost of relations with other regional partners, including Vietnam, particularly after the Ukraine Crisis. According to this story, as a China-Russia strategic alignment grows, Russia is likely to snub those of its partners who are at odds with China (Baev and Tønnesson 2015).

Although these interpretations grasp some divergent trends in Russia's behavior, they are incomplete and present only snapshots of the complex reality. First, they make the coexistence of the Russia-China and Russia-Vietnam strategic partnerships a sheer paradox. However, both relationships have existed and even progressed for quite some time, which reveals that their coexistence possesses a certain degree of sustainability. Second, although Russia does try to enhance cooperation with Vietnam and other regional states, its cooperation with China continues to grow, and there is no evidence of Russia intentionally trying to slow it down. Rather, Moscow is willing to push cooperation with Beijing to new levels. Should Russia have serious worries about China, it would be trying, or at least showing an intention, to limit the scale and depth of the China-Russia partnership. Third, the Russia-Vietnam partnership should not be underestimated because it has been growing despite and independently of Russia-China relations. In summary, cooperating with both China and its rival claimants in the sovereignty dispute characterizes Russia's policies in the SCS.

This paper argues that to untangle this situation, one must "zoom out" to see the logic of both international systemic and nonsystemic (regional and domestic) levels of great power behavior. Theoretically, the paper contributes by clarifying the concepts of hedging and balancing and demonstrating how they can be used for the analysis of great power politics and policies involving complex international issues. Empirically, it explains the complexity and ambivalence of Russia's behavior toward the SCS dispute. The paper shows that the SCS is the point of intersection of Russia's policies of "systemic balancing" and those of "regional hedging." The former are motivated by the power distribution and threat perception within the international system, and they materialize in a balancing response against the unipolar dominance of the system leader—the United States.³ The latter is a non-system-level "insurance policy" that is motivated by causal forces other than the systemic power-and-threat distribution and emerges as measures aimed at the diversification

² A rare exception is Elizabeth Wishnick, who argues that Russia's simultaneous relations with both China and Vietnam are more complex and are likely to continue, at least for some time. See Wishnick (2016).

³ The issue of the United States' unipolar dominance this paper repeatedly refers to as a systemic condition is hardly clear-cut. Many have argued that the post-Cold War international system is gravitating toward multipolarity, bipolarity, "nonpolarity," or the like. See, for example, Haass (2008); Zakaria (2009); Layne (2012); Acharya (2014); Posen (2012). What matters for this paper, however, is not whether the world remains unquestionably unipolar (whatever is implied by unipolarity) but simply that there is a systemic power pole that is significantly stronger than the rest; therefore, other great powers are expected to balance against it. That the United States is still, by large margins, the most powerful player in the system is empirically straightforward. See, for example, Taylor (2015).

of Russia's regional links and the prevention of potential instability that can harm its economic interests in the Asia-Pacific region. The different incentives generated by these two prongs explain the pattern of Russia's behavior in the SCS, particularly Russia's relations with China and Vietnam.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 outlines Moscow's official approach to the SCS dispute and policies toward both China and Vietnam. Section 2 elaborates the theoretical framework by specifying "balancing" and "hedging" as two intrinsic but distinct aspects of great power behavior. Section 3 examines the systemic-balancing component of Russia's behavior toward the SCS, whereas Section 4 explicates its hedging dimension. Section 5 concludes by further elaborating how the potential prevalence of balancing vis-à-vis hedging, and vice versa, can shape Russia's policies in the SCS dispute or elsewhere. Throughout the analysis, the paper draws on original Russian sources, including official documents, media, analytical reports, and academic publications that have been absent from English-language analyses of Russia's policies toward the SCS.

Russia's Approach to the South China Sea: Formal Rhetoric and Actual Behavior

At the official level, Russia has consistently been displaying a neutral "middle of the road" posture toward the SCS dispute. Because Moscow is not a territorial claimant, it has never formally accepted or publicly backed any involved country's sovereignty or position over the disputed territories. Russia's official line emphasizes disengagement and includes:

- advocating a peaceful resolution of the SCS dispute while calling for self-restraint among the disputants and for political-diplomatic solutions acceptable to all;
- not taking a position on the legitimacy of territorial claims;
- calling for adherence by all parties to the United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982;
- supporting the implementation of the 2002 ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and emphasizing the importance of moving from DOC to a well-developed Code on Conduct (COC) of Parties in the South China Sea;
- standing against any interference by extra-regional nations in the dispute.

These principles have been reiterated in different forms and settings, and Russia has been consistently propagating them to the international community and to both China and China's opponents in the SCS dispute.⁴

Unlike the United States, Russia has never publicly questioned the legitimacy of China's "nine-dash line," which in the context of growing China-US tensions has at times been interpreted as indirect support of China (*Lenta.ru* 2016). However, in response to media speculation, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated on July 14, 2016: "[Russia] had never been a participant in the South China Sea disputes," that it "would not be involved in them," and that "we consider it a matter of principle not to side with any party" (*MoFARF* 2016c). Moscow's official rhetoric changed slightly toward being more pro-China after the July 2016 Hague Tribunal Ruling on the SCS dispute in favor of the Philippines. However, upon closer examination, it is clear that the related official statements

⁴For example, they appeared in Russia-Vietnam and Russia-China joint statements. See *President of Russia* (2012) and *President of Russia* (2016).

were carefully crafted against the legitimacy of the institution of The Hague Arbitration Court, which Moscow has its own strong reason to challenge, and do not indicate support of anyone's territorial sovereignty. Moreover, the subsequent official statements made by Russian diplomats in Thailand, China, and other places reiterate the aforementioned positions of neutrality and disengagement.⁵ As far as the SCS dispute is concerned, Moscow has been unwilling to spend political capital to support either Beijing or its rivals and has preferred to remain aloof from the SCS conundrum.

Moscow's diplomatic posture of disengagement, however, is in discord with Russia's actual behavior in the region, which suggests the existence of broader strategic goals. In 2014, Russian naval activities in Southeast Asia intensified substantially and included drills in the Philippine and Coral Seas, with calls to the ports in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia (MoDRF 2014). During the G20 Summit in Brisbane on November 15–16, 2014, the ships of the Russian Pacific Fleet conducted operations off Australia's Queensland coast (BBC Russia 2014). Throughout 2015 and 2016, the Russian Pacific Fleet conducted tens of maneuvers with the Navy task groups either passing through the SCS or operating in the nearby areas to demonstrate Russia's capacity to mount considerable military power in the region.

In this context, Russia-China relations have been developing steadily and have reached the level of "comprehensive strategic partnership of equality, mutual trust, mutual support, common prosperity and long-lasting friendship" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Slovenia 2016). At the Munich Security Conference on February 4, 2012, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated, "We will never participate in any arrangements aimed at containing China" (MoFARF 2012). Simultaneously, both Moscow and Beijing emphasized that their positions on major international issues are "either similar or identical" (Portyakov 2015, 143). President Putin has even referred to China as Russia's "natural partner and natural ally" (Sputnik 2014). In 2014 and 2015, China and Russia concluded historic energy deals, and on June 25, 2016, Putin and Xi signed *The Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China*, which states that both sides should support each other "on the issues concerning each other's security, territorial integrity, sovereignty, and other core interests" (President of Russia 2016). Moscow's arms supply to Beijing, which occupies the lion's share of China's total arms imports, recently included twenty-four Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets and four battalions of S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems (Krecyl 2014). Simultaneously, the geographic scope of Russia-China joint annual naval drills, the "Joint Sea," has expanded considerably. Thus, "Joint Sea-2015" occurred in the heart of NATO—the Mediterranean (Marcus 2015). "Joint Sea-2016" became the first drill of this kind that involved China and another country in the waters of the disputed SCS after the Hague tribunal came up with the ruling on China's territorial claims under the "nine-dash line" and included "joint island-seizing" exercises, which were absent from the previous "Joint Seas" (Panda 2016). Given the international circumstances, the very existence of these exercises has triggered speculation about Moscow unequivocally siding with China and switching toward proactive military support of China in the SCS (Buckley 2016).

This, indeed, could have been true if not for Russia's growing relations with Vietnam. In July 2012, Russia and Vietnam signed the *Joint Statement on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Intensification*, which has elevated their bilateral relations to the status of "comprehensive strategic partnership," roughly similar in nature to the relations Russia has with China (President of Russia 2012). When visiting Moscow in 2012, the President of Vietnam Trương Tấn Sang stated, "[The] consolidation of relations of our traditional friendship and development of comprehensive strategic partnership with the Russian Federation is one of the top priorities of Vietnam's

⁵ See, for example, MoFARF (2016d).

foreign policy” (Kobelev 2014, 7). During his visit to Hanoi in November 2013, President Putin called Vietnam “a key partner of Russia in the Asia-Pacific region” (Kozyrev 2014, 9). Simultaneously, Russia enhanced energy and military cooperation with Vietnam and increased the transfers of advanced weapons systems that enhance Vietnam’s defense capabilities. In this context, the Vietnamese Defense Minister called Russia “Vietnam’s leading strategic partner in the area of military-technical cooperation” (*Sputnik* 2013). In 2013, the two countries concluded a military cooperation pact that formalized Russia-Vietnam defense cooperation and established mechanisms for information exchange. At the same time, Russia has been assisting Vietnam in building a submarine base and repair dockyards at Cam Ranh Bay (a former Soviet military base in Vietnam). In November 2014, the two countries signed an agreement considerably simplifying the use of this facility by the Russian Navy and Air Force (TASS 2014). Vietnamese President Trương Tấn Sang clarified that Russia’s new activity at Cam Ranh Bay does not mean turning the base over to Russia for use as a military base. However, he emphasized that the port will be used for the development of military cooperation between the two countries and that, as a traditional friend and strategic partner, Russia will enjoy definite strategic privileges there (Lokshin 2014, 52).

Similar to how Russia’s cooperation with China can be interpreted as an indication of its support for China in the SCS dispute, Russia’s policies toward Vietnam can be viewed as an indication of Moscow’s support of Hanoi. To explain this pattern of Moscow’s behavior, it is useful to discern two modes of behavior related to two different levels of great power foreign policy—balancing and hedging—and to demonstrate how these two modes operate in the context of the SCS dispute. The moves by Russia that appear to work both in China’s interests and against them can, in fact, be manifestations of parts of different strategies of balancing or hedging. The same applies to Russia’s policies toward Vietnam, depending upon the degree of US involvement in the region’s affairs.

Hedging, Balancing, and Great Power Politics

The terms “balancing” and “hedging” are widely used in the international relations literature. However, the conceptual distinction between the two requires further elaboration. As demonstrated below, balancing and hedging represent two different modes of state behavior that are associated with different patterns of causation and different levels of analysis. Balancing is a system-level phenomenon, whereas hedging is best explained by nonsystemic causal factors.⁶ This conceptualization is based on several theoretical distinctions.

The first distinction is that balancing is a behavior of great powers and is directed against the strongest power or the greatest threat in the system. However, hedging involves a vast range of players, large and small, engaged in a mix of versatile day-to-day policies in various areas of state interests that are not necessarily aimed at the system leader. Indeed, according to Levy (2003, 141), “when most balance of power theorists talk about states balancing power, there is generally an unstated assumption that it is the most powerful states in the system (. . .) who do balancing, not states in general.” At the same time, the great powers balance against the most powerful state—the one that threatens to achieve, or has already achieved, a position of hegemony in the system. Hedging, in turn, characterizes the behavior of

⁶The initial idea of presenting hedging as a nonsystemic mode of state behavior by contrasting it to systemic balancing can be found in Korolev (2016b). One must recognize, however, that the theoretical distinction here is made in terms of relative, rather than absolute, utility of different levels of analysis. It is not implied that the system-level explanations are completely irrelevant for understanding regional hedging or that unit-level factors have absolutely nothing to say about balancing; to have a full picture, variables of all levels must be considered. Rather, it means that for hedging, the systemic forces are not the immediate drivers and that it is nonsystemic factors that will generate a greater causal yield.

both small and great powers,⁷ with the latter simultaneously balancing at the systemic level and doing many other things (e.g., hedging) to utilize the abundant international opportunities they have and to fulfill their multiple interests that are not directly related to the pressure coming from the systemic hegemon. The system should be better at explaining basic patterns of balancing that involve the most powerful states, whereas hedging should be more directly affected by other causal forces, such as situations in immediate geopolitical environments or other unit-level circumstances.

The second difference is that hedging is less linear than balancing is and is best described as an “engage-and-resist strategy” that consists of both agreements and disagreements over certain issues simultaneously occurring between states. According to Goh (2005, viii), hedging is a set of strategies that “cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side at the obvious expense of another.” As such, hedging consists of counteracting actions that are a mix of “balancing/containment and engagement” (Goh 2006); of “cooperation and competition” (Medeiros 2005); of “risk contingency,” which can take the shape of indirect balancing, and “return maximization,” which can turn into limited bandwagoning (Kuik 2008, 171). Hedging, thus, can include the elements of balancing and bandwagoning in one pattern of action. According to Medeiros (2005, 145), hedging involves policies that “on the one hand, stress engagement and integration mechanisms and, on the other hand, emphasize realist-style balancing in the form of external security cooperation.” Nadkarni (2010, 45), who analyzed relations between secondary great powers such as Russia, China, and India, associates hedging with “neither classic balancing nor bandwagoning” but instead views it as the “engage-and-resist” strategies, which are routine policies responsive to domestic and regional environments. For example, as Russia or India develops closer ties with China, their mutual partnership “serves as a hedge for each in the event of a downturn in their respective ties with China” (Nadkarni 2010, 102). Hedging, therefore, is inherently contradictory and can meander between counteracting cooperation and competition, or balancing and bandwagoning, as long as it serves the goal of diversifying stakes and risks, avoiding overdependence, or preventing some other undesirable scenarios.

Although balancing might take different forms, its overarching target is always to check and block an aggressor—a rising or established hegemon. Balancing is “a countervailing policy designed to improve abilities to prosecute military missions in order to deter and/or defeat another state” (Elman 2003, 8). Balancing can be external or internal, but in both cases, it “involves blocking the ambitions of the other side, taking actions to prevent it from achieving its goals of dominance” (Vasquez 2003, 91). Thus, bandwagoning or otherwise cooperating with the potential aggressor or hegemon (which is a part of the dual nature of hedging) would not be balancing because it does not check, block, or otherwise detract from, or perhaps even aids, the power of the hegemon. Nor can the neutral middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side at the obvious expense of another that characterizes hedging be counted as instances of systemic balancing because it does not straightforwardly check or block.

The straightforward nature of balancing makes it a good fit with the systemic monocausal explanations, whereas presenting hedging as being due to systemic pressure would mean explaining by the same variable both balancing *and* bandwagoning by the same state, toward the same state, and at the same time. The result is a situation in which both the evidence of a phenomenon—balancing in all shades—and its counterevidence—bandwagoning in all shades—which are combined in the concept of hedging, are explained by one causal force—the structural configuration of the international system. In this situation, systemic theories become unfalsifiable

⁷ For hedging by small states, see, among many, Goh (2006); Kuik (2008); Jackson (2014). For great power hedging, see, Tessman and Wolfe (2011); Tessman (2012); Wolfe (2013).

because there will always be some evidence that proves the role of the system. Establishing causality becomes impossible because any evidence will be a good fit with the theory, and any causal argument can be asserted through a rational actor reconstruction of the presumed motives of state behavior. Structural realists diverge on whether second-tier powers should be expected to bandwagon the system leader or balance against it. However, because realism is a parsimonious theory that is insensitive to domestic or regional geopolitical conditions, one would expect a uniform behavior that is *either* balancing *or* bandwagoning and not a combination of both (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012, 121).

The third difference is ontological and concerns the difference between “foreign policy” and “international politics,” as highlighted by Kenneth Waltz (1996). Namely, hedging, as it stands in the literature, is a better fit with foreign policy rather than with the international politics approach. In the Waltzean theory, the crux of international politics is the irreversible emergence of balancing, driven by the structural pressure of the international system, and the restoration of the balance of power. It is not about the “how” and “when” of state behavior but rather about dispositional pressures of the system and basic reactions to such pressures. According to Waltz, system-level forces are good at explaining international outcomes and general modes of great power behavior, such as balancing and bandwagoning, but not the varieties of states’ acts in a particular place at a particular time. The move to the third image (the systemic level of explanation) in his theory of international politics comes with an important caveat: “Of necessity, realist theory is better at saying what will happen than in saying when it will happen . . . international political theory deals with the pressures of structure on states and *not with how states will respond to the pressures* [emphasis added]. The latter is a task for theories about how national governments respond to pressures on them and take advantage of opportunities that may be present” (Waltz 2000, 27). The key parameters of structural realism—balance of power and security—can explain balancing, but taken alone they fail (or do not claim) to explain the various motives and acts of states that occur outside of the realm of systemic balancing and involve the plethora of day-to-day agreements and disagreements over certain issues that constitute “hedging.”

Hedging is a better fit with foreign policy, which can take a variety of forms and is subject to a myriad of causes other than the pressure of the international system (Waltz 2010). The foreign policy analytical approach focuses on a specific policy process and outcome and addresses a particular state(s) and its motivations, policies, directives, and behavior with respect to specific international affairs and situations.⁸ Although system-level forces might remain relevant, they are too distant to provide sufficient explanation of specific foreign policies. A foreign policy approach provides a different frame of reference that encourages examination in greater detail of the process of goal selection, the internal and external factors that impinge on those processes, or the institutional framework from which external behavior emerges. This frame is a good fit with hedging, which is conceptualized as a policy or state behavior in an area of important national security or economic concerns, for example, stable delivery of oil or gas, rather than a restoration of an international outcome such as a balance of power. Goh argues, for example, that there are multiple targets and aims of hedging and that “any analysis of hedging includes examination of what state(s) and what outcome(s) a country is hedging against.” At the same time, “recognizing the necessary complexity of hedging strategies means that it becomes essential to ask which part of a combination of policies is in fact ‘the hedge’” (Goh 2006). Thus, hedging is better explained by variables of a level lower than the systemic level and more related to diverse regional economic and political interstate and intrastate interests.

⁸ For contrasting “international politics” and “foreign policy,” see Liu and Zhang (2006).

The above discussion helps clarify the essence of “hedging” vis-à-vis “balancing.” Figure 1 visualizes the patterns of balancing and hedging within a hypothetical and simplified anarchic international system consisting of one unipole, two great powers, and multiple smaller powers, and it lists corresponding independent variables. Balancing among great powers is indicated by thick arrows in the rectangle called “balancing.” Its explanatory variables are system-level phenomena listed in the corresponding square to the left. As shown in the figure, the baseline trends of great power balancing are surrounded by a mesh (small arrows) of hedging that involves all types of international actors and constitutes an everyday milieu of international politics. Shifting analytical emphasis from balancing to hedging (lower-right rectangle) requires refocusing on nonsystemic independent variables, examples of which are listed in the lower left square of the figure. Both balancing and hedging can be detected in Russia’s behavior in the SCS dispute.

Russia’s Systemic Balancing and the SCS dispute

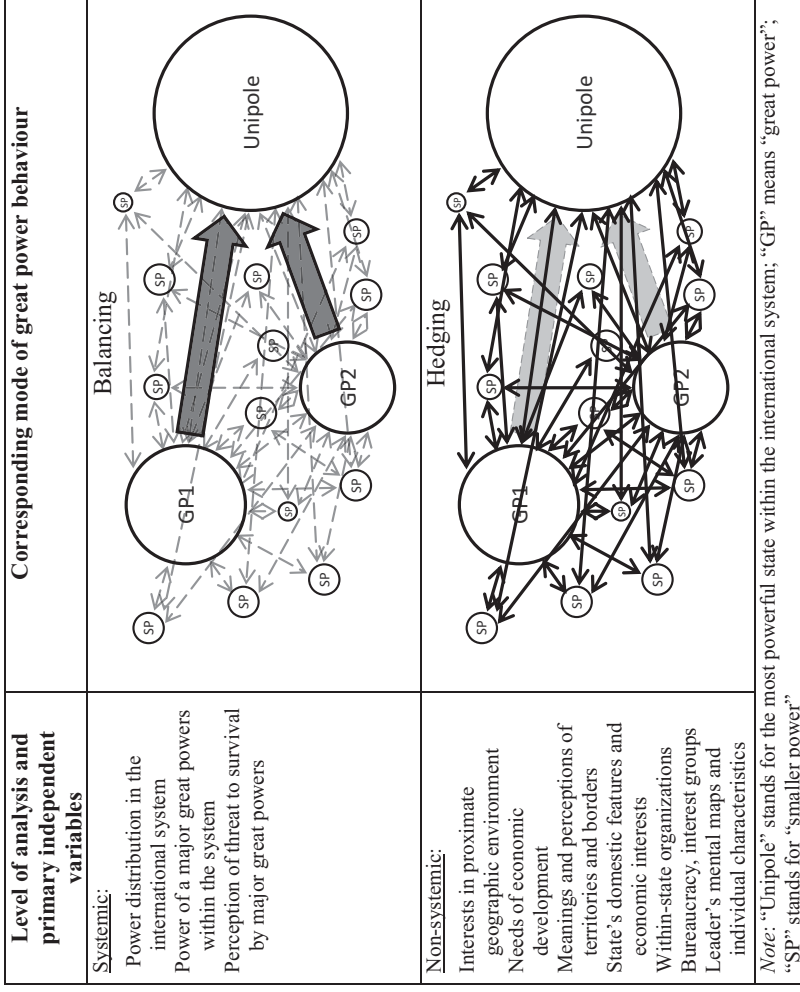
In light of the above conceptualization, Russia, as a systemic balancer, is expected to check, block, or otherwise frustrate the geopolitical projects of the United States. Russia is also supposed to perceive the United States (the system leader) and the US-led NATO’s eastward expansion as a major threat to its existence and national security. These expectations are borne out by Russia’s actual attempts to challenge the US-led system in multiple ways, as demonstrated by its policies in Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014, and Syria in 2015; all three run counter to the system leader’s interests and significantly frustrated its geopolitical projects. From this standpoint, for Russia the SCS is a part of a larger global strategy that dictates a peculiar stance on regional disputes. The imperatives of systemic balancing push Russia to side with China (which also resists the American unipolar domination)—but only with respect to resisting American hegemony, not issues of territorial rights. This is a crucial qualification that highlights the systemic balancing component of Russia’s SCS policies; Russia sides with China not because it supports the latter’s territorial claims but because, and as much as, doing so aids Russia’s anti-US balancing attempts.

The pressure coming from the US-dominated global system makes Russia’s and China’s assessments of external threats in the SCS largely coincide in that both countries view the United States’ “rebalancing to Asia” as a threat. While Beijing considers it, and particularly the strengthening of American military alliances in Asia, a strategy of containing China,⁹ Moscow reads the United States’ “rebalancing to Asia” through the lens of its own balancing against the United States—even more so after US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton took a more active anti-China stance at the 2010 ASEAN Regional Forum in Hanoi, thus shifting the crux of the SCS issue from sovereignty over isles and islands to the systemic competition between China and the United States. Simultaneously, the United States’ moves to strengthen capacity among China’s opponents in the SCS dispute further pushed the originally regional issue to the level of the global China-US power game.

In this context, and as can be judged from a large number of publications in Russian leading international relations and regional studies journals such as *Rossiia v Global’noi Politike* [*Russia in Global Affairs*], *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn’* [*International Affairs*], *Problemu Dal’nego Vostoka* [*Far Eastern Affairs*], and *Aziya i Afrika Segodnia* [*Asia and Africa Today*], as well as various specialized web portals, the Russian political elites and the academic community interpret American “rebalancing to Asia” as a manifestation of Washington’s desire to strengthen its international positions by means of containing China.¹⁰ Some view the United States’ activity in Asia as

⁹ For a straightforward criticism of American alliances in Asia by Chinese officials and media, see [Ruwitch \(2014\)](#) and [Wang \(2015\)](#).

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of Russia’s assessments of American pivot to Asia, see [Portyakov \(2015, 255–66\)](#).



Note: “Unipole” stands for the most powerful state within the international system; “GP” means “great power”; “SP” stands for “smaller power”.

Figure 1. Balancing and Hedging in International Politics

a preventive measure against the possibility of Asian countries gathering around China, which “promotes the alternative model of development and has a goal to reform the present international regime” (Mihnevich 2012), which Russia supports. Russia’s leading political scientist and editor-in-chief of *Russia in Global Affairs*, Fyodor Lukyanov, argues that the United States utilizes the security concerns of some countries that tend to worry about China’s rise (e.g., Australia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, and India) to strengthen its alliance system in Asia such that “there is a sense that a containment ring is being closed around China” (*The Voice of Russia* 2012). According to Viktor Trifonov, a former diplomat and now a researcher at the Moscow Institute of Far Eastern Affairs, all aspects of United States’ activity in Asia Pacific, including the deployment of regional antimissile defense (AMD), the revamping of military bases at Guam and Okinawa, and the increasing of military assistance to the American allies in Asia Pacific, are directed at the SCS region, in which the United States has undertaken a course of direct confrontation with China (Trifonov 2012). According to Yana Leksyutina, Professor at St. Petersburg State University, disputes in the SCS between China and ASEAN members create a favorable environment for Washington’s “rebalancing to Asia.” On the one hand, they increase US-ASEAN interactions, while on the other hand, they help the United States contain China’s influence in the region (Leksyutina 2011, 39). The list of assessments can be continued, but the dominant view in Russia of the developments in the SCS is permeated by concerns about the United States’ hegemonic policies, which strike a chord with China’s assessments and reflect the expected systemic balancing logic.

In turn, President Putin, in his article titled “Russia and the Changing World,” emphasized the increasing role of the Asia-Pacific region in international affairs and stated that “with its stand in the international arena, China does not provide any reason to talk about its desire to dominate. Indeed, China’s voice does resonate more confidently in the world and we greet this, since China shares our views on the evolving multipolar world order” (Putin 2012). Echoing Putin, Russia’s military experts consider China’s military activity and assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region and in the SCS beneficial for Russia’s national security. Some believe that “the construction of Chinese military infrastructure [in the South China Sea] will provide Russia with projection in the area against US Aegis systems, Navy ships, and SM-3 and Tomahawk missiles” (Litovkin 2016). Others propose to form a permanent Russia-China joint naval operations group supported by Russia’s Tu-22M3 strategic bombers to contain the US-Japan coalition naval forces in the area (Mardasov 2016). By supporting China, some argue, Russia will accelerate the restoration of the balance of power in Asia Pacific that will eventually provide stability in the region (Novikov 2015). This is a typical logic of checking and blocking the power of the hegemon as a part of the systemic antihegemonic balancing conceptualized in the previous section.

That Russia is involved in such balancing, rather than simply supporting China, is borne out by the fact that Moscow consistently resists the “internationalization” (i.e., greater involvement of the United States) of the SCS dispute but does not openly support anyone’s, including China’s, territorial claims. In 2013, then Russian ambassador to China, Sergei Razov, stated in an interview that “lifting the bilateral dispute to the international, collective level would fail to generate acceptable solutions” (MoFARF 2013a). In 2016, in his interview for the Chinese, Japanese, and Mongolian media, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reemphasized, “It is necessary to terminate any meddling by extra-regional countries into the negotiations taking place between the direct participants of the dispute and to stop any attempts to internationalize the issue” (MoFARF 2016a). The current ambassador to China, Andrey Denisov, also emphasized that a new stalemate in the SCS was instigated artificially because of “the

interference of non-regional actors in conflict settlement” (MoFARF 2016b).¹¹ Although one can read this as support of China, it is so only insofar as it concerns resisting the United States’ interference in the dispute and does not spread beyond that to the actual dispute, that is, to China’s tensions with the regional disputants such as Vietnam, the Philippines, or others.

The same applies to Russia’s position on the Hague Tribunal’s ruling on the SCS in favor of the Philippines. In his press conference at the G20 Summit in Hanzhou, China, on September 5, 2016, President Vladimir Putin stated, “Russia supports China’s decision not to recognize The Hague Arbitration Court ruling” (TASS 2016). He added, however, that Russia’s position is based purely on judicial rather than political considerations, namely, that to have ruling power, any arbitration must listen to both disputing parties. “We know that China never turned the case to the Court and that its position was not listened to in the Court. Then, how can one recognize such decisions as fair?” (TASS 2016). Putin also emphasized that “Russia is not interfering in the dispute” and that “any interference by outsiders is detrimental and counterproductive” (TASS 2016). Thus, Russia officially supported the right of China to ignore the Hague-based arbitration but did not openly recognize China’s historical rights in the SCS. This position is determined by Russia’s ongoing confrontation with the West over Ukraine rather than by the developments in the SCS. As emphasized by Vasili Kashin, in August 2016, Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin mentioned that Ukraine would also launch the arbitration process against Russia over Crimea, which means Russia is likely to face similar arbitration, which will most likely be supported by the West (Kashin 2016b). In this context, Moscow is interested in delegitimizing the entire institution of the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration as a “propaganda act” (Kosurev 2016). For Moscow, the Chinese decision to ignore the UNCLOS arbitration jurisdiction on the sovereignty clause sets up a useful precedent.

Russia’s anti-US balancing can also be traced in its relations with Vietnam, which shows the strength of the imperatives of system-level factors in shaping great power behavior and proves the point that presenting Russia-Vietnam military cooperation purely as a measure to check China is a gross simplification. At first sight, it might appear that Russia seeking good relations with both Vietnam and China is not consistent with the logic of balancing and the balance of power. However, since systemic balancing, as highlighted above, is directed against the strongest power (which is the United States, not China) or a greatest threat in the system (which for Russia is the United States, not China), the baseline logic of Russia’s balancing follows the principle that everything works as long as it helps Russia to contain or avert the hypothetical or actual threat coming from the United States. Thus, Russia seeking cooperation with both China and Vietnam is in accord with the balancing assumption as long as it aids Russia’s goals of antihegemonic balancing.

A case in point is the aforementioned return of Russia to Cam Ranh Bay military base in Vietnam. In accordance with the new Russia-Vietnam agreement, Russia could station at Cam Ranh Bay the IL-78 tanker aircrafts that were used for refueling TU-95 nuclear strategic bombers for the resumed patrols close to Japan and the American territory Guam. The activity of Russian bombers close to Guam triggered Washington’s admonition of Hanoi in January 2015 for letting the Russians use Cam Ranh Bay, which, according to Washington, raised tensions in the region (Lee and Collin 2015).

Quite tellingly, in this context, are the Russian State Duma’s internal discussions of reestablishing military presence in Vietnam, which intensified after the American chief of staff of the army, General Mark Milley, stated, “Armed conflict between the United States and the Russian Federation is almost guaranteed” and that “the United States is taking all of the necessary measures to prepare for a

¹¹ It should be noted that by “non-regional” or “extra-regional” actors, the Russian officials imply the United States.

large-scale war” (*Live Journal* 2016). The Duma Parliamentarians urged that the base in Vietnam be fully restored and its military modernization accelerated, arguing that our “strategic partners” in Washington “do not understand the language of diplomacy and rattle the sabre” (Olizhevsky 2016). Russia’s military bases in Vietnam and Cuba, it was argued, will be an “unpleasant surprise for the American militarism” (*Live Journal* 2016). According to Russia’s First Deputy Chair of Federation Council Committee on Defense and Security, Franz Klinzewitsch, “Russia undoubtedly needs military bases in Cuba and Vietnam . . . Let’s remember that we have a dozen military bases abroad, whereas the Americans have 800—400 active and 400 frozen. And they are still saying that they are protecting their own country without threatening anyone? Why cannot Russia do the same? Look at the map! We simply have to follow the same tactics” (Olizhevsky 2016). This once again demonstrates the role of systemic balancing in Russia’s strategic calculations in the region, which makes Russia’s policies toward the SCS dispute complex and multilayered.

Russia’s Regional Hedging and the SCS dispute

Balancing is only one force that shapes Russia’s behavior toward the SCS dispute. To have a deeper understanding of the complexity of Russia’s policies, it is necessary to descend from the systemic level and examine the strategic motivations and patterns of behavior unfolding at the interstate interactional level, which is not under direct influence of system-level trends and is subject to various regional and domestic circumstances. While system-level forces might remain relevant to some extent, the analysis below demonstrates that Russia’s hedging behavior is driven by more immediate regional and domestic circumstances rather than by a causally distant systemic power-and-threat distribution that can push in a different direction. At this level, Russia utilizes the abundant opportunities available to great powers to realize its commercial interests and to diversify its economic model and its external relations in Asia, which requires maintaining a more or less cooperative environment in the region and dictates a different behavior—hedging—in the SCS. Regional hedging, therefore, is nonsystemic not only because it occurs in a region but also because evidence does not show it to be driven by the system.

The milieu and the driver of Russia’s hedging behavior in the SCS is its comprehensive socioeconomic “reorientation to Asia,”¹² which became a national development strategy and was announced as “Russia’s national priority for the entire 21st century” after Putin’s return to power in 2012 (President of Russia 2013). Its main goal is to accelerate Russia’s domestic socioeconomic development, primarily the projects of intensive development of Siberia and the Far East, by enhancing Russia’s embeddedness in the mechanisms of Asia-Pacific integration. Putin wrote in 2015, “Today we see the future of Russia’s Far East as one of the country’s key centers of socioeconomic development, which must be effectively integrated in the developing Asia-Pacific region” (President of Russia 2015). The essence of the new strategy is to go beyond just an “energy pivot to China” and to make the development of the Far East and Siberia truly international, with diverse sources of labor, technology, and investments. The most desirable arrangement is the “concert of interests,” in which none of the countries participating in the development of Russia’s eastern territories gains an overwhelmingly predominant role (Chechevishnikov 2014, 59). The main long-term goal is “maximum extension and diversification of economic links,” which will allow Russia to gain from globalization and exercise truly multivector policies (Kashin 2016a). While all of these goals can arguably be somehow linked to system-level causal factors and explained with balance of power logic, the actual policy-making calculus and the dynamics of related policies prove to be driven more

¹² Often called in Russia “*Povorot na Vostok* [turn to the East].” See Karaganov and Makarov (2014) and Korolev (2016a).

by nonsystemic considerations of regional economic diversification than by intentions to block or check the power of the hegemon.

Thus, Moscow tries to hedge its regional economic and security bets by expanding cooperation with as many Asian countries and multilateral organizations as possible and seeks to export, for example, energy, arms, agricultural products, machinery, space technologies, and educational services to different Asian markets. Therefore, whereas from the perspective of systemic balancing, China is the main, if not the only, great power Russia can align with to effectively balance the American global dominance, from the standpoint of regional hedging, Russia needs a more diverse portfolio of partners. Moreover, Moscow can even engage in regional geopolitical competition of low intensity with China and employ tactics of engagement and resistance, containment and cooperation with various Asian partners—all to avoid undesirable regional developments that can hinder the “reorientation to Asia” strategy and harm Russia’s regional economic interests. This pattern of behavior cannot be sufficiently captured and explained by the systemic theory.

In this context, although the SCS is far from the Russian borders, disputes there became a concern for Moscow, and how Russia addresses them is affected by its regional calculations related to hedging that, when intersecting with the layer of system-level balancing, leads to the inherent ambivalence of Russia’s SCS policies.

Vietnam, for example, is an extremely important partner for Russia both in its own right and as a gate to multilateral regional organizations in Southeast Asia. It is Russia’s largest trade partner in Southeast Asia, with the volume of trade growing, on average, by 20 percent annually since 2010. Even in 2015, when because of Western sanctions Russia’s trade with almost all countries, including China, shrank, Russia-Vietnam trade increased by 31 percent and reached \$US 3.84 billion compared with \$US 2.94 billion in 2014 ([Russian Exports 2016](#)). Driven by the need to diversify its energy cooperation and hedge its economic bets, Russia’s Gazprom in 2012 signed a deal with the state-owned PetroVietnam on the development of two large-scale gas projects on Vietnam’s continental shelf in the parts of the SCS that fall under the nine-dash line. Subsequently, Moscow and Hanoi agreed to extend this energy partnership through 2030 ([Gazprom 2016](#)). Of particular importance for Russia are the long-term technology-intensive cooperation projects, such as its participation in Vietnam’s ten-year plan for the development of the national electrical power industry ([Kobelev 2014](#), 8). Simultaneously, Vietnam has become the first Southeast Asian country to sign, in July 2016, a free-trade agreement (FTA) with the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). According to the EAEU’s minister of trade, Veronika Nikishina, the new agreement serves Russia’s plans to diversify its economic relations in Asia Pacific, particularly in the sphere of the automobile industry because Vietnam has agreed on the industrial assembly of cars and trucks with Russian producers. In other words, the assembled vehicles will be considered manufactured in Vietnam and will have free access to the ASEAN markets ([Fedorov 2016](#)). This, according to some assessments, could pave the way to a Russia-ASEAN FTA ([Sumsy and Kanaev 2014](#)). Russia’s intentions to cooperate with different ASEAN member-states is also evidenced by the Russian Railway’s involvement in the construction of the 240 km-long West Kutai-Balikpapan coal railway in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, at a cost of approximately \$2.4 billion ([The Jakarta Post 2012](#)). According to the Indonesian local officials, Russia’s planned investments in infrastructure in East Kalimantan amount to \$33.9 million and include a railroad, twenty-three bridges, a science park, and other projects ([Mattangkilang 2015](#)).

Vietnam has also been consistently helping Russia establish connections with ASEAN—it did so in 1996 by pushing the case for Russia becoming a full-fledged ASEAN dialogue partner and subsequently pushing for Russia’s participation in the East Asia Summit (EAS). The Joint Russia-Vietnam Declaration of 2006 states that

“in the spirit of relations of friendship and cooperation, Russia and Vietnam express their firm resolve to further strengthen cooperation within the ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Partnership . . . and to strive to render mutual assistance in the multilateral structures now operating and taking shape in the Asia-Pacific region” (Kobelev 2014, 6). In July 2012, in an interview to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* [*The Russian Gazette*, a major Russian government daily newspaper], Vietnamese President Trương Tấn Sang stated that “I clearly see a bright future for Russia-ASEAN relations . . . Vietnam and all the other ASEAN members heartily welcome the deepening of cooperation with Russia,” adding that “we deem it very important to build up Russia’s activity, as a weighty political player, in ASEAN-centric forums on a regular basis” (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 2012). Hanoi played a notable role in supporting Russia’s presence in the major regional economic and security institutions, including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). On 26 April 2016, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu hosted the very first Russia-ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Informal Meeting in Moscow (MoDRF 2016).

All of these developments facilitate the realization of Russia’s goals of diversification under its “reorientation to Asia” initiative rather than its goals of balancing against the United States. They also directly bear on Russia’s approach to the SCS. Russia, while at the systemic level balancing the unipole, is also interested in forging a regional environment that is conducive to tackling the existing contradictions in nonexplosive ways so as not to severely frustrate its regional economic and development goals. This requires maintaining some sort of geopolitical equilibrium in the SCS that prevents absolute preponderance, military or diplomatic, of any of the disputants. As emphasized by Victor Sumsy, director of the ASEAN Centre at the Moscow Institute of International Affairs, the SCS disputes cause serious tensions between China and the ASEAN member states (mostly Vietnam and the Philippines), between China and ASEAN as a whole, within ASEAN, and between China and India, that is, between Russia’s close, highly valued partners. Thus, Moscow “needs to think more about how to neutralize these unhappy trends,” and “special relations with both Beijing and Hanoi are a resource that should not be underestimated” (Sumsy 2012). Some Russian experts also argue that Russia should show consistency with its partnership relations with Vietnam and encourage the formation of some sort of China-Vietnam alignment (Mosyakov 2013). In other words, Moscow must both hedge and be a hedge for others.

These calculations on Russia’s part explain why the burgeoning Russia-China military cooperation and China’s status of a “privileged partner” (which is a system-level balancing) in Russia’s foreign policy coexist with Moscow’s increased attempts to create a regional security system involving ASEAN¹³ and its willingness to be a strategic partner and the largest arms supplier to Vietnam (which is an element of regional hedging). They also explain the presence of Russia’s energy projects on Vietnam’s continental shelf. Worth noting is that whereas Russia’s arms sales to both China and Vietnam have been driven since the 1990s by commercial considerations, with the intensification of the SCS dispute since 2010, they have gained a serious strategic component, providing Russia with certain strategic leverage in the region. Thus, whereas commercial considerations for Moscow are not unimportant, they are interlinked with the strategic side of the issue in the current regional context.

This hedging behavior on Russia’s part fails to make everyone happy, but it largely satisfies the involved parties’ basic national interests and facilitates the search for a diplomatic solution or at least helps preserve some form of status quo in the SCS, which for Russia is better than facing a victory of either party. Thus, Moscow

¹³ ASEAN’s East Asia Summit (EAS), for instance, was mentioned in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept as an important component of the emerging security architecture in East Asia. See MoFARF (2013b).

understands that although its strategic partnership with Hanoi, which has strong military dimension, might appear to be against China, Beijing is willing to accept it because in the existing circumstances, it, in fact, serves China's interests, namely, it helps prevent the strengthening of a Hanoi-Washington alignment. Although not happy about, and in fact contained by Moscow's large-scale arms sales to Hanoi, Beijing understands that a termination or decline of such sales and technology transfers would lead Vietnam to shift from its own policy of hedging, that is, diversifying security and military relations, to a stronger tilt toward the United States, which would close the American containment circle around China. Thus, despite emphatically resisting the internationalization of the SCS dispute, China accepts Russia's more-active involvement and the "containment" created by the Russia-Vietnam energy and military cooperation. This explains why Beijing, although pressuring American, Indian, and Malaysian energy companies not to cooperate with Vietnam in the SCS, remains largely silent about Russia's involvement in Vietnam's offshore energy projects and Moscow's transfer of arms to Hanoi (Torode 2011).

Simultaneously, Russia's involvement creates new channels for engagement between China and Vietnam. While being on an opposite side in the SCS dispute, China is interested in accommodating Vietnam and maintaining a Beijing-Hanoi dialogue in both bilateral and multilateral formats. Worth noting is that the notorious "nine-dash line," under which China claims the main islands and 80 percent of the water surface of the SCS, previously included eleven dashes, two of which clashed with Vietnam's territorial claim in the Gulf of Tonkin and were removed by Beijing in 2008 after prolonged negotiations—a sign that some of the remaining nine dashes might also be subject to negotiations (Lokshin 2014, 56). From this perspective, a good relationship with Moscow is an important asset that opens extra avenues for a Beijing-Hanoi dialogue and, given the high level of China-Russia military-technical cooperation, might even allow Beijing to have a better understanding of Vietnam's military modernization and even participate in it.

Vietnam, in turn, is also hedging. It pursues a multipolar environment, formed by several great powers and aimed at maintaining a balance between their interests (Pham 2016). While competing with China over the SCS, Hanoi also tries to cooperate with China. Partnership with Russia, in this context, is very useful for having an extra hedge in its relations with China and the United States. Vietnam's Russia policy is not simply an attempt to fence off the Chinese threat. Unlike the United States, Japan, or other regional players, Russia remains very close to China, and for Hanoi, Moscow is not only a valuable partner in its own right but is also an extra gateway for engaging and enhancing Vietnam's relationship with China, which is valued by Hanoi. In contrast to closer cooperation with the United States, which would become a straightforward containment of China, partnership with Russia guarantees Hanoi the required access to energy technologies and advanced military hardware, while at the same time avoiding being locked up between the Scylla and Charybdis of China-US competition. Thus, Hanoi maintains a greater degree of freedom in foreign policy-making and has an extra channel to hedge its way through the complexities of the regional disagreements.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to explain Russia's policies toward the SCS dispute by highlighting the two modes of great power behavior: system-level balancing and regional hedging. Both modes are present in Russia's behavior. In the SCS, they intersect with each other, generating a two-level configuration. At the systemic level, the baseline of Russia's policies is characterized by a strong anti-unipolarity pursuit that permeates Russia's interactions with China and other regional players. However, at the regional level, Russia plays a complex engage-and-resist game of hedging aimed at averting the undesirable scenarios of regional confrontation that can undermine

Russia's plans to diversify its economic development and economic integration into the Asia-Pacific region. At this nonsystemic level of hedging, any regional state, large or small, and China and the United States, can be both a partner and a rival of Russia, and these roles can switch from time to time. However, these interstate day-to-day relationships lack system-level causal force. This lack does not make them unimportant but simply different.

As long as the relative weights of balancing and hedging in the two-level "balancing-hedging" configuration remain unchanged, the logic of interstate interactions and developments unfolding at one level need not override those prevailing at the other level. As long as the system permits, movement in opposite directions at different levels of foreign policy can coexist. Thus, as a phenomenon of a different level, and assuming that the SCS situation does not change, Russia-Vietnam relations can grow and prosper without challenging Russia-China relations. Vice versa, the global politics of Russia-China alignment need not necessarily trespass into the regional hedging logic of Russia-Vietnam relations. However, lifting the SCS dispute to the level of global politics involving the United States and the US-China global competition sets into motion causal forces of a systemic level and makes anti-unipolarity balancing define Russia's behavior.

The major implication of the two-level configuration, therefore, is that for Russia, the essence of the SCS dispute and Russia's responses to it together are rather a variable than a constant. The further the SCS dispute diverges from the regional matters of sovereignty over islands and waters into the area of US-China strategic competition, the more likely Russia's policies in the region will carry the elements of anti-US system-level balancing. Contrariwise, the less the United States is engaged and the more the SCS dispute remains predominantly a regional issue, the more likely Russia's policy responses in the area are to remain detached from the systemic trends of anti-US balancing and to exhibit the elements of regional nonsystemic hedging aimed at creating a more balanced network of regional contacts. The more the SCS issue is concerned with US-China relations more than with ASEAN-China or Vietnam-China relations, the more support China is likely to obtain from Russia. Conversely, the more the SCS dispute is about China and smaller states in the region, the more reluctant Russia will be to side with China in the SCS. Some Russian scholars conclude that the dispute is no longer about sovereignty over lands and maritime zones of the SCS; rather, it is about whether and how much American naval activity in the region China can accept (Kanaev 2015). If this assessment is correct, the game of balancing is going to dominate that of hedging in Russia's policies in the region.

References

- ACHARYA, AMITAV. 2014. *The End of American World Order*. New York: Polity.
- BAEV, PAVEL K., AND STEIN TØNNESSEN. 2015. "Can Russia Keep its Special Ties with Vietnam While Moving Closer and Closer to China?" *International Area Studies Review* 18(3): 312–25.
- BBC Russia. 2014. "Australia: Rossiya Stiagivaet Flot k Mesty Sammita G20 [Australia: Russia Draws Up its Fleet to the G20 Summit]." November 12. http://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/11/141112_russian_navy_australia_g20. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- BUCKLEY, CHRIS. 2016. "Russia to Join China in Naval Exercise in Disputed South China Sea." *The New York Times*, July 29. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/29/world/asia/russia-chinasouth-china-sea-naval-exercise.html?_r=1. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- CHECHEVISHNIKOV, ALEXANDER. 2014. "Vostochnui Vector Rossiiskoi Politiki i Perspektivu Razvitiya Dal'nego Vostoka Sibiri [Russian East Policy and Prospects for the Siberian Far East]." *International Trends* 12 (1–2): 51–76.
- ELMAN, COLIN. 2003. "Introduction: Appraising Balance of Power Theory." In *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate*, edited by John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman, 1–22. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- EMBASSY OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA. 2016. "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on June 27, 2016." June 27. <http://si.china-embassy.org/eng/fyrth/t1375607.htm>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- FEDOROV, GLEB. 2016. "Russian automobiles to have free access to ASEAN via Vietnam- EAEU minister." *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, 8 August. http://rbth.com/business/2016/08/08/russian-automobiles-to-have-free-access-to-asean-via-vietnam-eaeu-minister_619053. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- Gazprom*. 2016. "Vietnam." March 16. <http://www.gazprom.com/about/production/projects/deposits/vietnam/>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- GOH, EVELYN. 2005. *Meeting the China Challenge: The U.S. in Southeast Asian Regional Security Strategies*. Washington DC: East West Center.
- GOH, EVELYN. 2006. "Understanding 'Hedging' in Asia-Pacific Security." *PacNet 43*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 31.
- HAASS, RICHARD N. 2008. "The Age of Nonpolarity: What Will Follow US Dominance?" *Foreign Affairs* 87 (3): 44–56.
- JACKSON, VAN. 2014. "Power, Trust, and Network Complexity: Three Logics of Hedging in Asian Security." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, lcu005.
- Jakarta Post*. 2012. "Russian Firm Signs MoU to Build \$2.4 Billion Railway," February 8. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/02/08/russian-firm-signs-mou-build-24-billion-railway.html>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- KANAEV, EVGENY. 2015. "Developing Russia's Far East and Siberia: The Interplay of National, Regional and Global Implications." In *International Cooperation in the Development of Russia's Far East and Siberia*, edited by Jing Huang and Alexander Korolev, 19–38. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- KARAGANOV, SERGEI, AND IGOR MAKAROV. 2014. "Strategiya 21: Povорот na Vostok" [Strategy in the 21st century: Turn to the East]." *Vedomosti*, January 28. <http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2014/01/28/povorot-na-vostok>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- KASHIN, VASILY. 2016a. "Rossiyskiy Podhod k Problemam Bezopasnosti vi ATR [Russia's Approach to the Security Issues in Asia-Pacific]." *Moscow Carnegie Centre*. June 17. <http://carnegie.ru/2016/06/17/ru-pub-63832>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- KASHIN, VASILY. 2016b. "The Ukrainian Crisis: Impact on Sino-Russian Relations." *RSIS Commentary*, (257), October 14. <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/CO16257.pdf>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- KOBELEV, YEVGENY. 2014. "Twenty Years of the Russia-ASEAN Partnership." *Far Eastern Affairs* 6: 1–11.
- KOROLEV, ALEXANDER. 2016a. "Russia's Reorientation to Asia: Causes and Strategic Implications." *Pacific Affairs* 89 (1): 53–73.
- KOROLEV, ALEXANDER. 2016b. "Systemic Balancing and Regional Hedging: China-Russia Relations." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9 (4): 375–97.
- KOSUREV, DMITRI. 2016. "Kak Podelit' Yuzhno-Kitaiskoe More, Ili Istoriya Predskazannogo Provala [How do Divide the South China Sea, or the Story of a Predicted Failure]." *Ria Novosti*, July 12. <https://ria.ru/analytics/20160712/1464689094.html>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- KOZYREV, VITALY. 2014. "Russia-Vietnam Strategic Partnership: The Return of the Brotherhood in Arms?" *Russian Analytical Digest* 145 (31 March): 8–11.
- KRECL, ROMAN. 2014. "Rossiya i Kitai Usilivayut Sblizhenie v Voennoi Oblasti [China and Russia are accelerating Military Rapprochement]." *Vzglyad*, November 19. <http://vz.ru/society/2014/11/19/716036.html>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- KUIK, CHENG-CHWEE. 2008. "The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore's Response to a Rising China." *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 30 (2): 159–85.
- LAYNE, CHRISTOPHER. 2012. "This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana." *International Studies Quarterly* 56 (1): 203–13.
- LEE, NHINA,, AND KOH SWEE LEAN COLLIN. 2015. "Vietnam and Great Power Rivalries." *The Diplomat*, March 31. <http://thediplomat.com/2015/03/vietnam-and-great-power-rivalries/>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- LEKSUTINA, YANA. 2011. "Obostrenie Napyazhennosti v Yuzhno-Kitaiskom More: Vzglyad iz YuVa, KNR, i SShA [Growing tensions in the South China Sea: A View from Southeast Asia, China, and the United States]." *Problema Dal'nego Vostoka [Far Eastern Affairs]* 5: 30–41.
- Lenta.ru*. 2016. "Iz Pekina s Lybov'y: Sergei Lavrov ybedilsa, chto otosheniya s KNR horoshi kak nikogda [From Beijing with Love: Sergey Lavrov is Assured that Relations with China Have Never Been So Good]." April 30. <https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/04/30/beijingcalling/>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- LEVY, JACK S. 2003. "Balances and Balancing: Concepts, Propositions, and Research Design." In *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate*, edited by John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman, 128–53. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- LITOVKIN, VICTOR. 2016. "Russia Could Gain from Backing China in South China Sea Disputes." *Russia beyond the Headlines*, September 8. http://rbth.com/international/2016/09/08/russia-could-gain-from-backing-china-in-south-china-sea-disputes-experts_628057. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- LIU, FENG, AND RUIZHUANG ZHANG. 2006. "The Typologies of Realism." *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 1 (1): 109–34.
- Live Journal*. 2016. "Bazovue Interesu. Zachem Rossiiskoi Armii Garnizonu na Kybe i vo V'etname? [Basic Interests. Why does the Russian Army Need Garrisons in Cuba and Vietnam?]." October 10. <http://www.livejournal.com/media/950750.html>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- LORSHIN, GRIGORY. 2014. "Russia's Policy and Problems of Regional Security in Sea and the APR." In *Russian Scholars on Vietnam: Selected Papers, Centre for Vietnam and ASEAN Studies of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences*, 44–58. Moscow: Forum Publishing House.
- MARCUS, JONATHAN. 2015. "China-Russia Drills in Med Show Shifting Strategies." *BBC News*, May 11. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-32686956>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- MARDASOV, ANTON. 2016. "V Kil'vatere Kovarnogo Drakona [In the Wake of a Crafty Dragon]." *Svobodnaya Pressa Online [The Free Press Online]*, July 29. <http://svpressa.ru/war21/article/153424/>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- MATTANGKILANG, TUNGADEWA. 2015. "Russia Reportedly to Invest \$34m in East Kalimantan Railway, Infrastructure." *The Jakarta Post*, September 25. <http://www.jakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/russia-reportedly-invest-34m-east-kalimantan-railway-infrastructure/>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- MEDEIROS, EVAN S. 2005. "Strategic Hedging and the Future of Asia-Pacific Stability." *The Washington Quarterly* 29 (1): 145–67.
- MIHNEVICH, SERGEI. 2012. "SShA v Aziatsko-Tihookeanskom Regione: Liderstvo Lyuboi Ceni [USA in Asia-Pacific Region: Leadership at any Costs]." In *God v Bolshoi Politike [A Year in Big Politics]*, edited by Konstantin Kaminsky, 6–9. Moscow: Modern Politics Russia.
- MODRF (MINISTRY OF DEFENSE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION). 2014. "Otriadu Korablei Tihookeanskogo i Chernomorskogo Flotov Otrabatuva'yut Sovmestnoe Vupolnenie Zadach v Filippphinskom More [The Task Groups of the Pacific and the Black Sea Fleets Conduct Joint Exercises in the Philippine Sea]." November 17. <http://structure.mil.ru/structure/forces/navy/news/more.htm?id=12000062@egNews>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- MODRF (MINISTRY OF DEFENSE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION). 2016. "On April 26, 2016 the first informal meeting of defence ministers of Russia and the ASEAN member-states took place in Moscow." http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12083927@egNews. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- MOFARF (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION). 2012. "Vistuplenie Ministra Inostrannuh Del Rossii S. V. Lavrova na 48-I Mynhenskoi Konferentsii po Voprosam Bezopasnosti [Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov delivers a Speech at the 48th Munich Security Conference]." February 4. http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/obsie-voprosy-mezdunarodnoj-bezopasnosti-i-kontrola-nad-vooruzheniami/-/asset_publisher/6sN03cZTYZOC/content/id/171750. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- MOFARF (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION). 2013a. "Interview Cherizvuchainogo i Polnomochnogo Posla Rossii v KNR S.S. Razova Rossiiskoi Gazete [Russian Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador to China Sergey Razov Gives Interview to the "Russian Newspaper"]." February 1. http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/cn/-/asset_publisher/WhKWb5DVBqKA/content/id/124698. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- MOFARF (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION). 2013b. Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. February 12. http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D. (Accessed November 23, 2017)
- MOFARF (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION). 2016a. "Interview Ministra Inostrannuh Del Rossii S.V. Lavrova SMI Mongolii, Yaponii, i KNR v Predavarii Vizitov v Eti Stranu [Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov's Interview to the Japanese, Mongolian, and Chinese Media on the Eve of Visiting These Countries]." April 12. http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2227965. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- MOFARF (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION). 2016b. "Interview of the Russian Ambassador to China A.I. Denisov to Russian News Agencies 'Russia Today' and TASS." June 21. http://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/cn/-/asset_publisher/WhKWb5DVBqKA/content/id/2327002. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- MOFARF (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION). 2016c. *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova's Briefing*. Moscow, July 14. http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2354135. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- MOFARF (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION). 2016d. "Interview Posla Rossii v Tai-lande K. M. Barskogo Gazete "Daily News" [An Interview of Russian Ambassador to the Kingdom

- of Thailand, K.M. Barsky, for “Daily News].” October 4. http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/th/-/asset_publisher/UhQB5xrATSUO/content/id/2486513. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- MOURITZEN, HANS, AND ANDERS WIVEL. 2012. *Explaining Foreign Policy: International Diplomacy and the Russo-Georgian War*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- MOSYAKOV, DMITRY. 2013. “Na Grani Fola: Politika Kitaya v Yuzno-Kitaiskom More [Extremely Risk-taking: China’s Behavior in the South China Sea].” *Index Bezopasnosti [Security Index]* 19 (4): 58–67.
- NADKARNI, VIDYA. 2010. *Strategic Partnerships in Asia: Balancing Without Alliances*. London: Routledge.
- NOVIKOV, DMITRI. 2015. “Neravnobedrennui Treugol’nik: Celi i Vozmozhnosti Rossii v Otnoshenii Kitaisko-Amerikanskogo Dueta [Scalene Triangle: Goals and Opportunities of Russia regarding the Chinese-American Duo].” *Russia in Global Affairs*, June 7. <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Neravnobedrennyi-treugolnik-17499>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- OLIZHEVSKY, DMITRI. 2016. “Zachem Rossii Bazu v Lurdese i Camrani? [Why does Russia need military bases in Lourdes and Cam Ranh?].” *Parlamentskaya Gazeta [The Parliament Newspaper]*, October 7.
- PANDA, ANKIT. 2016. “Chinese, Russian Navies to Hold 8 Days of Naval Exercises in the South China Sea.” *The Diplomat*, September 12. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/09/chinese-russian-navies-to-hold-8-days-of-naval-exercises-in-the-south-china-sea/>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- PHAM, BINH MINH. 2016. “Viet Nam’s Achievements in Foreign Affairs during the Past 5 Years.” *Communist Review*, March 24. <http://english.tapchicongsan.org.vn/Home/Foreign-Relations-and-International-Intergration/2016/634/Viet-Nams-achievements-in-foreign-affairs-during-the-past-5-years.aspx>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- PORTYAKOV, VLADIMIR. 2015. *Vneshniaya Politika Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki v 21-m Stoletii [The PRC’s Foreign Policy in the 21st Century]*. Moscow: Institute of Far Eastern Studies Press.
- POSEN, BARRY R. 2012. “From Unipolarity to Multipolarity: Transition in Sight?” In *International Relations Theory and the Consequences of Unipolarity*, edited by G. John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno and William C. Wohlforth, 317–41. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA. 2012. *Russia-Vietnam Joint Statement on Intensification of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership*. July 27. http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/1279. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA. 2013. “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly.” December 12. <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/6402>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA. 2015. “The First Eastern Economic Forum.” September 4. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50232>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA. 2016. “Sovmestnoe Zayavlenie Rossiiskoi Federacii i Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki [The China-Russia Joint Declaration of 25 June 2016].” June 25. <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/5100>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- PUTIN, VLADIMIR. 2012. “Rossiya i Meniayuscheisia Mir [Russia and the Changing World].” *Moskovskie Novosti [Moscow News]*, February 27. <http://www.mn.ru/politics/78738>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- RINNA, TONY. 2016. “The China Factor in Russia-Vietnam Security Ties.” *Foreign Policy Journal*, January 5. <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2016/01/05/the-china-factor-in-russia-vietnam-security-ties/>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- Rossiyskaya Gazeta. 2012. “Ot Ho Shi Mina do VTO [From Ho Chi Ming to WTO].” *Interview with the Vietnamese President Trương Tấn Sang*. Issue No. 5844 (171). July 27. <https://rg.ru/2012/07/26/shang-pohn.html>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- RUSSIAN EXPORTS. 2016. “Vietnamese-Russian Bilateral Trade in 2015.” June 6. <http://www.rusexporter.com/research/country/detail/4672/>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- RUWITCH, JOHN. 2014. “China’s Xi Issues Veiled Warning to Asia over Military Alliances.” *Reuters*, May 21. www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xi-idUSBREA4K02V20140521. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- Sputnik. 2013. “Russia is Vietnam’s Leading Strategic Partner in the Area of Military-Technical Cooperation—Defense Minister of Vietnam.” August 5. http://in.sputniknews.com/indian.ruvr.ru/news/2013_08_05/Russia-Vietnam-cooperation/. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- Sputnik. 2014. “Putin Confirms Plans to Meet Chinese President during APEC Summit in Beijing.” October 14. <http://sputniknews.com/politics/20141014/194060827.html>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- SUMSKY, VIKTOR. 2012. “Rossiya i Problemu Yuzhno-Kitaiskogo Moria [Russia and the Problems of the South China Sea].” *Govoriat Expertu MGIMO [MGIMO Experts are Speaking]*, May 3. <https://mgimo.ru/about/news/experts/223482/>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- SUMSKY, VIKTOR, AND EVGENY KANAIEV. 2014. “Russia’s Progress in Southeast Asia: Modest but Steady.” *Russian Analytical Digest* 145 (31 March): 2–5.
- TASS. 2014. “Russia, Vietnam Agree on Simplified Cam Ranh Port Entry for Russian Warships.” November 27.

- TASS. 2016. "Putin: Rossiya Solidarna with KNR, Ne Priznavshei Reshenie Suda bo Yuzhno-Kitaiskomy Mory [Putin: Russia Solidarizes with China, Who Did Not Recognized the Court Decision on the South China Sea]." September 5. <http://tass.ru/politika/3595565>. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- TAYLOR, ADAM. 2015. "US Defense Spending Still Dwarfs the Rest of the World." *The Washington Post*, February 11. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/02/11/chart-us-defense-spending-still-dwarfs-the-rest-of-the-world/?utm_term=.8673d88704a4. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- TESSMAN, BROCK. 2012. "System Structure and State Strategy: Adding Hedging to the Menu." *Security Studies* 21 (2): 192–231.
- TESSMAN, BROCK, AND WOJTEK WOLFE. 2011. "Great Powers and Strategic Hedging: The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy." *International Studies Review* 13 (2): 214–40.
- The Voice of Russia*. 2012. "SShA Okruzhayut Kitai Vnimaniem [The United States is encircling China with attention], R. Zhuravlyova interviews Fyodor Lukyanov." February 11. http://rus.ru/radio_broadcast/55813581/65596075.html. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- TORODE, GREG. 2011. "Beijing Pressure Intense in South China Sea Row." *South China Morning Post*, September 23. <http://www.scmp.com/article/979876/beijing-pressure-intense-south-china-sea-row>. (Accessed November 23, 2017).
- TRAN, PHUC THI, ALENA VYSOTSKAYA G. VIEIRA, AND LAURA C. FERREIRA-PEREIRA. 2013. "Vietnam's Strategic Hedging vis-à-vis China: The Roles of the European Union and Russia." *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 56 (1): 163–82.
- TRIFONOV, VIKTOR. 2012. "Vastuplenie na Zachnom Kruglom Stole 'Factor Kitaya vo Vzaimootnosheniyah RF i SShA [Presentation at the roundtable 'The China Factor in Russia-US relations].'" *Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka [Far Eastern Affairs]*, (2): 101–2.
- VASQUEZ, JOHN A. 2003. "The New Debate of Balancing Power: A Reply to My Critics." In *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate*, edited by John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman, 87–114. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- WALTZ, KENNETH N. 1996. "International Politics is Not Foreign Policy." *Security Studies* 6 (1): 54–57.
- WALTZ, KENNETH N. 2000. "Structural Realism after the Cold War." *International Security* 25 (1): 5–41.
- WALTZ, KENNETH N. 2010. *Theory of International Politics*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- WANG, HUI. 2015. "US-Philippines Military Alliance Could Backfire." *China Daily*, September 2. www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2015-09/02/content_21774078.htm. (Accessed November 24, 2017).
- WISHNICK, ELIZABETH. 2016. "Russia Wants to be a Contender: The New Problem in the South China Sea." *Foreign Affairs*, September 19.
- WOLFE, WOJTEK M. 2013. "China's Strategic Hedging." *Orbis* 57 (2): 300–13.
- ZAKARIA, FAREED. 2009. *The Post-American World*. New York: W. W. Norton.