At the end of the Cold War, the thesis of the “end of history” (Fukuyama) argued that democracy and capitalism would represent the future and the Western model would conquer the world. Twenty-five years later this model is being challenged. For Layne: “The end of America’s unipolar moment will cause major changes in international politics. Under the Pax Americana the world has enjoyed a long era of great power peace and international prosperity. This holiday from history, however, is coming to an end and international politics is headed back to the future”¹. There is an economic and political shift and redistribution of power, from the “West to the Rest” on the classical state power chessboard. In this regard, the Indo-Pacific region is the new centre of world affairs. Indeed, new centres of power emerge. And although most researchers concentrate their studies on emerging powers as India or China, the role of middle powers has been neglected. Yet, numerous middle powers seem to want to assert themselves in this world in transition and potential leadership void. The fact that the world is not unipolar anymore, and has still not evolved towards a new polarity, appears to give middle powers new opportunities, developing a multidimensional foreign policy. They have more freedom to act than in a rigid bipolar world or concert of nation (that is they are able to defend their regional interests). Indeed, in a situation of rivalry and cooperation, alliances are characterized by a degree of looseness. Now that the United States is in relative decline, the role of middle powers is taking a new dimension. As Cooper mentioned, the role of a middle power is rather dynamic than static and it must be ‘constantly subjected to adjustments to fit the evolutions of the international system’². Middle powers could classically choose between balancing and bandwagoning and “be freer to lean one way or the other in order to take advantage of a favourable bargaining position”³, but there is a third option in a world in transition: exploring the possibility of protecting their interests by cooperating with each other. In the past decade there has been rudimentary cooperation among middle powers of the Indo-Pacific region. This rapprochement has taken different forms – development of political relationships, high-level visits, defence and security agreements, joint operations and exercises and foreign military assistance and arms sales. It might even turn into an embryo of a middle power concert that could give them influence in the region. Consequently, this research, based on middle power theory, management theory and leader-follower literature, proposes to address the importance of middle powers for the future of the liberal world order shaped by the United States and how Washington and China could benefit from the emergence of middle powers.

³ Carsten Holbraad, Middle powers in International Politics, New York, St Martin Press, 1984, p. 141.
Our hypothesis are the following: 1) middle powers do not necessarily look up to great powers for leadership, and go their own way to influence events by forging new regional relationships; 2) middle powers going their own way to influence events by forging new regional relationships are beneficial for the United States, if the latter transforms its leadership in transformational leadership and could be helpful for an emerging China.

I will first develop, based on Carr’s definition of middle powers one particular aspect of middle powers, namely the ability to alter or affect specific elements of the international system and based on mid-level management theory develop the “middle-up-down model”. I will then articulate how middle powers develop their own autonomous foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific by cooperating together in order to form an alternative to China and the United States. I will subsequently analyse different examples of cooperation and based on another management theory- the strategy of the Dolphin- I will articulate how these middle powers can form a third bloc. Finally, I will demonstrate that this third bloc could be beneficial to the United States and China.

1. Systemic impact “plus”: middle-up-down approach

The scientific literature is very divided on the concept and definition of middle power. Since the end of the Second World War, many articles and books have been dedicated to the subject yet no one appears to agree on a common definition or on common characteristics. The purpose of this article is not to enter the debate of the definition of a middle power, but is deliberately characterized by a more practical approach, related to our hypothesis. Consequently, for this article we retained the common practical definition of middle power: Middle powers are considered as “states that are weaker than the great powers in the system but significantly stronger than the minor powers and small states with which they normally interact.”

This being so, our starting point is the analysis of Carr, which relies on the importance of the systemic impact – “that is, the ability to alter or affect specific elements of the international system in which (Middle powers) find themselves”. Consequently, Carr’s definition of middle power becomes: “states that protect their core interests and initiate or lead a change in

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4 Generally there are four ways to define a middle power – according to function, capabilities, norms or behaviour.
6 Carsten Holbraad, Middle powers in International Politics, St Martin Press, New York, 1984, p. 4.
a specific aspect of the existing international order”. Leaning on his study, we pushed further, based on the literature of management, more specifically mid-level management or leadership. The model that retained our attention is the one developed by Floyd and Wooldridge regarding management.

Figure 1: Middle-up-down approach


To paraphrase Floyd and Wooldridge, middle powers are traditionally *strategy implementors*, but reinforce the grand strategy of the hegemon/leader as upward *information synthesizers*. The United States can, of course, establish a grand strategy and set goals that will affect the entire international system, but in order to achieve these endeavours, they will need others, most of them will be middle powers. A grand strategy is not only about the definition of a project, it is also about coalition building/networking, procurement of other states’ support, and last but not least implementation. As Mintzberg underscored in the sector of management in the eighties – yet still applicable to the field of International Relations: “… the scope of

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8 *Ibidem.*
strategy process research [was] expanded to include not only top managers (superpower) but also middle managers (middle powers) whose activities and behaviours have important consequences for how strategy forms within organisations”. The involvement of middle powers beyond implementation and farther into strategic planning is crucial: an influence strategy as an implementation of strategy.

But middle powers can also be adaptative facilitators with room for manoeuvre without any melding from the superpower. Middle powers can detect opportunities, develop innovative approaches more quickly (regional approach) than the superpower (global approach) and can also recognize when the strategy may need adaptation. Middle powers are closer to day-to-day regional interactions and realities and have better knowledge of regional tensions, reality, etc. As D. Dewitt rightly suggests “A major hallmark of a middle power was that it could always get a hearing from a major power but be trusted by smaller states”9. If successful, alternatives can be championed upward10.

Consequently, what makes middle powers so important is not necessarily where they sit in the hierarchy of power. Indeed, it is rather due to – as explained in management theory through the middle-up-down concept – their access to great powers coupled with (regional) expertise. An upward influencing strategy is used to influence the leader, a downward strategy is used to influence small states, what is lacking in the management model is a lateral strategy used to influence peers.

Lateral relationships are “those whose functions are not primarily the passing down of orders or the passing up of information and whose nature and characteristics are not primarily determined by the fact that one actor is superior to the other in the organization's hierarchy. The function of horizontal relationships is to facilitate the solution of problems arising from division of labor, and their nature and characteristics are determined by the participants having different organizational subgoals but interdependent activities that need to intermesh”11.

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The lateral organization describes thus the side by side relation, the horizontal processes (coordination and consultation) between actors of the same level in a hierarchy (power, status), having similar or common interests, goals and objectives: the development of a mutually reinforcing and interrelated set of policies and practices to achieve a common goal rather than operate as separate and distinct entities.

For lateral cooperation to succeed, it is important to plan how to manage the interactions: “The key to collaboration is initiating processes leading to shared understanding”. Lateral leadership “requires recognizing what drives one's partners before being able to align one's own interests with them. Then an attempt must be made to break open their ways of thinking”\textsuperscript{12}. Lateral cooperation is characterized by the division of labor but is only possible if there is some degree of trust. The latter can be obtained initially by “utilizing secondary theaters of engagement”\textsuperscript{13} or by logrolling - trading of favors, or quid pro quo. Furthermore following the authors of \textit{The keys to lateral leadership}, lateral cooperation must be based, amongst others on 1) mutually supportive and trusting relationships; 2) removing relationship roadblocks that can stand in the way of addressing substantive issues; 3) focusing on the basic issues at stake; 4) pragmatically and constructively integrating the respective needs of those involved is the best way to build objective alliances and overcome interpersonal conflicts; 5) ensuring that the parties to the relationship have the impression that they are getting their fair share; and 6) the lasting success of the arrangement depends primarily on the quality of interpersonal relationships\textsuperscript{14}. We could add integrity, transparency, empowerment, flexibility, commitment, exemplarity,

\textsuperscript{13} Ibidem., p. 186.
\textsuperscript{14} “The keys to lateral leadership”. \textit{Manageris}, 2010, n° 185, p. 3-6
accountability and connectivity. Furthermore as in holacracy\(^\text{15}\), leadership would be distributed among roles, not states: power would be detained in or rely on the roles (match the end objectives) not by the states, as role trumps rank. Of course, lateral relations are not only about collaboration; there will be competition between middle powers, because of resources, status, and so on. But in the end it is about finding the right balance between the two: “Coopetition”. Consequently, a middle power should adopt a profile of “initiator”, “role model”, “mentor” or “being in the driving seat” of a peer-to-peer network (with equal authority, power and responsibility)\(^\text{16}\) to guide and facilitate the rapprochement of a diverse group of equals without behaving as a leader, a status that would not be granted in any case by the other middle powers. So, peer leadership is fraught with peril because you don’t have the authority, because of the rivalries among peers, but also because power is detained by the different roles the different states fulfill. So the common project has to be at the centre and consequently the roles to fulfill, not the one who carries or advances the project.

In fine, the international system is characterized by vertical and horizontal relations that are interconnected in a “stable network of patterned interactions”\(^\text{17}\). Thus, more a middle power forms a node in the network, more it gains power because “(its) immersion in multiple interdependencies makes (it) functionally indispensable”\(^\text{18}\). Such “intraorganizational power”, namely network centrality, “is attached to an actor’s position in the network rather than derived from a control of resources within any particular dyadic relationship (…) Thus power derives not only from resource dependencies within specific exchange relations, but also has a structural component, namely the position or location of the actor within the exchange network”\(^\text{19}\). Consequently, the international system is not merely defined by a top-down approach; it is all the more complex due to the fact that middle powers form a very important link.

2. Intense peer cooperation between middle powers

The Indo-Pacific region is evolving and is becoming the centre of economic, security and political issues. Furthermore, the security environment - an assertive China, piracy, security of the SLOCs, defence spending, nationalism, North Korea, South China Sea, … - is evolving rapidly and risks of conflicts cannot be excluded in the future. Middle powers cannot afford to wait and sit idly by without taking into consideration potential new factors in the regional strategic equation of the Indo-Pacific (potential disengagement of the United States and heavy handed Chinese foreign policy). Middle powers in the region have to find also the right balance between Washington and Beijing in this likely “Asian century”, to harmonize economic and security objectives. Success is linked to flexibility and adaptation. As Cox already mentioned in 1989 about middle powers, they need to have “an ability to stand a

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\(^{15}\) The term holarchy, was developed by Arthur Koestler, author of the 1967 Book The Ghost in the Machine, as the organizational connections between holons (from the Greek for ”whole”), which describes units that act independently but would not exist without the organization of which they are a part.


\(^{18}\) Ibidem., p. 106.

\(^{19}\) Ibidem.
certain distance from direct involvement in major conflicts, a sufficient degree of autonomy in relation to major powers, a commitment to orderliness and security in interstate relations and to the facilitation of orderly change in the world system are critical elements for the fulfillment of the middle power role. Consequently, middle powers need to adapt and adopt new policies in order to ensure the continuity of a certain influence (concept of Ratzels's social Darwinism). They have to reinvent themselves. For former Prime Minister of Australia K. Rudd, middle powers have to be creative: “creative middle powers are uniquely placed to bring together major, regional and smaller powers alike to inform and shape solutions, since their strength comes from the good offices they bring to bear on regional and global problems and the persuasiveness of their arguments and the coalitions they are capable of building, not the assertion of direct power”. This is in accordance with the concept of “Entangling diplomacy”, described by Hurrell as follows: “there is no great puzzle as to the advantages that often lead intermediate states to favor multilateralism and institutions (...) The degree to which institutions provide political space (...) to build new coalitions in order to try and effect emerging norms in ways that are congruent with their interests and to counter-balance or deflect the preferences of the most powerful”. Middle powers have not always been moderate in their foreign policy, but most bridge-builders fall into this category. That said, in general, their policy is a combination of realpolitik and liberalism. Consequently, most middle powers do not only focus on bridge-building or mediation. As we shall observe, they strengthen their partnership through high-level meetings, joint military exercises, thus reinforcing agenda-setting, trust and cohesion. Due to the uncertain future of the Indo-Pacific’s regional security environment, middle powers have diversified their relations via the creation of a web or network of relations. To support our argument, let’s take the examples of

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22 Hurrell summarizes it well: “There is no great puzzle as to the advantages that often lead intermediate states to favour multilateralism and institutions (...): the extent to which institutions empower weaker states by constraining the freedom of the most powerful through established rules and procedures; the degree to which institutions provide political space for important middle-level players to build new coalitions in order to try and affect emerging norms in ways that are congruent with their interests and to counter-balance or at deflect the preferences and policies of the most powerful; and the extent to which institutions provide ‘voice opportunities’ to make known their interests and to bid for political support in the broader marketplace of ideas. So intermediate states will seek to use international institutions either to defend themselves against norms or rules or practices that adversely affect their interests or even in optimistic moments, to change dominant international norms in ways that they would like to see” (Andrew Hurrell, “Some Reflections on the Role of Intermediate Powers in International Institutions”, in *Paths to Power: Foreign Policy Strategies of Intermediate States*, (Ed. Andrew Hurrell), Latin American Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2000, p. 4).
Australia, Japan, India and South Korea. The relationships among all these middle powers have deepened in recent years.

2.1. Australia

In an international game, in which its two main security and prosperity partners represent both the most important protagonists of the contemporary international system and rival geopolitical powers, Canberra's strategy must remain subtle. Facing this reality, Canberra understands the interest to balance its two major relationships in order to defend at best its national interest. Therefore, Canberra tries to advance a nuanced and pragmatic policy. For Australia it’s important to look for alternatives and bolster regional relationships. Australia defends this idea in Strong and Secure: A Strategy for Australia’s National Security of 2013: “Looking ahead, a few partnerships will warrant particular focus. The importance of a deepening of our relationship with China cannot be overstated. Indonesia, already a key partner will continue to grow in strategic and economic weight. We will seek to enhance bilateral cooperation with those nations comprising ASEAN, as well as Japan, South Korea and India—nations with which we share a widening range of security interests. New Zealand will continue to be our most important security partner in the South Pacific”25.

Indonesia is a major partner of Australia, and probably the one with which it has the most complex relationship. For a long time, Canberra, with its sparsely populated north of Australia, considered the proximity of the Indonesian archipelago26 to be its main threat to national security. Without mentioning demographic, cultural or religious differences—which already represent a distancing factor—, history and politics played a decisive role in ties between Canberra and Jakarta, thus holding back the economic ties and the common strategic priorities of the two countries. Historically, Australia feared the emergence of a hostile Asian power in its vicinity. This explains the tumultuous pattern of their bilateral relations. The Indonesian-Malaysian confrontation (1962-1966) and the independence of East Timor (1998-1999), have led to tense relations between the countries. At a political level, and starting with the Revolusi (the Indonesian struggle for independence between 1945 and 1949), the Australian governments had constantly placed their relations with Indonesia at the forefront of their foreign policy concerns. Depending on the events, their relations were either characterized by strengthened cooperation (Australian support for Indonesian independence, Bali terrorist attacks, the 2006 Lombok Treaty, the 2012 Defence Cooperation Arrangement, the 2014 Joint Understanding on intelligence cooperation, Defence and Foreign Affairs 2+2 Ministerial talks) or by degradation (official critics of Human Rights, the case of the ‘billions of Suharto’, the ‘Snowden scandal’, the executions of two Australians in Indonesia in 2015).

After this turbulent period with ups and downs under Prime Minister Abbott, the relationship between current Indonesia’s President Joko Widodo and the current government of Prime minister Turnbull is in a positive mood (visit of Turnbull to Jakarta in 2015). The fourth 2+2

26 There is a distance of approximately 144 km between the Roti Island (Indonesia; south-west Timor) and the uninhabited Islands Ashmore-and-Cartier (Australia; north-west).
Dialogue was held in Jakarta at the end of October 2016, where the two states were considering joint patrols in the contested South China Sea. The two parties discussed also cybersecurity, terrorism and the common development of a MRAV (mine-resistant armored vehicle). In the long term, no bilateral relationship will be more important to Australia than that with Indonesia.

Next to Indonesia, Japan and South Korea are also becoming predominant partners of Australia. Although Japan has always been a key-trading partner of Australia, confirmed by a free trade agreement signed in April 2014, their ties in terms of foreign and security policy have been growing since the early 2000s and particularly since 2007 with the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation. This has resulted since in regular summits (dialogues in 2 + 2 format, bringing together the foreign affairs and defence ministers of Australia and Japan), joint military exercises, information sharing, etc. During her visit in Tokyo of October 2013, Bishop, the Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, even said that Japan was ‘Australia’s closest friend in Asia’\(^\text{27}\) The relationship was further elevated to a Special Strategic Partnership in 2014. Although there was a great deception when the Australian government decided to acquire a French submarine instead of the Japanese submarine, it did not left a visible trace in the relationship. In January 2017, Tokyo and Canberra inked even a new Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)\(^\text{28}\), reinforcing their military ties by facilitating the exchange of support, including food, fuel, transportation, equipment and ammunition\(^\text{29}\).

Even if the relationship with South Korea is more recent than the Japanese one, it is rapidly expanding. The two states signed a Joint Statement on Enhanced Global and Security Cooperation in March 2009 and there also exist a Korea-Australia Strategic Dialogue facilitating cooperation in different fields: border security, counter-terrorism, maritime security and peacekeeping operations. In addition, they signed a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2009 to facilitate exchange of information and shared understandings of security challenges\(^\text{30}\). Since 2013, the two countries have also organized meetings in a ‘2 + 2’ format and have deepened their military cooperation, both bilaterally and through multilateral exercises (such as RIMPAC). Moreover, in April 2014, South Korea signed a free trade agreement with Australia. Adding to that, in 2015, the two countries signed a new defence cooperation framework, encouraging more joint military exercises, cooperation in defence, counter-proliferation, transnational law enforcement, cyber, border security and crisis management. Seoul and Canberra are as well members of MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia), established in 2013, on an initiative of Seoul. The initiative is seen as “one between middle-power nations that share core values of democracy and free market economy and have the willingness and capability to contribute to the international community’s development”\(^\text{31}\). Although still lacking recognition on the

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\(^{27}\) J. Bishop supports Japan on Defence”, *The Australian*, 16 octobre 2013.

\(^{28}\) The first one was signed in 2013.


international scene, MIKTA wants to have influence on important international dossiers. Furthermore, Australia has set as a priority the deepening of its economic, political and security cooperation with ASEAN through different fora (ARF, ADMM +,...). Australia is the sixth trade partner of ASEAN, and ASEAN the second to Australia. Bilateral trade between the two reached 195 billions of dollars in 2014. Besides, bilateral relations in the field of security and foreign policy has also developed between Canberra and different member states. Without being exhaustive, some examples of recent developments: 1) The Philippines and Australia signed in 2007 the Philippine Australia Status of Visiting Force Agreement, and have held regular joint military exercises. A new Joint Declaration on Philippines-Australia Comprehensive Partnership was signed in November 2015; 2) In May 2016, Singapore and Australia signed a new agreement to boost their defense relationship: Singapore, whose troops have been training since the 1990 in Australia, will invest almost 2 billion of dollars to expand its military facilities in Northeastern Australia, joint bilateral military exercises, intelligence-sharing; 3) In September 2009, Australia and Viet Nam established the Australia – Viet Nam Comprehensive Partnership. The two countries agreed in 2015 to organize joint military exercises.

In addition to the rapprochement with Indonesia and some other states of ASEAN, Australia and India are also developing a partnership. This rapprochement between Canberra and New Delhi is recent; the relationship was hindered for a long time due to the Australian refusal to sell uranium to India, a non-signatory state of the NPT. However, both countries are members of many regional organizations (ASEAN Regional Forum, ADMM-Plus, Indian Ocean Rim...) and have common interests such as the security of maritime routes, the fight against piracy, a certain mistrust of China and the development of their common economic relations. They signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Cooperation in 2006 and a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in 2009. In 2014, the two states concluded a nuclear agreement facilitating uranium export to India. The same year they signed the India-Australia Framework for security cooperation, which included the objective of holding regular meetings, a security dialogue, military exercises and better naval cooperation. In addition, they have started bilateral military exercises (AUSINDEX), the first taking place in 2015. Australia already exports gas and many raw materials (coal, copper, gold) to India. The rapprochement also manifests itself in discussions for a bilateral free trade agreement.

2.2. India

Likewise, India has reinforced its relationship with middle powers through its Look East Policy, today Act East Policy, thus strengthening the relationship with ASEAN countries but also Japan and Australia. Although India started its Look East Policy in the early nineties (1992: Sector Dialogue Partner of ASEAN; 1995: Full Dialogue Partner of ASEAN; 2012: Strategic Partnership ASEAN-India), it only began to be effective over the last few years. Originally the emphasis was set on economics, yet it rapidly included security and defense issues. Regarding the latter, the main partners within ASEAN are Vietnam, Indonesia and

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32 Australia appointed the first resident ambassador to ASEAN in 2013.
33 In 2014, Modi was the first Indian prime minister to visit Australia in 28 years.
Singapore. India has helped Vietnam in the modernisation of its naval forces (credit line of 100 millions for 4 patrol boats) and aerial capacities (modernisation MIG-21) and is very interested to have access to Cam Ranh Bay. With Indonesia, New Delhi concluded a strategic partnership in 2005 and both countries have engaged in coordinated patrols and joint bilateral exercises in the region. The two countries also envisage enhancing military exports.

The Indian-Japanese rapprochement is quite recent. It started with the speech of Prime Minister Abe at the Indian parliament where he laid out his vision of “The Confluence of the two seas” in 2007. Since then the relationship has intensified, India and Japan having a lot of interests in common: North Korea, maritime trade routes, reform of the UN, defiance towards China. The rapprochement was, as they generally are, gradual: India-Japan Partnership in a New Asian Era: Strategic Orientation of Japan-India Global Partnership (2005); Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (2008) (Common coast-guard exercises, meetings); “Two+Two Dialogue” (Defense and foreign policy) (2010) and Special Strategic and Global Partnership (2014). They also have bilateral military exercises (JIMEX). Moreover, the recent lift on arms export ban will reinforce the relationship (possible acquisition of the Japanese US-2 patrol aircraft by India). In December 2015, prime ministers Abe and Modi also signed agreements on civil nuclear cooperation, defence equipment and technology transfer, protection of classified military information exchanges and high-speed rail cooperation.

Finally, it is important to further mention that Japan, India and Australia hold their first Trilateral Dialogue in June 2015. There even was the establishment of a Triilateral dialogue Japan-India-United States in 2011, followed by regular joint US-India-Japanese Naval exercises.

For its part, the rapprochement between India and Seoul has been slow. India and South Korea had distant relations over a long period of time, sharing no real common interests. They closed in on each other in the nineties, albeit only in the economic field (bilateral trade in 2014 of almost 18 billion of dollars). Yet, as Snyder explains “India’s Act East policy and South Korea’s Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative do not yet intersect, and the political/security dimension of South Korea-India cooperation remains underdeveloped”.

Nevertheless, things are going in the right direction. In 2005 they signed a first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance cooperation in defense industries and logistics. One year later a new MoU was signed to improve collaboration between Coast Guards. In 2010 two other MoU were signed, one on exchange of visits concerning military personnel, ships and aircrafts, and the other on industrial collaboration (R&D, co-production,…)

The subsequent year, they contracted an agreement on civil nuclear energy cooperation. In 2015, the two states concluded a Special Strategic Partnership Agreement, encouraging more cooperation among their armies and military industries (R&D) as well as establishing an annual 2+2

34 Since 2002, the Indian Navy and the Indonesian navy participate in coordinated patrols (CORPAT) to guaranty the security of SLOCS.
35 About 80 per cent of vital nuclear plant components are made in Japan meaning India is also dependent on Tokyo for nuclear deals concluded with other countries. (Satoru Nagao, “The significance of the Japan-India nuclear deal”, The Diplomat, 25 December 2015.
36 The rapprochement between the two states is delicate, as it could be perceived by China as a threat and a confrontational behaviour.
37 Scott Snyder, “Prospects For A U.S.-South Korea-India Triangle?”, in Forbes.com, 18 September 2015.
dialogue at the vice-ministerial level. The two share tangible common interests: North Korea, regional stability, maritime security, SLOCS… What is more, they have started to conduct joint naval exercises, anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and collaborated on cyber issues.

2.3. Japan
Japan has become more assertive on the regional scene these last few years and has the ambition to redefine Japan’s role on the regional scene. To accomplish this endeavour, Tokyo did not merely reinforce its alliance with the United States or solely reinterpreted art. 9 of the Constitution, it also establishes new partnerships. These actions are parts of what is known as “normalisation”. The fact that Japan will now be able to deploy forces abroad in an easier fashion and engage in collective self-defense, will facilitate the cooperation with other powers of the region. Japan has even lifted its self-imposed ban on arms exports and increased defence spending (although not exceeding 1% of GDP).

In 2006-2007, Japan as already mentioned, wanted to create a “Diamond relationship”, including India, United States and Australia. New Delhi and Canberra had some reservations because they were concerned by a possible Chinese reaction that would interpret this policy as containment. This quadrilateral dialogue never officially became a reality and was put aside. Yet, in reality, things are very different. Indeed, in the last few years the bilateral relationship among the four as well as their multilateral relations have strengthened, principally due to the rise of China, not necessarily seen as a peaceful by Japan.

Although we already mentioned Tokyo’s rapprochement with Canberra and New Delhi, the Japanese are even more ambitious regarding the development of their relations with ASEAN as a regional organization and some of its members. Japan signed with Indonesia in March 2015 the Japan-Indonesia Joint Statement on Strategic Cooperation. Still in 2015, the two states pledged to reinforce their relation and hold “two-plus-two” (once every two years) talks between their foreign affairs and defence chiefs to promote security cooperation (the first meeting was held end 2015). Moreover, Indonesia envisions to buy weapons from Japan in the future. Japan participates also in a multinational naval exercise, the Komodo, hosted by Indonesia. Nevertheless, it is with Vietnam and the Philippines that military cooperation is further advanced. Japan has already provided the Philippines’ coast guard patrol vessels. In addition, in March 2016, an agreement to supply defense equipment and joint military training was signed by Japan and the Philippines. Japanese warships have docked regularly in ports in the Philippines in 2016. Concerning Vietnam, Japan not only reinforced its economic relations, it also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Cooperation in 2011 and delivered six patrol vessels. In April 2016, two Japanese destroyers made their first port call into Vietnam’s strategic Cam Ranh Bay port. These port calls are part of a broader Japanese strategy to affirm its presence in the region. The two states also organised a search and rescue exercise in February 2016.

Although Japan is already present in continental ASEAN economically (aid and investments), there is also clearly a nascent, to be sure still modest, defense cooperation implementation. In 2013 Cambodia and Japan signed a strategic partnership and in February 2017, three Japanese warships visited the country. These examples confirm the growing importance of the Southeast Asian states in the Japanese foreign and defense policy.
The relationship between Seoul and Tokyo is marked by history, making any rapprochement complicated. The strained relation between Seoul and Tokyo obscures any effective cooperation between the two middle powers in the Indo-Pacific. In June 2012, Seoul cancelled two security agreements (GSOMIA\textsuperscript{39} and ACSA\textsuperscript{40}) concluded one month earlier with Tokyo due to national emotion and pressure from the public opinion. For Glosserman and Snyder “the interaction between national leadership and public opinion is a critical factor in the evolution of each country’s perceptions of self and other. This means that political leaders may face the temptation to follow public opinion but may also shape public opinion with the exercise of effective, enlightened, and truly strategic political leadership. (…) As political leaders, both President Park Geun-hye and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe must be sensitive to the needs of their people and to public approval. By the same token, decisive leadership can provide valuable political capital and win public support if the leaders themselves are able to give each other enough material to work with and can make the case to their respective publics in favor of a mutually beneficial political outcome. Statesmanship is arguably the highest exercise of a leader’s political skills in the service of the state, and it is what distinguishes an average national leader from one that has a distinctive historical legacy.”\textsuperscript{41}. Under American pressure Japan, South Korea and the United States signed in 2014 a trilateral information sharing agreement, but a “Japan-ROK GSOMIA would remove the United States as an intermediary and streamline the exchange of North Korea-related intelligence between Japan and South Korea.”\textsuperscript{42} There is also the controversy concerning the Dokdo/ Takeshima islands, disputed by the two states. For Japan, South Korea unlawfully occupies the islands, whereas for South Korea there cannot be any dispute about the islands since they are under Korean sovereignty. The strategic and economic value of the islands being very limited, the stake is rather centred on prestige and reputation. In addition, the two countries have a different approach regarding China. Principally due to geography and the North-Korean issue, Seoul is more open to dialogue and soft power, while Japan is more inclined to resort to hard power. Moreover, the reinterpretation of art. 9 of the Constitution by Japan has reopened past wars wounds.

Still, Japan and South Korea do work together in multilateral fora (Six party talks, Shangri-La Dialogue) and participate in multilateral military exercises (RIMPAC, SAREX). There was also positive news at the end of 2015. In November 2015, President Park and Prime Minsiter Abe held their first bilateral summit meeting, in Seoul. One month later, the two concluded an agreement regarding the issue of comfort women\textsuperscript{43}, albeit met by strong criticism in South Korea, illustrating the fragility of this agreement. Furthermore, continuous North-Korean provocations and the ambiguous role of China could push the two states closer to each other.

\textsuperscript{39} General Security of Military Information Agreement: agreement outlining procedures to facilitate the sharing of classified defense-related threat information.

\textsuperscript{40} Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement.

\textsuperscript{41} Mina Pollman, “The Troubled Japan-South Korea Relationship” (The Diplomat talks with Brad Glosserman and Scott A. Snyder about Japan-Korea relations), The Diplomat, July 27, 2015.

\textsuperscript{42} Samuel Mun, “Japan-South Korea Defense Ties Need a Boost Amid North Korea's Provocations”, The Diplomat, February 27, 2016.

\textsuperscript{43} Japan admits that atrocities were committed and acknowledges the resulting dishonor to Korean women and agreed to contribute for 9 million of dollars to a foundation. South Korea promised to put the matter behind and to find a solution concerning the removal of a statue representing a comfort woman in front of the Japanese embassy.
2.4. South Korea

In previous sections, we revealed South Korea’s relationship with India, Australia and Japan. Nonetheless, it is interesting to now devote some lines to its relationship with some of the ASEAN members. South Korea signed a defence agreement in 2015 with Philippines encompassing shared military information on North Korea, exchange of military personnel and reinforced cooperation against non-conventional threats. Moreover, Seoul continues to export fighter jets (12 FA-50) to Manila. In August 2001, bilateral relations between Seoul and Hanoi were enhanced through a Comprehensive Partnership. In 2009 the two countries signed a Strategic Cooperative Partnership, later upgraded in 2011, it includes: expanding exchanges in foreign security and defense and to increase cooperation in search and rescue, anti-terrorism, crime prevention, personnel training and defense industries. As already mentioned, Indonesia and South Korea are both members of MIKTA and have a strong economic relation. That said, although they hold strong industrial defense cooperation and signed a strategic partnership in 2006 – and even if Indonesia acquires weapons from South Korea (advanced jet trainers, diesel-electric submarines, cooperation for the development of KFX/IFX fighter jets) – their military cooperation is relatively limited.

This general overview demonstrates that in the past few years some middle powers have engaged with each other in order to diversify and multiply their options. Yet, many of these new bilateral and trilateral relations, have failed to realize their full potential. It is still a work in progress. Surely, these middle powers have their own challenges to take into account too. Indeed, every middle power has its own priorities based on its national interest, meaning that the cooperation will reach its limits at some points in time. Some of the difficulties are historical issues or are related to sovereignty disputes, without mentioning the defence budgets constraints (economic crises) that make collaboration and investments harder. One relevant example is the aforementioned South Korea-Japan relation. Certainly, a poor relationship between Seoul and Tokyo jeopardizes any effective middle power collaboration, thus limiting the systemic impact.

2.5. The dolphin strategy and a nascent third bloc network

The relationship is currently limited to operational partnerships and still lacks concrete long-term strategic and thoughtful partnerships. But for the abovementioned middle powers, the rise of the Indo-Pacific realities obliges them to look more and more further afield.


In 1989, while reflecting upon leadership strategies in the new age of information, Dudley Lynch and Paul Kordis, authors of *The Dolphin Strategy*, drew from typified animal behaviour in order to develop a new management model. According to them, you do not need to be a ‘shark’ to be a winner. It is rather more interesting to be a ‘dolphin’: smart, adaptive, responsive, looking further afield. Remarkably, they subtitled their book ‘Scoring a win in a chaotic world’\(^{46}\). Lynch and Kordis argue that in an era of organisational change there are three types of leadership strategies which mirror respectively the behaviour of sharks, carps, and dolphins. Sharks are insecure. They see the world as a zero-sum game, and act accordingly. They focus on their survival and rely on power, prestige and manipulation to secure it. Carps are insecure too. Yet, unlike sharks, they avoid conflict and seek to leverage sympathy. Guardians of the status quo, they think of themselves as the ‘eternal victims’ of change. Dolphins, finally, are those who make the best out of organisational change. They display pragmatic coping and communications skills, guided by a long-term purpose. They see opportunities where sharks and carps see threats. Where sharks focus on power and carps on relationships, dolphins resort to both.

Having the opportunity to be more (pro)active on the international scene is one thing, to translate it into practice, is another. A middle power requires of course some material capacities to be credible on the international scene (self-defence, sphere of influence). However, middle powers have to put greater emphasis on relations and processes since they have fewer capacities, resources and means than great powers. Keeping in mind that isolated, a middle power will have limited or no impact, what sort of architectural framework should middle powers adopt if they want to be influential? In a world in transition, middle powers have the opportunity to consolidate regional blocs without losing the global evolution out of sight. Cooper is right: “To offset the negative effects of American withdrawal, it will be necessary for the system’s small and middle powers to engage in more creative diplomacy to fill the obvious gaps left by the waning of ‘tests of will’. [...]the technical innovation and entrepreneurship in the international diplomacy of middle powers could, if effectively coordinated, play an important role in shaping the future”\(^{47}\).

Thus, it is in the interest of middle powers to work together if they want to have more autonomy and gain greater influence. They need to “share a sense of club membership, even though their effectiveness at procuring change and assisting in the transformation of the world system is still yet to be determined”\(^{48}\).

Middle powers need to use their network position and their hierarchical opportunity: the relations in the network need to evolve from the operational towards the strategic. We agree with Cooper for whom: “Under the conditions of shifting and expanding coalitions, countries with network and soft power resources have advantages because they can better identify and build right coalitions. A country with network power has more information, communication tools and human networks, so it can convene or put together winning coalitions more easily.

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Soft power helps because it produces right messages, initiatives and innovations as well as wins trust from partner countries\(^49\).

There is a need to see the emergence of a set of interactions within a cluster of middle powers, autonomous, yet interdependent among each other in order to satisfy their interests and become audible on the international scene, defend a pragmatic vision of international relations and understand the relevance of a system characterized by international interdependency.

The objective is to develop in a first stage a common ground within a community thus encouraging exchange of ideas and the promotion of interactions at different levels of participation. These practices can become institutionalized at a later stage. As Lee and Chun argue: “Its influence as a middle power is then defined within the context of a larger network, and the network itself presents opportunities for middle powers to exercise influence and achieve policy goals and or desired intentions”\(^50\). For Turner there is a psychological process, which makes the transition possible from a personal identity to a social identity, and that is through depersonalization – a process of self-stereotyping through which the self comes to be seen through the lens of a membership category that happens to be shared with other in-group members\(^51\). Although the self is not disappearing, it undergoes a redefinition in which all self-related terms are changed to “we”\(^52\). The objective for these middle powers is to start forming a coherent unity sharing the same goals, their self no-longer solely relying on one clear identity: Community empowerment, “the collective social process of creating a community, achieving better control over the environment, and decision making in which groups, organizations or communities participate”\(^53\). Based on the study of Elisheva Sadan, this empowerment process follows different steps: 1) a sense of frustration between aspirations and possibilities; 2) this sense needs to be accompanied by a minimal level of ability and resources to enable organized activity, as well a minimum of social legitimation to permit such activity; 3) mobilization of resolve and will is a first outcome in the process; 4) ability to define them is an outcome of developing a critical consciousness of the existing situation; 5) self-efficacy may become collective efficacy if translated into the community’s practical ability to organize itself for a collective effort to achieve outcomes in the environment; 6) success in mobilizing resources to continue the process, including resources of knowledge about organizing and setting up community organizations, are outcomes that indicate that the empowerment process has established itself\(^54\).

In practical terms, this could be encouraged by engaging in a first step based on the principle of communities of practice, concept developed in the nineties in management and sociology\(^55\). Communities of practice “are groups of people who share a concern, set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by

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\(^55\) I would like to thank Emilian Kawalski for his input on community of practices.
interacting on an ongoing basis.” 56. The characteristics are “interactions”, to “share information, insight, and advice”, to “discuss their situations, their aspirations, and their needs” and by “accumulating knowledge, they become informally bound by the value that they find in learning together”, to finally develop overtime “a unique perspective on their topic”, “common knowledge, practices, and approaches” 57.

Without going into much details, communities of practice are based on three characteristics: “a domain of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a community of (states) who care about this domain; and the shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain” 58. In our case, the domain is the place of middle powers in this world in transition (position towards China and the United States). The community equals to the middle powers and the shared practice are the tactics and strategies these middle powers develop together to be effective. The domain brings these actors together and legitimates this community of middle powers defining a determined objective and meaning to their actions. More the community is characterized by trust, reciprocity and interactions, more it will be effective internally and influential externally. Finally the practice corresponds to the framework the middle powers agreed on. A last element worth to mention is networking: a community of practice without networking will be complicated.

Community of practice is also more about the development of a core group (among Australia, Japan, India, South Korea and Indonesia), than about the number of members: “during the coalescing stage, building membership is actually much less important than developing the core group. It is through the collaboration of the core group that the community discovers its value; making connections between core group members is the most important networking the coordinator can do. When the core group is cohesive, the community can withstand the growth pressures typical of the next stage” 59. This community of practice could form the embryo of a future middle power concert that would let its voice be heard in the region. Furthermore, their positional advantage grants middle powers more opportunities to exercise influence 60. In addition, middle powers could, as Lee and Chun suggest, play a “socializer” role: “socialize China (and the US)” 61 into regional norms and acceptable behaviour” 62.

Consequently, middle powers need to expand their “independent diplomatic space and status that is compatible with (their) existing identity as an American ally. China’s perception of regional middle powers is limited in that it acknowledges the strategic value of middle powers that are allied with the U.S. based not on its respect for their middle power status, but on its perception of the regional middle powers as the U.S.’s junior partners. In order to maintain the status and role of middle power diplomacy, regional middle powers need to reshape their identity and roles as U.S. allies in the context of the U.S.-China rivalry” 63.

57 Ibidem., p. 5
58 Ibidem., p. 27.
59 Ibidem., p. 88.
61 Added by the author
62 Sook-Jong Lee, Chaesung Chun, HyeeJung Suh, and Patrick Thomsen, op. cit., p. 11.
63 Ibidem., p.16.
A stable middle power cooperation will have a stronger impact on architectural issues\textsuperscript{64}: forming a third bloc could anchor the US and China in a win-win relation instead of a zero-sum game. As Spero indicates “middle powers can influence great power security dilemmas, even reduce those dilemmas through regional and cooperative bridging alignments”\textsuperscript{65}. Additionally, should an American withdrawal of the region arise (isolationism or offshore-balancing for example), the creation of a third bloc would further guaranty the security of middle powers.

3. Managing US-China reactions to a third bloc

In a world in transition, the relationship between leader and follower changes and is submitted to variations and adaptations. The US cannot be the sole guarantor of world order it had been over the last two decades anymore. It is about power distance (developed by Hofstede), “the dimension expressing the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally”\textsuperscript{66}. The greater the asymmetry of power between leader and followers, the more the leader will be able to impose itself via its capacities, hence the more transactional its leadership. On the contrary, if the gap keeps shrinking – and provided that the leader wishes to stay at the top of the pyramid – the dominant power must increasingly consider its followers’ needs and interests and aught to share parts of the leadership’s responsibilities with them.

Consequently, Washington has to make its followers (middle powers) feel part of the strategic process because “leadership is not defined by the exercise of power but by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those led. The most essential work of the leader is to create more leaders”\textsuperscript{67}. In this context, Asia’s power web of middle powers could be beneficial to Washington by giving, for instance, second layer powers more responsibilities in the area of terrorism, maritime security, piracy, etc. This nascent power web could be valuable to the United States and reinforce its leadership. Due to its relative decline, Washington needs, now more than ever, to be able to count on its allies in taking the lead in particular securities issues and in sharing burdens and risks. To be successful, the rebalance strategy requires from allies of the United States in Asia to develop their respective political and security ties with each other. There is a tendency to resort to what C. Layne called “burden shifting”: “getting other states to do more for their security so the United States can do less”\textsuperscript{68}. Washington is, in a certain way, reactivating the Guam/ Nixon Doctrine of the seventies by designating pivotal states. In practice, the cooperation between middle powers supports Washington’s presence in the Indo–Pacific and thus reinforce the rebalancing policy. Furthermore, as Michael Ignatieff accurately analyses when discussing Canada and the United

\textsuperscript{64} Sook-Jong Lee, Chaesung Chun, HyeeJung Suh, and Patrick Thomsen, “Middle Power in Action: The Evolving Nature of Diplomacy in the Age of Multilateralism”, East Asia Institute, April 2015, p.11.


States: "we have something they want. They need legitimacy". In other words, it is a “third bloc” tilting towards the US, supporting regional order, the status quo and encouraging China to become a responsible stakeholder. For the US, it also is an opportunity to reinforce risk-sharing, burden-sharing, blood-sharing and thus avoid free-riding. The current situation gives similarly opportunities for more autonomy for the followers, combining conditional support to a fair amount of critical thinking, carefully balancing between cooperation and independent initiatives. Traditional and emerging middle powers can be critical allies (cf. Figure 1). To encourage middle powers embrace these roles, the dominant power should involve middle powers in discussions regarding the world vision. Unless the United States provides them with proper support and development to perform their new responsibilities, they could become toxic followers (resisting or defying the leader) or worst swing states. As the power distance diminishes, the US can’t afford to put the emphasis only on transactional leadership through coercion. The psychological context of the relation changes: transformational leadership aught to be applied by Washington towards allies by empowering them with parts of the responsibility of the world order’s stability, while enabling them in this task. The US must give middle powers vision and strategy, yet they are not giving them enough of the development needed to succeed in their roles. Middle powers will facilitate the attainment of objectives. They have a better understanding of regional realities and can consequently pass down information or give a feedback, making the middle powers indispensable.

Of course, this scenario forms a real risk of antagonizing China, and Chinese cooperation will be essential to guaranty stability in the region. Middle powers will have to consequently overcome Chinese resentment and gain respect from Beijing. Although most of these middle powers are close to the United States, especially regarding security issues, they will have to be critical followers if they want China to recognize them as bridge-builders – like Canada during periods of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. They will have to walk a tightrope between Washington and Beijing, but they have some room to manoeuver. On the one hand they could convince China it is in its interest to participate in their networks and guaranty the status quo (liberal order) or let it face complete isolation (middle powers aligning unconditionally with the US). The fact that some middle powers are participating for example in bilateral military exercises with China (India-China or Indonesia-China bilateral military exercises) or holding multilateral exercises (exercise

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69 Michael Ignatieff, “Canada in the Age of Terror-Multilateralism Meets a Moment of Truth”, Options Politiques, February 2003, p. 16.

70 “Over the last year, we’ve made progress toward that vision. China and India will both participate once again in the U.S.-hosted RIMPAC naval exercise this summer. Japan and the Republic of Korea are engaging with each other in new ways. And, in addition to the ASEAN-centric security network that’s developing in Southeast Asia, nations across the entire Asia-Pacific are increasingly working together – and networking security together”. (US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter, “The Asia-Pacific’s Principled Security Network”, June 4, 2016).

71 Carsten Holbraad, Middle powers in International Politics, St Martin Press, New York, 1984, p. 122.

72 Difference between the faithful ally (which in most matters is prepared to pursue, more or less unquestioningly, a policy that is in conformity with the goals of the alliance leader) and critical ally (which mixes conditional support with a fair amount of advice and criticism) (Carsten Holbraad, Middle powers in International Politics, St Martin Press, New York, 1984, p. 122).

73 “Close allies become closer in tough times that remind them of their shared interests and identities” (Bruce Gilley, “Middle Powers during great power transitions”, International Journal, Spring 2011, p.264.
Komodo, hosted by Indonesia) reinforces confidence. In addition, they can pressure the United States to have a constructive approach towards China (shared power and leadership)\textsuperscript{74} by threatening to form a comprehensive independent third bloc, because without their support, the current world order is not guaranteed (cf. point 1).

Consequently, middle powers can be agents of change, yet this fact will go hand in hand with experimentation and errors. Middle powers will have to navigate in the face of adversity: they will be confronted to the adoption of competing roles, due to conflict of interests and pressure (from above, below and across). In view of these conflicting and changing demands and roles, it will be difficult for middle powers to reach consistent patterns of behaviour: in the process of satisfying the requirements of one set of relationships, they may reduce their effectiveness in managing another. Success will come from balancing all these roles. Sometimes it will require trade-offs\textsuperscript{75}. In addition, role balancing will be influenced by the demands, expectations, and abilities of the United States and China.

This approach is different of classical hedging (mix of bandwagoning and balancing between the US and China). As Lim and Cooper explain “hedging offers little insight into the security dynamics of East Asia”: “It should be no surprise that every state is looking to engage with China economically and politically, since doing so offers obvious benefits at minimal cost. But this says virtually nothing about today’s central security questions, such as the durability of alliance commitments, the stability of the regional order, or whom a state would support if the unthinkable occurred — war between the United States and China.”\textsuperscript{76}

4. Conclusion

The space occupied by middle powers has grown and turned crowded. Furthermore, foreign and security policy of middle powers are conditioned by the structure of the international system. In a world in transition middle powers have the opportunity to consolidate regional blocs without losing the global evolution out of sight while retaining some room for manoeuvre.

The actual distribution of power is an opportunity for middle powers to advance their political, economic and security goals, but only if they work collectively, in a network-centric oriented way as dolphins do. Middle powers have an opportunity to reinvent themselves, relying on strong influence skills, networks and resources. They do not want to be passive bystanders. Quite the contrary, they wish to be active stakeholders, that is, security-makers instead of being reduced to the rank of security takers. The more the middle powers will interact with each other, the more they will be able to influence the agenda-setting in the region and fulfill the role of facilitator, mediator and bridge-builder. Like-minded middle powers can form an alternative to the discourse of the great powers. Nevertheless, and contrary to Europe where the past belongs to the past, in the Indo-Pacific region, and more specifically in North East Asia, history is still pregnant and has been a stumbling block towards greater political integration between middle powers. The defiance among some

\textsuperscript{74} Australia organised along with China and the United States their first trilateral military exercise in 2014: Exercise Kowari 14.


\textsuperscript{76} Darren Lim, Zack Cooper, “Are East Asian states really hedging between the US and China?”, Eastasiaforum.org, 30 January 2016.
states, well represented by the South Korea-Japan relationship, has clearly been an obstacle for middle powers in the region to play a more proactive role and has prevented a positive snowball effect.

**Figure 3: From Carps to Dolphins**

That being so, middle powers can be a driving force of tomorrow’s international system. Because, in the end, it is those powers in the middle who will make or break the status quo. Therefore, ignoring middle powers carries significant risks. Their actions and influence are significant to ensure the system survival. If for Kenneth Waltz only great powers could determine the structure of the international system, hence marginalizing small and middle powers, this study has shown that it is quite the contrary: middle powers can achieve considerable influence on the international structure, without punching above their weight. There is no guarantee that the middle powers will succeed, but they do not form a frozen middle.

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77 “International structures are defined, first, by the ordering principle of the system in our case anarchy, and second, by the distribution of capabilities across units. In an anarchic realm, structures are defined in terms of their major units. International structures vary with significant changes in the number of great powers” (Kenneth Waltz, “Realist thought and Neo-Realist Theory”, *Journal of International Affairs*, 44, n°1, 1990, p. 31).