

*Reinforcing Wedging: Assessing China's Southeast Asia Policy in the Context of Indo-Pacific Strategy**

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Abstract

From the Asian financial crisis in 1997 to the year 2010, China's self-restraint and strategic reassurance toward ASEAN countries created a favorable regional environment for its rise. After 2010, the South China Sea disputes and the Sino-U.S. strategic competition intensified. During this period, China simultaneously pursued a wedging strategy which aims to avoid Southeast Asia completely turning toward the United States. Since the Trump administration launched the Indo-Pacific strategy, Sino-U.S. relations have transited from competition to confrontation, significantly increasing the importance of Southeast Asia as a buffer between China and the U.S. At the same time, intensified economic dependence on China for ASEAN countries, and the uncertainty surrounding the U.S.'s strategic attention to the region have increased the costs and risks of alienating China. Both China and ASEAN countries can no longer afford further deterioration in their

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