

# China and Singapore to establish high-level defense communications link

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Singapore skyline

Hailey Brown - China's new Defense Minister, Li Shangfu, has visited Japan and now Singapore to **establish defense 'hotlines'** since his appointment to the position in March. These lines create an open, secure communication between high-level defense leaders. Singapore and the U.S. are strong allies, while the current status of the U.S. and China's relations is strained. Thus, the willingness of Ng En Hen, Singapore's Defense Minister, to establish this communication link with China could be a signal of shifting priorities in the country's **geopolitical code**.

Countries position themselves in the world based on a unique geopolitical code, which examines their current allies, future allies, enemies, and threats. For Singapore, opening this communication channel can help to further solidify its alliance with China, a strong geopolitical player in the region. However, in doing so it risks alienating its other ally, the United States. Relations between the U.S. and China have been poor over recent years and the U.S. has even enforced sanctions on China for several reasons. The rift was made more apparent when Li declined to meet with the U.S. Defense Secretary, Lloyd Austin at the Shangri-La Dialogue security forum. However, the move to deepen ties with Singapore does not come out of nowhere. In 2019, the two countries increased defense ties, and Hen said Singapore has continued to engage in multilateral and bilateral exercises with China.

China has continued to ramp up military exercises, an expression of material power that flaunts its sense of stronger **relational power** over other countries in the region. This has created a global and regional sense of uneasiness, as countries like Taiwan view their power in relation to China. While Taiwan has looked to the U.S. as an ally to boost its weaker geopolitical position, Singapore and Japan's moves to deepen defensive ties to China are another approach to mitigating possible threats.

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