The Limits of Alignment
Southeast Asia and the Great Powers since 1975
John D. Ciorciari

“By empirically demonstrating the ubiquity of limited alignment by Southeast Asian states since 1975, John Ciorciari usefully redirects our attention toward complexly contingent engagement as normal behavior in international relations. His argument is timely too, in that it showcases responses to uncertainty—a prominent current and likely future condition of (in)security in world affairs.”
—Donald K. Emmerson, Stanford University

The Limits of Alignment is an engaging and accessible study that explores how small states and middle powers of Southeast Asia ensure their security in a world where they are overshadowed by greater powers. John D. Ciorciari challenges a central concept in international relations theory—that states respond to insecurity by either balancing against their principal foes, “bandwagoning” with them, or declaring themselves neutral. Instead, he shows that developing countries prefer limited alignments that steer between strict neutrality and formal alliances to obtain the fruits of security cooperation without the perils of undue dependency.

Ciorciari also shows how structural and normative shifts following the end of the Cold War and the advent of U.S. primacy have increased the prevalence of limited alignments in the developing world and that these can often place constraints on U.S. foreign policy. Finally, he discusses how limited alignments in the developing world may affect the future course of international security as China and other rising powers gather influence on the world stage.

John D. Ciorciari is an assistant professor at the University of Michigan’s Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. He was previously a National Fellow at the Hoover Institution and Shorenstein Fellow at the Asia-Pacific Research Center, both at Stanford University.

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