

# Navigating U.S.-China Digital Geopolitics for Non-Superpower States: Singapore as a Case Study Post-October 2022

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## Introduction

The new export controls on semiconductors released by the Biden administration on October 7, 2022, marked a watershed moment in U.S.-China technology geopolitics after years of escalating tensions on both sides, and will lead to further technological bifurcation. These tensions are placing other states in difficult geopolitical traps, as previously seen in cases like Huawei in the Philippines.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Asian countries located on China's doorstep will be caught in the technological nationalism crossfire and must adapt.<sup>2</sup>

There are three consequences of the new controls that non-superpower states will have to address: the economic cost, backsliding on global development of AI standards-setting, and an erosion of trust between the U.S. and China. As digital bifurcation intensifies, non-superpower states should try to find a middle path between the two superpowers. It is unclear what this middle path will exactly look like, but there are guiding aims that non-superpower states can focus on. Using Singapore as a case study, this paper will explore the following guiding aims: robust dialogue with both superpowers, strong coordination with the private sector, and multilateral engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Sofia Cuyegkeng, "5G Geopolitics and the Philippines: The Huawei Controversy," Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, December 22, 2021), <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/5g-geopolitics-and-philippines-huawei-controversy>.

<sup>2</sup> Bilahari Kausikan, "The Geopolitics of Semiconductors | the Straits Times," *The Straits Times*, August 29, 2020, [https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/the-geopolitics-of-semiconductors-0?xtor=CS3-18&utm\\_source=STiPhone&utm\\_medium=share&utm\\_term=2020-08-29%207%3A08%3A12](https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/the-geopolitics-of-semiconductors-0?xtor=CS3-18&utm_source=STiPhone&utm_medium=share&utm_term=2020-08-29%207%3A08%3A12).

## A New Digital Global Order Post-October 7<sup>th</sup>

### The Watershed Moment

Over the last few years, both the U.S. and China have increasingly engaged in technological nationalism. With emerging technologies vital to its continued economic growth,<sup>3</sup> China has pushed to reduce technology dependency by developing its own homegrown technologies, creating its own economic network (i.e., Belt and Road Initiative), and cyber-industrial espionage.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. has similarly taken proactive measures to maintain its own position in the digital technologies race. Even prior to its new export ban in October 2022, the U.S. government had begun to restrict Chinese technology companies through the Entity List, which forbids identified firms from importing U.S. digital goods without permission.<sup>5</sup> Certain Chinese tech firms like Huawei have faced “supercharged” versions of the List<sup>6</sup> which kneecapped revenue.<sup>7</sup> However, these measures were *targeted*.

In contrast, the new export controls announced on October 7<sup>th</sup> impact everything in the Chinese tech industry that utilizes AI – from e-commerce to medical imaging and climate modelling.<sup>8</sup> The strategy aims to hamper the development of Chinese AI chips by denying Chinese

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<sup>3</sup> Adam Segal, “The Coming Tech Cold War with China,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 7, 2020, [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-america/2020-09-09/coming-tech-cold-war-china?utm\\_medium=newsletters&utm\\_source=twofa&utm\\_campaign=The%20Coming%20Tech%20Cold%20War%20With%20China&utm\\_content=20200911&utm\\_term=FA%20This%20Week%20-%20112017](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-america/2020-09-09/coming-tech-cold-war-china?utm_medium=newsletters&utm_source=twofa&utm_campaign=The%20Coming%20Tech%20Cold%20War%20With%20China&utm_content=20200911&utm_term=FA%20This%20Week%20-%20112017).

<sup>4</sup> Segal, 2020

<sup>5</sup> Jon Bateman, “Biden Is Now All-in on Taking out China,” *Foreign Policy*, October 12, 2022, [https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/12/biden-china-semiconductor-chips-exports-decouple/?utm\\_source=PostUp&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Subscribers%27%20Picks&utm\\_term=56126&tpcc=Subscribers%27%20Picks](https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/12/biden-china-semiconductor-chips-exports-decouple/?utm_source=PostUp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Subscribers%27%20Picks&utm_term=56126&tpcc=Subscribers%27%20Picks).

<sup>6</sup> Bateman, 2022

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan E. Hillman, “Huawei Strikes Back,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 9, 2021, [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-11-09/huawei-strikes-back?utm\\_medium=newsletters&utm\\_source=twofa&utm\\_campaign=Can%20Ethiopia%20Survive%20&utm\\_content=20211112&utm\\_term=FA%20This%20Week%20-%20112017](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-11-09/huawei-strikes-back?utm_medium=newsletters&utm_source=twofa&utm_campaign=Can%20Ethiopia%20Survive%20&utm_content=20211112&utm_term=FA%20This%20Week%20-%20112017).

<sup>8</sup> Bateman, 2022

firms access to U.S. chip design software and manufacturing equipment.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. has long held leverage over “chokepoints” on the global semiconductor supply chain that it will now use to “actively strangl[e] large segments of the Chinese technology industry...with an intent to kill.”<sup>10</sup>

The U.S. cites national security as the reason for these new restrictions – arguing that high-end semiconductors can be for military purposes. However, Bateman points out this reasoning fails to address the fact that semiconductors and AI are *dual-use* tools that constitute the foundation for an internationally competitive economy. Therefore, denying them to China amounts to economic containment.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, while the new controls are not a complete chip embargo (Chinese firms can still import the lesser semiconductors used in cars, for example), this step indicates an American mindset that “all but guarantees a continued march toward broad-based technological decoupling.”<sup>12</sup>

## The Fallout

Repercussions of technological decoupling range from disrupted supply chains to backsliding in the development of global technology standards. On a systemic level, the export controls have caused collateral damage in the industry and in research labs, eroding trust and innovation in the global semiconductor system.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the Biden administration’s strategy carries two geopolitical repercussions: negative reactions from U.S. allies (the U.S. issued the

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<sup>9</sup> Dani Rodrik, “Don’t Let Geopolitics Kill the World Economy | by Dani Rodrik,” *Project Syndicate*, November 10, 2022, [https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/us-china-high-tech-trade-restrictions-by-dani-rodrik-2022-11?utm\\_source=Project+Syndicate+Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=ebcec63c4e-sunday\\_newsletter\\_11\\_13\\_2022&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_73bad5b7d8-ebcec63c4e-105815289&mc\\_cid=ebcec63c4e&mc\\_eid=52f79d2d07](https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/us-china-high-tech-trade-restrictions-by-dani-rodrik-2022-11?utm_source=Project+Syndicate+Newsletter&utm_campaign=ebcec63c4e-sunday_newsletter_11_13_2022&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_73bad5b7d8-ebcec63c4e-105815289&mc_cid=ebcec63c4e&mc_eid=52f79d2d07).

<sup>10</sup> Rodrik, 2022

<sup>11</sup> Bateman, 2022

<sup>12</sup> Bateman, 2022

<sup>13</sup> Dieter Ernst, “Supply Chain Regulation in the Service of Geopolitics: What’s Happening in Semiconductors?,” *CIGI Papers*, no. 256 (August 2021), <https://www.cigionline.org/static/documents/no.256.pdf>.

controls before international consultation were complete)<sup>14</sup> and a significant loss of trust with China.

For the U.S.'s new plan to succeed, they require the cooperation from its allies – not just on export controls but in other areas of its global technology strategy (i.e., industrial policy, economic intelligence, digital regulations, a coordinated pressing of Beijing).<sup>15</sup> The unilateralism of the move will make allies consider whether U.S. policies align with their own unique interests, and doubt America's willing to consider its allies' perspectives.<sup>16</sup> As of December 12, Japan and Netherlands "agreed *in principle*" to join the U.S. semiconductor controls with the official announcements detailing which specific measures they will adopt to be announced.<sup>17</sup>

For China, the new export controls are what Singaporean Minister of Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan calls "all but a declaration of technology war."<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, an erosion of strategic trust between China and the U.S. will impact the entire global community negatively. Biden's administration claims that it still wants to work with China on "shared challenges" (e.g., climate change) but fails to recognize that its new technology war on China erodes considerable trust in the U.S.-China relationship needed to effectively cooperate in other areas.<sup>19</sup> Naturally, China will see the export controls as a sign of growing U.S. aggression and may retaliate

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<sup>14</sup> Bateman, 2022

<sup>15</sup> Bateman, 2022

<sup>16</sup> Bateman, 2022

<sup>17</sup> Takashi Mochizuki, Cagan Koc, and Peter Elstrom, "Japan to Join US Effort to Tighten Chip Exports to China - BNN Bloomberg," *Bloomberg News Network (BNN)*, December 12, 2022, <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/japan-to-join-us-effort-to-tighten-chip-exports-to-china-1.1858129>.

<sup>18</sup> The Business Times, "Singapore Wants Open Supply Chains as US Levels China Chip Curbs," *Business Times*, November 9, 2022, <https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/singapore/economy-policy/mobile-spotlight/singapore-wants-open-supply-chains-us-levels-china-chip>.

<sup>19</sup> Rodrik, 2022

accordingly. The restrictions may quicken China's development of domestically produced emerging technologies and thicken tensions.<sup>20</sup>

Chinese response can take the form of restricting critical minerals exports and cross-border data flows,<sup>21</sup> and retaliation against U.S. companies.<sup>22</sup> More likely, Bateman argues, is Chinese wedge-driving among U.S. allies (e.g., South Korea) where China has leverage – a network crucial to implementing Washington's new plan.<sup>23</sup> U.S. economic containment also supports Xi's narrative that a hegemonic America is blocking China's natural development, generating sympathy in the Global South.<sup>24</sup> On December 13, China filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization accusing the U.S. of abusing export controls.<sup>25</sup> A WTO ruling in favour of China would create unease in the EU and the Global South and erode American commitment to open trade.<sup>26</sup> However, WTO investigations can take years so it is still unknown what China's next steps will be.

## Case Study: Singapore

Despite the semiconductor export controls being aimed at China, U.S. allies including Singapore have become collateral damage. While other Asian states like Vietnam and Malaysia are

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<sup>20</sup> Laurie Macfarlane, "The Tensions over Huawei Are Not about Trade, but about Global Supremacy | Laurie Macfarlane," The Guardian, July 16, 2020, [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/16/huawei-trade-global-supremacy-us-uk-china-liberal-capitalism?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Yahoo\\_Mail](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/16/huawei-trade-global-supremacy-us-uk-china-liberal-capitalism?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Yahoo_Mail).

<sup>21</sup> Bloomberg New Economy, "The Geopolitics of Technology," YouTube, November 17, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgDmvmBl4u8>.

<sup>22</sup> Segal, 2020

<sup>23</sup> Bateman, 2022

<sup>24</sup> Bateman, 2022

<sup>25</sup> Arjun Kharpal, "China Brings WTO Case against U.S. And Its Sweeping Chip Export Curbs as Tech Tensions Escalate," CNBC (CNBC, December 13, 2022), <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/12/13/china-brings-wto-case-against-us-chip-export-restrictions.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Bateman, 2022

angling to benefit from the new controls, Singapore remains more cautious.<sup>27</sup> Singapore's Minister of State for Trade and Industry Alvin Tan said that Singapore's semiconductors industry (which makes up 7% of GDP) will be impacted since its globalized supply chains includes U.S. technology which could fall under the new rules.<sup>28</sup> Notably, Applied Materials (the largest contributor to Singapore's semiconductor equipment industry) reduced its fourth-quarter sales forecast by US\$400 million (S\$570 million) in response to the news.<sup>29</sup> Tan says that the government will mitigate these impacts by ensuring that the country remains an attractive business hub.<sup>30</sup> The government plans to help firms strengthen their continuity plans and diversify supply chains.<sup>31</sup>

In a recent speech, Singaporean Foreign Minister Balakrishnan, asked that "our superpower friends...bear in mind that the rest of us do have agency and do have choices, and to the maximum extent (we) will seek to raft ourselves to each other in open, inclusive architectures... [W]e are not interested in bifurcation lines across Asia. Our paradigm...is *overlapping circles of friends*."<sup>32</sup> Singapore does not appreciate the intensifying tensions, forging ahead instead, for a middle path. What exactly this middle path will look like is unknown, but there are some guiding aims that would serve Singaporean policymakers well: strong coordination with its private sector, pragmatic multilateral engagement, and open communication with both superpowers.

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<sup>27</sup> Afiq Fitri, "The US Wants to Cut off East Asian Chip Exports to China. Some Asian Countries Are Set to Reap the Benefits," Tech Monitor, November 14, 2022, <https://techmonitor.ai/technology/emerging-technology/us-east-asian-semiconductor-exports-china-asian-countries-benefit>.

<sup>28</sup> Ovais Subhani, "US Tech Curbs on China Will Affect S'pore's Semiconductor Sector: MTI | the Straits Times," *The Straits Times*, October 20, 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/us-tech-curbs-on-china-will-affect-s-pore-s-semiconductor-sector-mti>.

<sup>29</sup> Subhani, 2022

<sup>30</sup> Subhani, 2022

<sup>31</sup> Subhani, 2022

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore, "Transcript of Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan's Remarks at the 2nd next Step Global Conference 2022 at Raffles Hotel on 9 November 2022," Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore, November 10, 2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2022/11/221110nextstep>.

## Leveraging the Private Sector

First, the Singaporean government must ensure strong coordination with its private sector both to weather the economic storm as best it can, but also to leverage these firms on the global stage in terms of standard-setting. As mentioned earlier, a slowdown in intergovernmental cooperation on emerging technology standards is a consequence of the intensifying U.S.-China tech tensions. The power of tech companies is immense – with one report estimating that over 50% of global GDP will be driven by digitally transformed industries.<sup>33</sup> For example, Google alone pledged \$1 billion for undersea cables connecting Africa to Europe – showcasing a private sector capacity that rivals and even exceeds states.<sup>34</sup> From the U.S.<sup>35</sup> to Singapore, corporations will be negatively impacted by the export controls. Because of this, private sector tech companies may make strong allies of non-superpower states seeking a middle path between disruptive U.S.-China digital geopolitics.

The role that private sector technology companies can play in this superpower rivalry is unique. With proper coordination with governments who share Singapore's middle-path approach, corporations can be leveraged to de-politicize at least some aspects of digital bifurcation. Singapore can continue pushing forward AI standards setting by leveraging its private sector tech companies. Over the last few years, China has risen to prominence in global standards development organizations (SDOs).<sup>36</sup> In China's 2021 Standards Strategy, the government calls for

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<sup>33</sup> Klon Kitchen, "Technology Companies as Geopolitical Actors," GIS Reports, January 6, 2021, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/technology-geopolitics/>.

<sup>34</sup> Adam Segal and Gordon M. Goldstein, "The United States Needs a New Foreign Policy for Cyberspace," *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 12, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/report/confronting-reality-in-cyberspace>.

<sup>35</sup> Alex Capri, "Export Controls and the Rise of US-China Techno-Nationalism · TechNode," TechNode, April 24, 2020, <https://technode.com/2020/04/24/export-controls-and-the-rise-of-us-china-techno-nationalism/>.

<sup>36</sup> Matt Sheehan, Marjory Blumenthal, and Michael R. Nelson, "Three Takeaways from China's New Standards Strategy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 28,

“elevating the role of industry players in standards setting...”<sup>37</sup> While such a move may seem counterintuitive for an authoritarian state – this policy is not a break from government-led standards-setting, but a pragmatic acknowledgement that “no government has the in-house technical capacity to develop the dizzying array of technical standards needed to operate a modern economy.”<sup>38</sup>

Private companies often propose standards to SDOs and collaborate globally to develop and adopt standards through these mechanisms.<sup>39</sup> AI governance is already generated through private-public interaction.<sup>40</sup> An example of multi-stakeholder AI governance is the Partnership on AI, which brings together top firms like Amazon, Facebook, and Google with NGOs and the United Nations, and has strong international industry and cross-sectoral buy-in.<sup>41</sup> In attempting to maintain the development of global technology standards as much as possible amid digital bifurcation, Singapore should encourage industry-led technology standards development at the international level. Such an initiative is in line with its AI National Strategy<sup>42</sup> and the Singaporean state is in a strong position for such participation, being a regional AI leader.<sup>43</sup>

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2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/10/28/three-takeaways-from-china-s-new-standards-strategy-pub-85678>.

<sup>37</sup> Sheehan et. al, 2021

<sup>38</sup> Sheehan et. al, 2021

<sup>39</sup> Sujai Shivakumar, “Securing Global Standards for Innovation and Growth,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, January 27, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/securing-global-standards-innovation-and-growth>.

<sup>40</sup> Graeme Auld et al., “Governing AI through Ethical Standards: Learning from the Experiences of Other Private Governance Initiatives,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 29, no. 11 (August 22, 2022): 1822–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2099449>.

<sup>41</sup> James Butcher and Irakli Beridze, “What Is the State of Artificial Intelligence Governance Globally?,” *The RUSI Journal* 164, no. 5-6 (September 19, 2019): 88–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2019.1694260>.

<sup>42</sup> Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, “Artificial Intelligence in APEC: Progress, Preparedness and Priorities,” ABAC Online (ABAC - APEC Business Advisory Council, November 2021), [https://www2.abaconline.org/assets/AI\\_Report\\_2021.pdf](https://www2.abaconline.org/assets/AI_Report_2021.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> [https://www2.abaconline.org/assets/AI\\_Report\\_2021.pdf](https://www2.abaconline.org/assets/AI_Report_2021.pdf)

Through such public-private partnership, Singapore creates a more depoliticized space for continued engagement on international digital issues where both China and the U.S. have been active. Engaging in this area allows Singapore to continue dialogue with both parties in a relatively less politicized area due to the private sector leadership. Maintaining continuous global efforts around AI standard-setting is also important for Singapore's 'middle path' digital geopolitics strategy in facilitating multilateral engagement with like-minded countries. However, it should be noted that leaning on private sector firms to drive global AI standards is a short-term solution – in future, states should take a more active role in organizing these standards.<sup>44</sup> But in the meantime, to keep dialogue with like-minded allies and superpowers alive and work on AI standards going, leveraging the private sector is the best path forward.

### Multilateral Engagement

Singapore must also work to build a coalition of like-minded countries. Pragmatism is key – while the wish to not take sides in this conflict is admirable, Singapore cannot do it alone. Minister Balakrishnan proposes a Non-Aligned Movement as seen in the Cold War to counterbalance bipolarisation. This movement would be “multipolar, open, and rules-based...[committed to]...a system in which we will compete to be most innovative, reliable, and trustworthy, rather than be judged simply by which side...we have taken.”<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat advocates for “a role for smaller, advanced economies such as Switzerland and Singapore to explore ways to strengthen such collaboration and innovation and rally like-minded partners.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Butcher and Beridze, 2019

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore, 2022

<sup>46</sup> Syarafana Shafeeq, “US-China Tensions, Bifurcation Will Make It More Difficult to Innovate: DPM Heng | the Straits Times,” *The Straits Times*, October 29, 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/us-china-tensions-bifurcation-will-make-it-more-difficult-to-innovate-dpm-heng>.

As argued earlier, multilateral engagement through public-private partnership in the standards-development space could provide a less politicized space for this engagement.

Marko Papic, Chief Strategist at Clocktower Group, pointed out that “the U.S. does not get to do what it wants – it has an invisible constraint of allies.... At the AI chip level, maybe the allies play along – *but if the U.S. keeps pushing the boundary, they will start getting pushback from their allies.* Even at this point, many allies are already complaining that [the new controls] was a unilateral, extrajudicial move by the U.S.”<sup>47</sup> Beyond its allies, the U.S. faces hurdles in form of the Global South. Hillman rightfully argues that “security warnings will not win this competition... in the rest of the world, it will have to offer compelling alternatives.”<sup>48</sup> In this context, Singapore’s hope for a STEM non-aligned movement may come to fruition in the long run.

Singapore is not the only U.S. partner with a substantial stake in the semiconductors game that is disgruntled or wary by American unilateralism. Even Taiwan, with its tension-filled relationship with China and strong security reliance on the U.S., has reason to be cautious. Roughly 60% of Taiwanese chip exports are to China and stopping these exports would be a steep price to pay for the industry.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, 40% of all South Korean chip exports in 2021 went to China.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, AI geopolitics researcher Chris Miller claims that “[t]he U.S. would have to consider the enormous damage to the world economy that would result if it were to go to war. Taiwan's importance in the semiconductor industry may in fact deter the U.S. from helping Taiwan.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bloomberg New Economy, 2022

<sup>48</sup> Hillman, 2021

<sup>49</sup> The Economist, “When the Chips Are Down,” *The Economist*, December 3, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Che Pan, “South Korean Trade Group Warns of Semiconductor Export Dependency on China,” South China Morning Post, August 22, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/tech/tech-war/article/3189760/tech-war-south-korean-trade-group-calls-chip-diversification-china>.

<sup>51</sup> Masahiro Okoshi, “U.S. Should Brace for ‘10-Year’ Chip Curbs against China: Analyst,” Nikkei Asia, December 15, 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/U.S.-should-brace-for-10-year-chip-curbs-against-China->

On October 14<sup>th</sup>, Singapore and the European Union announced a new digital partnership that will increase coordination on issues including data flows, digital trust, and standards.<sup>52</sup> Although further details are still forthcoming, this new pact could be a starting point for a coalition of countries hoping to cautiously navigate U.S.-China tech tensions. If Singapore can successfully form a coalition of countries committed to a more neutral path, it would also have the effect of subverting the U.S. export controls<sup>53</sup> and hopefully cool U.S.-China tech tensions. However, it is still too early to definitively say as the various players in the global semiconductor supply chain make their moves.

### Robust Superpower Communication

Finally, in forging a middle path Singapore must maintain open communication with both superpowers. Non-superpower states like Singapore should continue to engage as much as possible with both parties, both for its own sake and for the possibility as serving as a neutral bridge between the two superpowers. Once again, the global standards-setting arena driven by private firms may prove an option for de-politicizing superpower dialogue both with each other and facilitating communication with Singapore.

George Perkovich, who leads the Technology and International Affairs Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, argues that “if China and the United States can sustain a process of serious dialogue, they will keep their relationship from worsening even if they cannot

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<sup>52</sup> Goh Yan Han, “New Singapore-EU Pact to Boost Cooperation and Establish Common Framework in Digital Realm | the Straits Times,” *The Straits Times*, December 15, 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/new-singapore-eu-pact-to-boost-cooperation-and-establish-common-framework-in-digital-realm>.

<sup>53</sup> Gregory C. Allen, “The Only Way the U.S. Can Win the Tech War with China,” *Time Magazine*, November 17, 2022, <https://time.com/6234566/how-us-win-the-tech-war-with-china/>.

formally restrain their competition.”<sup>54</sup> Perkovich’s focus in this research is nuclear conflict, but his overarching message is arguably applicable to U.S.-China digital geopolitics. With U.S.-China tensions high, dialogue may be difficult. But even during the Cold War, the U.S. and USSR signed the Outer Space Treaty,<sup>55</sup> showing that when it comes to standards vital to public good, there is chance for cooperation between rival superpowers.

## Conclusion

Until all U.S. allies and the Global South make their moves, it is impossible to predict how tensions will evolve next. Regardless, in approaching this new digital geopolitical landscape before them, non-superpower states like Singapore should coordinate with its private sector, pursue multilateral cooperation, and maintain robust communication with the duelling superpowers. At the centre of these goals is the core principle of caution over reactivity – which from early indications Singapore is already exercising. Although the exact way this middle path may play out for each state is different, the options that Singaporean policymakers may and should pursue present a guide which other non-superpowers can adapt for their own unique circumstances.

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<sup>54</sup> George Perkovich, “Engaging China on Strategic Stability and Mutual Vulnerability,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 12, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/10/12/engaging-china-on-strategic-stability-and-mutual-vulnerability-pub-88142>.

<sup>55</sup> Butcher and Beridze, 2019

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