Abstract

Strategic hedging behavior is used by second-tier states in order to improve their relative position vis-à-vis the leading state in the international system. It is most likely to occur in unipolar systems that are experiencing power diffusion, and involves the improvement of both military and economic capability, while at the same time avoiding a direct confrontation with the system leader.

The present international system is going through a phase of fundamental change as the present unipolarity gives way to a process of power deconcentration. Under such conditions strategic hedging becomes an attractive alternative for other strategies, such as balancing, bandwagoning, and buckpassing.

Conceptually, this thesis situates itself at the intersection of four research areas: great powers' politics under unipolarity, China-Middle East relations, China-US relations, and foreign policy strategy. But the main motivation behind this thesis is the further development of ‘strategic hedging’ as a concept of behavior used by second-tier states under unipolar system, specifically in all of the four research areas.

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter presents strategic hedging as a core strategy for second-tier states under deconcentrating unipolar systems, and reviews the theoretical literature dealing with hedging behavior.

The second chapter offers the first attempt to measure the core components of a state’s strategic hedging capability and as such provides a comparative snapshot of those components by means of composite index.

In the third chapter, we present the strategic hedging framework as a way to trace the determinants of the foreign policies of hedging states. We use the case of Chinese energy security strategy in the Middle East as an illustrative case study.

The fourth chapter examines policies of both China and the United States in the Middle East. It evaluates the effectiveness of Beijing's strategic hedging behavior against Washington's hard power strategies by discussing several challenges in this region.

The fifth chapter attempts to provide an explanation of dynamic change of unipolarity through a perspective of strategic. We argue that strategic hedging is drives a gradual, multi-stage process, starting with a significant power difference between the hedging state and the system leader, and leading to a point where this difference has disappeared as a result of successful hedging policies.

While we are fully aware that it is not possible to develop a theory that can predict the rise and fall of a great power, we believe that strategic hedging theory describes an underlying mechanism that will make possible more realistic forecasts of great power dynamics under conditions of power diffusion.