

Sino-US Competition: Power shift and regional responses in Indo-Pacific region



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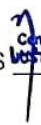


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DEDICATION

To my beloved brother Assistant Commissioner M. Qasim Mehboob Janjua Shaheed. Your unwavering love, support and encouragement have always been my guiding light. Though you are no longer here to share in this journey, your memory lives on in every step I take. This research is a testament to the strength and inspiration you installed in me. I miss you dearly and I carry your spirit with me always.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

A2/AD	Anti access / Area Denial
AI	Artificial intelligence
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand, United states
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic corporation
APR	Asia Pacific region
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	the Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	Air University
AUKUS	Australia, United kingdom, United States
B3W	Build Back Better World
BoP	Balance of Power
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CBMs	Confidence building measures
CMF	Combined Maritime Force
COVID-19	Corona Virus disease 19
D.o.D	Department of Defense
DOD	Department of Defense
DTTI	Defense Technology and Trade Initiative
EAS	East Asia Summit
ECS	East China Sea
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FOIP	Freedom of information and protection of privacy
FOIPS	Free and Open Indo Pacific Strategy
FONOPs	Freedom of Navigation Operations
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force
INFT	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
IO	Indian Ocean
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic framework

IPR	Indo-Pacific Region
IR	International Relation
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance
ITAN	Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network
JIDF-IZ	Japan's Air Defense Identification Zone
LOC	Line of control
MSI	Maritime Security Initiative
NATO	North Atlantic treaty Organization
NBR	National Bureau of Asian Research
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NSC	National Security Council
PO	Pacific ocean
PLA	Peoples' liberation Army
PRC	Peoples' republic of China
QUAD	Quadrilateral security dialogue
RCEP	Regional comprehensive Economic partnership
RMB	Renminbi
SAGAR	S approach, driven by the Security and Growth for All in the Region
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SCS	South China Sea
SDF	Self-defense force
SEA	Southeast Asia
SSP	Security Studies Program
SR	Structural Realism
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
THAAD	Terminal high altitude area defense
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
U.S.	United States
USIS	United States Indo-Pacific Strategy
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
USAF	United States Air force
VOA	Voice of America

WWII	World War II
YSEALI	Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative

ABSTRACT

The research study “Sino-US Competition: Power Shift and Regional Responses in the Indo-Pacific Region” explores the growing competition between Washington and Beijing and the consequences of this conflict on the stability and security perspectives in the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, this study has a great relevancy particularly given the recent conflicts between India and China within the region and seeks to understand how this escalating power rivalry is influencing security policies as well as diplomatic relations in the region. Based systematically, the study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to conducting interviews and performing secondary and primary research in an effort to demonstrate a deep understanding of strategic decisions made by the countries of the region and their effect on the future of the region. The analysis of the reality is considered within the neo-realist theory, dwelling upon the anarchy of the international system and its impact on the state action. Furthermore, this thesis gives a comprehensive analysis and covers all the aspects including the US-China competition, region’s reaction, and the strategic outlook of the major actors in the region. Given the extensive systematic approach to the problem and a detailed analysis, the study occupies one of the leading positions in terms of academic research, and it is crucial in understanding this important aspect of geopolitics.

Keywords: Sino-US rivalry, Washington-Beijing competition, Indo-Pacific, Strategic competition, Regional response

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the landscape

The strategic competition between the United States and China significantly shapes the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region. This rivalry affects regional security, economic policies, and diplomatic relations in profound ways. According to NDS, America's alliances and partnerships are crucial in this extended competition with PRC. Unlike China, the US has access to a network of alliances and partner capabilities, resources and strengths because the success of US is significantly influence by the efficacy of these ally and partners. The IPR extends from the west coast of the US to India and marks as a major theater for Sino-US rivalry. Within this vast area, Southeast Asia is particularly significant. This region is connected to China and borders the South China Sea (SCS) , East China Sea(ECS) and Indian Ocean (IO). It is also 3rd most populated region around the globe that is following East Asia and South Asia. In terms of economy the evidences say that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can be ranked as the 5th largest economy around the globe if it is considered as a single entity.¹ The economic, political, social and cultural diversity of Southeast Asia give unique opportunities and challenges for the US. This region includes combination of other political systems and democracies, requiring U.S. in order to adopt nuanced but adaptable strategies to build effective partnerships.

Navigating these complexities is important for US to strengthen state's position in IPR. In order to understand how partners and allies view Sino-US rivalry and how they are adjusting their approaches, it is crucial for US to strengthen its position in IPR. In Southeast Asia, countries like, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam and, Thailand, each have distinct perspectives and strategies in response to U.S.-China rivalry.² These nations are not merely passive actors but active participants influencing regional power dynamics. Fig 1 explains area under study

¹ Lin, Bonny, Michael S. Chase, Jonah Blank, Cortez A. Cooper III, Derek Grossman, Scott W. Harold, Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Lyle J. Morris, Logan Ma, Paul Orner, and Alice Shih. "U.S. Versus Chinese Powers of Persuasion: Does the United States or China Have More Influence in the Indo-Pacific Region?" RAND Corporation, 2023

² Bonny Lin et al., "Regional Responses to U.S.-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific STUDY OVERVIEW and CONCLUSIONS," 2020

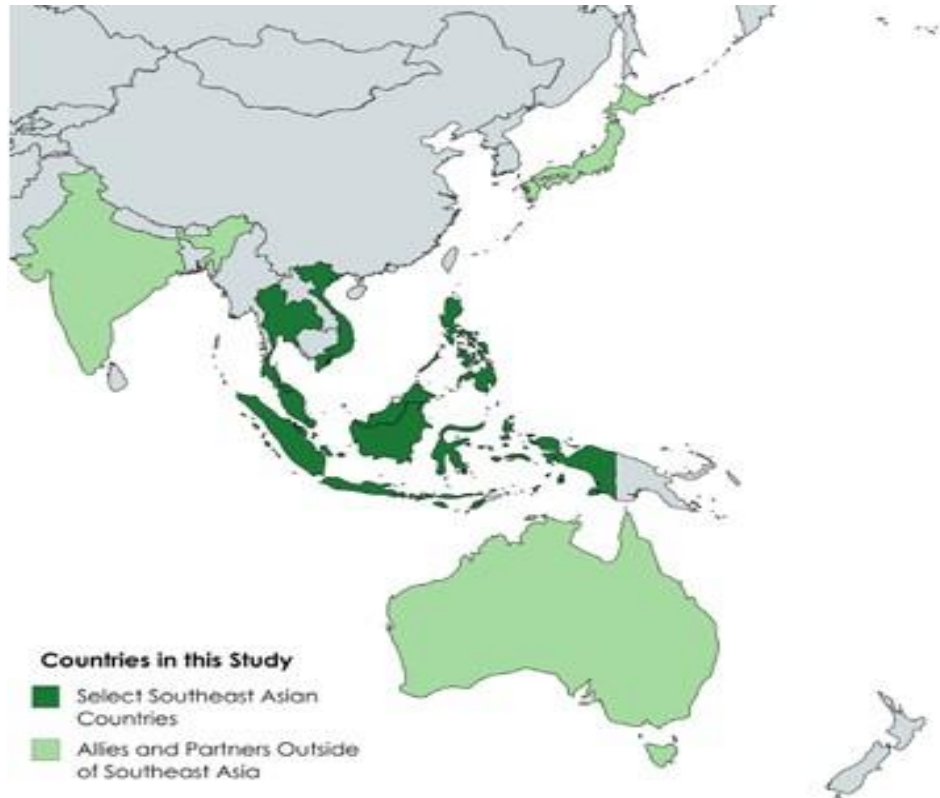


Figure 1: The IPR and nations analyzed in this research study

Indonesia, for example, adopts a cautious approach, balancing its fiscal ties with PRC and its strategic correlation with US. Malaysia, with its significant Chinese population, also navigates a delicate balance, leveraging its relationships for both economic and security benefits. The Philippines, depending on its leadership, swings between closer ties with PRC and reaffirming its defense agreements with US. Singapore, a major financial hub, skillfully manages its relations with both powers to maintain economic stability and security.³ Thailand, historically a U.S. ally, experiences increasing Chinese influence but continues to engage with US. Vietnam, given its historical tensions with China, strengthens its security bonds with US despite the fact of managing fiscal dependency on PRC. In addition to Southeast Asia, other important partners and allies of US like Japan, India and Australia play significant roles in the broader Indo-Pacific strategy. Australia that is located to the south of this region has deepened its security partnership with US while facing financial repercussions from PRC. Japan, situated to the east, closely aligns with U.S. strategic goals, reinforcing its defense posture against Chinese expansionism. India, positioned on the region’s western periphery, views PRC as a regional rival or competitor and has increased its

³ Alice Ba, “In Southeast Asia, U.S.-China Competition Is More than a Two-Player Game,” United States Institute of Peace, September 6, 2023

strategic collaboration with the United States.⁴

This complex web of relationships and strategies highlights the multifaceted nature of U.S.-China competition in IPR. The ability of US to work effectively with its partners and allies, adapting to their diverse political and economic contexts, would be crucial in upholding its strategic gain. The evolving dynamics in IPR will shape the future of Sino-US relations as well as it will influence broader geopolitical order. This research study will further explore responses of indo-pacific nations amid this rivalry of super powers.

1.2 Review of literature

IPR has been found as a central stage for strategic competition between PRC and US, with both powers vying for influence over the political, economic and security landscape of the region. According to Smith and Jones (2019) in their analysis of US-China dynamics, this rivalry is driven by contrasting visions and objectives that shape the behavior of regional actors, creating a complex environment of alignment and resistance.⁵ The approach of approach to the IPR, as discussed by Carter and Wong (2018) in "The US Strategic Pivot," is anchored in maintaining a, open, free and rules-based order that supports security and stability.⁶ This vision is closely tied to the broader goal of containing China's growing influence and ensuring that no single power dominates the region. In contrast, China's strategy is centered on establishing a China-centric order, expanding its power, and fostering greater regional integration under its leadership, as outlined by Liu and Zhang (2020) in their study on China's BRI.

Among all the primary tools used by both the US and China in this competition is the ability to shape the behavior and decisions of regional countries. According to Thompson (2018), the US relies on its military presence, diplomatic influence, and alliances to secure its interests, while China leverages its economic clout and growing military capabilities. This competition for influence, as noted by Richardson (2017), is not merely about the absolute power of each country but rather their relative influence in shaping the decisions of regional actors. The competition amid the US and PRC is particularly forceful in SEA, where both powers seek to align key regional players with their respective strategies. Studies by Nguyen (2018) and Ahmad (2019) show that countries like Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia find themselves at the junctions of this competition, balancing their relationships with both

⁴ Veerle Nouwens, "US Allies in the Indo-Pacific Align on China," IISS, June 1, 2023

⁵ Smith, John, and Emily Jones. *US-China Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific: A Strategic Overview*. New York: Global Policy Press, 2019

⁶ Carter, Ashton, and Ming Wong. *The US Strategic Pivot: Maintaining Stability in the Indo-Pacific*. Washington, D.C.: Strategic Studies Institute, 2018.

superpowers to avoid becoming overly dependent on either.⁷

Scholars have extensively explored the contrasting strategies employed by the PRC and US to assert power in the IPR. Green and Mitchell (2020) emphasize that US traditionally emphasizes on deepening ties with nations that share its strategic interests and democratic values.⁸ This approach is often manifested through military alliances and economic partnerships, which are designed to reinforce these relationships. On the other hand, Wang (2019) provides a comprehensive analysis of China's approach, highlighting how Beijing utilizes a mix of economic incentives and coercive measures to exert influence, particularly targeting countries with significant economic dependence on Chinese trade and investment.⁹ In SEA, the regional responses to the ongoing Sino-US rivalry are shaped by the unique historical contexts, economic dependencies, and security concerns of each country. Tan (2023) examines Singapore's strategy of maintaining strong military and economic links with US while simultaneously engaging closely by China.¹⁰ This dual engagement is seen as a strategic hedging approach, allowing Singapore to balance between the two great powers. Meanwhile, Tran and Le (2024) discuss Vietnam's approach, noting that the country's historical antagonisms toward China have led it to enhance security cooperation with the United States.¹¹ Meanwhile, Vietnam remains cautious in managing its economic relationship with Beijing, reflecting a nuanced strategy of balancing its security concerns with economic realities. In recent years, Thailand and Malaysia have carefully maintained a neutral stance, deliberately avoiding a firm alignment with each of the PRC or US. But as the Sino-US rivalry has intensified, these countries have found themselves in a more strategic spotlight, becoming key players in this global power struggle. Tan and Lim (2023) noted that both Thailand and Malaysia have been skillfully navigating this delicate balance, taking advantage of economic opportunities from China while still preserving strong security relationships with America. The situation in Philippines offers a different perspective, where changes in leadership have led to shifts in foreign policy.¹² Under President Duterte, the Philippines moved away from its traditional close connections with the US and sought closer relations with China, despite ongoing tensions over the South China

⁷ Liu, Wei, and Li Zhang. *China's Belt and Road Initiative: Regional Integration and Power Projection*. Beijing: China Policy Publishing, 2020

⁸ Green, Michael J., and Nicholas S. Mitchell. *US Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Strategic Approaches and New Realities*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020

⁹ Wang, Zhengyu. *China's Global Strategy: Economic Statecraft and Coercion in the 21st Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

¹⁰ Tan, Andrew T. H. "Singapore's Balancing Act: Navigating US-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 45, no. 1 (2023): 25-48.

¹¹ Tran, Tuan, and Le, Anh. *Vietnam's Strategic Dilemma: Navigating US-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia*. London: Routledge, 2024

¹² Tan, Andrew, and Hui Lim. *Southeast Asia's Strategic Balance: Navigating the U.S.-China Rivalry*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2023

Sea.¹³ Garcia and Navarro (2023) discuss how this shift was driven by a desire to mend relations with PRC, even though it came at cost of distancing from the U.S. However, as Lee and Johnson (2024) underscore, the strategic importance of the Philippines to security of US means that military cooperation has remained a fundamental aspect of their relationship. Meanwhile, Australia, Japan, and India have taken a different approach, increasingly aligning them with the US in reaction to growing influence of PRC in the IPR.¹⁴ These nations have not only strengthened their strategic partnerships but have also bolstered defense cooperation, particularly through the Quad—a strategic forum that brings together Japan, India, US and Australia. Pant and Joshi (2024) highlighted that this coordinated effort reflects a shared commitment to managing China’s expanding power in the region.¹⁵

Australia, in particular, as noted by Smith and Turner (2019), has taken a proactive stance in empowering its defense capabilities and deepening its coalition with US, motivated by concerns over Chinese impact in the South Pacific and beyond.¹⁶ With time-honored security grouping with the US, Japan has also hunt for expanding its role in regional security through initiatives like the FOIPS, as elaborated by Japan’s ministry of foreign affairs.¹⁷ India, with its growing strategic rivalry with China, has increasingly cooperated with other regional powers and the US to counterbalance PRC’s influence, particularly in the IO region.¹⁸ Despite the varying degrees of alignment with the US, regional countries share a common preference for avoiding a binary choice between the two powers. According to studies by Rajesh Rajagopalan (2020), this reluctance stems from the desire to maintain strategic autonomy and avoid the risks associated with over-dependence on either power.¹⁹ As a result, many nations in Indo-Pacific engage in a strategy of hedging, where they seek to maximize benefits from both the US and China while minimizing potential risks. The competition for influence between the US and China has also prompted regional countries to enhance their own security capabilities and seek new partnerships. Vietnam, for example, as discussed by Hoang (2018), has pursued greater military self-reliance while

¹³ Garcia, Juan, and Maria Navarro. *Philippine Foreign Policy under Duterte: A Shift towards China?* Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 2023

¹⁴ Lee, Michael, and Richard Johnson. *The U.S.-Philippines Security Alliance in the Indo-Pacific Era*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2024

¹⁵ Pant, Harsh V., and Shashank Joshi. *The Quad and Indo-Pacific Security: Countering China’s Rise*. London: Routledge, 2024

¹⁶ Smith, John, and Andrew Turner. *Australia’s Strategic Defense Policy and the US Alliance*. Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 2019

¹⁷ Ministry of foreign affairs of Japan, “Japan’s Efforts for a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’” (Mofa of Japan, 2022).

¹⁸ Ibid 11

¹⁹ Rajesh Rajagopalan, “Evasive Balancing: India’s Unviable Indo-Pacific Strategy,” *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 75–93

exploring new defense relationships with states like India and Japan.²⁰ Similarly, Indonesia has sought to strengthen its naval capabilities and engage in multilateral security initiatives to safeguard its interests in the SCS and beyond.

In reaction to the rising PRC influence, the US has pursued to enhance its engagement with regional countries through a combination of direct bilateral cooperation and multilateral initiatives. This includes deepening defense ties, increasing economic engagement, and promoting shared values of democracy and human rights.²¹ The US has also emphasized the significance of working with partners and allies to counterbalance China's influence, recognizing that a coordinated approach, as discussed by Roper (2024), is more effective in addressing the challenges posed by rise of PRC.²²

Among significant challenges in this competition is differing approaches and priorities of the US and its allies. While the US prioritizes military engagement and security cooperation, regional countries often place more focus on fiscal growth and the benefits of engagement with China. This divergence in priorities, according to Weixing Hu and Weizhan Meng (2020), can complicate struggles to shape a cohesive strategy in order to counterbalance China's influence.²³ Moreover, ability of PRC to use economic incentives as a tool of power poses a significant challenge for the US. Regional countries, particularly those with weaker economies, are often reluctant to alienate China due to the potential economic costs.²⁴ This has led to a situation where many countries seek to engage with China economically while relying on the US for security guarantees, creating a delicate balance that both powers must navigate.

Overall the study ensures that the Sino-US competition in IPR is characterized by a complex interplay of strategic objectives, regional responses, and the differing approaches of the two powers. Regional countries, while seeking to avoid direct alignment with either power, are increasingly engaging in strategies of hedging, balancing, and enhancing their own capabilities to navigate this competition. The outcome of this competition will depend on the ability of the US and China to adapt their strategies to the changing aspects of the region and the responses of regional actors. As the IPR continues to be a focal point of global power shifts, the strategic

²⁰ Huong Le Thu, "Vietnam's Persistent Foreign Policy Dilemma: Caught between Self-Reliance and Proactive Integration," *Asia Policy* 13, no. 4 (2018): 123–44

²¹ *Ibid* 11

²² Brian S Roper, "China's Rise and the United States' Response: Implications for the Global Order and New Zealand/Aotearoa. Part II: The US Response, Emergence of a Multi-Polar Order, and New Zealand/Aotearoa Foreign Policy-Making," *Kōtuitui*, March 24, 2024, 1–11

²³ Weixing Hu and Weizhan Meng, "The US Indo-Pacific Strategy and China's Response," *China Review* 20, no. 3 (2020): 143–76

²⁴ *Ibid* 23

choices made by regional countries will play a crucial part in determining the future of the region and the broader international order.

1.3 Theoretical framework

Neo-realism, or structural realism, is the most appropriate theory for analyzing the research topic "US-China Competition: Power Shift and Regional Responses in the Indo-Pacific Region." This theory, developed by Kenneth Waltz, emphasizes the importance of the international system's structure, particularly its anarchic nature, where no central authority exists to govern state behavior.²⁵ In such a system, states are primarily concerned with their survival and security, which leads them to act in ways that maximize their power relative to others

In the light of Sino-US competition, neo-realism gives a clear agenda for understanding the strategic behavior of both major powers and regional responses in IPR. As rise of PRC and contests the existed power of US, both countries are compelled to engage in actions that reinforce their positions within the international system.²⁶ This dynamic is central to structural realism, which views the power distribution among nations as the key determinant of international relations. The theory is particularly relevant for explaining why countries in the IPR are reacting as they are. For example, nations like Vietnam, Japan, and India is either balancing against PRC by increasing their own defense or empowering relations with the US and economic capabilities. Neo-realism predicts such behavior as states respond to the shifting BoP to guard their security and interests. Thus, neo-realism offers the most robust theoretical lens through which to examine the strategic Sino-US rivalry and the corresponding regional responses, making it uniquely suited to this research.

1.4 Problem statement

The intensifying US-China competition has become a central variable influencing geopolitical stability in the IPR. This research has goals to explore how this rivalry is reshaping the security policies of Indo-Pacific nations and altering their diplomatic relations. Specifically, it examines the ways in which the strategic maneuvers of the US and China are prompting regional states to adjust their security strategies and diplomatic engagements, thereby escalating regional tensions and transforming the geopolitical landscape

1.5 Hypothesis and Research questions

In order to work on research study topic "Sino-US competition: power shift and regional responses in indo pacific region", the literature provides researcher a gap to explore how this rivalry is

²⁵ Kenneth N Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

²⁶ Derek Grossman, *Regional Responses to U.S.-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific: Vietnam*, RAND Corporation EBooks (RAND Corporation, 2020)

reshaping the security policies of Indo-Pacific nations and altering their diplomatic relations. Owing to which the hypothesis is derived which is given below

“Sino-US competition is leading to greater tensions in the Indo Pacific region.”

On the basis of above hypothesis, research will answer the following question.

1. How does US-China competition affect security policies of Indo-Pacific nations?
2. What impact does US-China rivalry have on diplomatic relations within IPR?

The answers of above questions are well explained in discussion body of the research study.

1.6 Research objective

In accordance with the problem statement and research questions presented, this research aims seek to give a structured method to analyzing the political and security elements of Sino-US competition in the IPR. It evaluates the effects of the IPR’s Sino-US competition on the geostrategic goals and strategies of the major global powers including their political participation and security plans, as well as the consequences for regional stability. The research also explores how changes in surrounding countries' political alliances, collaborations, and strategies as a result of the Sino-US competition are affecting the political landscape in the IPR. It determines and assesses the specific security issues, diplomatic ties, dangers, and threats that surrounding nations in the IPR believe to be caused via Sino-US competition., as well as further unveil laws and regulations those nations have put in place to manage these issues. Moreover, it is looking into the interactions between the US-China rivalry's economic, military, and diplomatic facets as well as how they have an impact on Indo-Pacific region politics and security.

1.7 Research methodology

This scholarly research uses a thorough methodology that blends secondary and primary research techniques.

Secondary research: The study begins by relying primarily on secondary research, which includes a detailed analysis of the current literature, scholarly articles, official reports, and media sources. This lays the groundwork for comprehending the competition between China and US in a broader perspective as well as regional responses in IPR.

Deductive research methodology: In order to move from the general to the specific in order to explore deeper into the region's unique characteristics deductive research methodology is used. Based on the body of current knowledge, this method entails formulating hypotheses and research questions, followed by the collection of data to test and improve these theories. By using a deductive methodology and being guided by well-established theories and frameworks, the study hopes to produce insightful information about the power shifts and responses within the Indo-

Pacific area. **Primary research techniques** are also used in addition to secondary research. This involves interviewing important stakeholders, decision-makers, experts, and others directly involved in the Indo-Pacific region. These interviews offer first-person accounts and qualitative data, enhancing the study and additionally, the study uses samples to collect quantitative data when necessary.

1.8 Data Analysis

To gather structured data, surveys and questionnaires may be taken from online resources to chosen groups within the area. This enables statistical analysis and the validation of some conclusions. Data analysis includes both primary and secondary research approaches, using a logical approach. Surveys, interviews, and observations are done across the Indo-Pacific area to collect primary data. These first-hand sources give vital insights into regional players' perspectives, tactics, and behaviors. Secondary data is gathered from existing scholarly papers, government reports, and policy documents, providing a thorough historical and contextual knowledge of the rivalry. Deductive reasoning is used to conduct a systematic analysis of the acquired data, allowing for the detection of patterns, correlations, and the formation of hypotheses. This balanced approach allows for a comprehensive valuation of power transition between US and PRC and allow many regional responses that it provokes. This multifaceted research methodology, which combines secondary research, deductive reasoning, interviews, and sample-based data collection, ensures a thorough and robust examination of the Sino-US rivalry and its implications on the IPR, contributing to a deeper understanding of this crucial geopolitical landscape providing a comprehensive insight of the rivalry and responses.

1.9 Research significance

Particularly in light of recent regional conflicts including Pakistan, the study "US- China Competition: Power Shift and Regional Responses in the Indo-Pacific Region" is of greatest significance. Powerful nations all around the world are affected by India and China's rivalry in the IPR. The geostrategic objectives and plans of significant parties in the region are strongly impacted by these two giants' struggle for domination, producing a dynamic that resonates in the fields of politics and security. As Pakistan struggles with the shifting power dynamics, this competition also has significant effects on the bordering countries. Important facets of this rivalry are clarified by the research questions posed in this study. It investigates how this intensifying power struggle has impacted the political tactics and alliances of neighboring nations. The security concerns of the neighboring countries take on utmost importance in the face of this evolving terrain. The study explores the unique security threats and concerns brought on by the rivalry between China and US, looking at how both countries are navigating and resolving these urgent

problems.

The urgency of this research is summed up in the problem statement. In IPR, the changing power dynamics concerning PRC and US are giving rise to serious worries that go beyond scholarly inquiry. The thorough analysis of the paper includes the economic, military, and diplomatic facets of this conflict along with its numerous dimensions. The research aims to give a nuanced and holistic view of the challenges and opportunities provided by this rivalry to the stability and security of the IPR by focusing on the political and security consequences for key parties. We can say that this research is important for understanding the larger dynamics at play since Pakistan's role and responses add an important layer to the complexity of regional responses.

This research work is organized into five chapters including this introductory chapter.

Chapter 2 is discussing theoretical framework while chapter 3 is main discussion chapter that is answering research question 1 and chapter 4 is discussing research question 2. Last chapter is concluding whole research by extracting key findings of research questions.

Chapter 2

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Realism in international relations is not a singular theory but rather a paradigm encompassing various theories, as Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik have argued.²⁷ This understanding prompts the delineation of different types of realism, among which Kenneth N. Waltz's neo-realism, also famous as structural realism, is prominent. Neo-realism extends classical realism by reformulating its core postulates in a more structured manner. In accordance to Kenneth Waltz, neo-realism offers a scientific basis for realist thought²⁸. Waltz emphasized the systemic constraints on international actors' behavior, highlighting the stability and relative peace provided by the bipolar system during the Cold War. Today, neo-realism remains the dominant theory in international politics, with many new theoretical schools emerging in response to its arguments.

2.1 Neo-Realism/Structural Realism: The Emergence

Hans J. Morgenthau significantly developed realism into a coherent theory of international politics in the post WWII era. However, realism faced substantial criticism by the 1960s as scholars pushed for a more scientific approach to international relations, often dismissing classical realism as unscientific.²⁹ Kenneth Waltz addressed these critiques by reformulating realism, leading to the emergence of neo-realism. Neo-realism focuses on the absence of a principal international authority highlighting anarchy as a central restraint on state behavior, thereby making the international system inherently anarchic. This anarchical structure forces nations to act in particular ways, which is why this theory is also called as structural realism (SR).

2.2 Structural Realism: Kenneth Waltz

SR seeks to separate the features of IR that depend on actor characteristics or interactions to emphasize the constraining impact of the international system's structure. Moreover, Waltz says international power politics is rooted in the system's structure rather than human nature.

Waltz gives key assumptions that include states acting as rational actors aiming to maximize benefits and minimize losses, the anarchical structure of the international system being primary determinant of state behavior, and absence of a central authority to enforce rules. In such an environment, states are uncertain about others' intentions, leading to a security dilemma where survival becomes the critical concern. Power, within structural realism, is not measured by

²⁷ Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?," *International Security* 24, no. 2 (October 1999): 5–55

²⁸ Ibid 26

²⁹ Hans J. Morgenthau, "Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace.," *Political Science Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (June 1948): 290

outcomes but by the combined capabilities of a state. Stability and peace in the I-system hinge on balancing power within the system. Waltz identifies three defining features of the international system's structure: organizing principle, differentiation of units, and distribution of capabilities. The organizing principle in domestic politics is hierarchy, where units are organized above or below one another, establishing relationships of authority and subordination. Conversely, international politics lacks a central authority, leading to sovereign units that are not hierarchically organized, resulting in anarchy. Waltz argues that states, despite their cultural or ideological differences, perform similar basic functions such as tax collection and foreign policy, with no functional differentiation among them. The distinction among states arises from the distribution of competencies. Understanding I-politics—encompassing war, peace, alliances, and BoP—requires emphasis on the distribution of competencies across states. Waltz asserts that the structure of the I-system changes with shifts in this distribution, such as emergence of a bipolar system when two great powers dominate.

Neo-realism aimed to talk the shortcomings of classical realism by offering a more robust theoretical framework. However, the collapse of bipolar global order, the rise of globalization, and the weakening of states as dominant actors have challenged its relevance. Despite these challenges, Waltz suggests that the fundamental features of the I-system remain unchanged.³⁰ This chapter reveals the implication of structural realism on US-China competition and response of Indo-pacific states. Moreover, chapter will see the applicability of neorealism on competition-oriented strategy toward hegemon.

2.3 Structuralism and Sino-Russian strategic partnership

In structural realism, Waltz posits that a unipolar system is unsustainable as excessive power incites balancing actions from other states, concerned about threats to their security. Recent analyses of Sino-Russian relations illustrate internal balancing against U.S. hegemony through increased military spending and strategic partnerships. From Russia's perspective, the United States has led NATO's eastward expansion to contain Russian advances, worsening its geopolitical environment.³¹ The US has also imposed financial and technological sanctions. In response, Russia engaged in military conflicts with Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014), intensified US-Russia tensions. Similarly, China perceives the US's "pivot to Asia" and subsequent "rebalancing strategy" as containment efforts. This strategy expanded under Trump, involving India and Australia. Facing US strategic pressure, China and Russia have enhanced their

³⁰ Ibid 26

³¹ Michael F. Cohen, *War with Russia? : From Putin & Ukraine to Trump & Russiagate* (Hot Books, 2018).

strategic, economic, and military cooperation, formalized by the 2010 “Joint Statement between China and Russia on Comprehensively Deepening the Strategic Partnership of Coordination.” In 2013 and 2016, China and Russia enhanced their strategic partnership with joint statements, particularly after Donald Trump’s inauguration.³² The Trump administration’s 2017 deployment of anti-missile systems in Eastern Europe and the Korean Peninsula posed direct threats to both nations' security. In reaction, China and Russia issued the "China-Russia Joint Statement on Strengthening Global Strategic Stability," criticizing the Aegis Combat System and THAAD deployment for undermining their strategic interests and increasing security pressures. This move highlighted their concerns over regional and international stability. China and Russia strengthened ties to tackle global threats together.

After the Trump government identified PRC and Russia as major threats in its "National Security Strategy Report," the "National Defense Report" labeled them as "revisionist states," challenging the US-led I-order. Following the principle of "peace through strength," the administration unilaterally ended the INFT in October 2018, increasing US power projection capabilities. The "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report" issued on June 1, 2019, named China as primary threat and acknowledged Russia's malign role in region. In response, Beijing and Moscow signed the "Joint Statement on Developing a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the New Era," enhancing their strategic coordination.³³ The strengthened China-Russia partnership enhanced political and military trust, with Xi and Putin meeting frequently. Annual Joint Sea exercises since 2012 underscore their external balancing against the US. In July 2013, China's PLA Navy North Sea Fleet and Russia's Pacific Fleet conducted significant joint military exercises in Peter the Great Bay; marking the biggest such exercise for PRC with a foreign navy. This collaboration continued in May 2015, when both navies held their first joint exercises in the Mediterranean, directly within NATO.³⁴ Evolving Sino-Russia relationship is primarily driven by their shared disagreements with the West, particularly the US. Their strategic partnership has intensified due to a mutual desire to enhance strategic confidence and bilateral cooperation to counterbalance U.S. influence.³⁵ As Ruslan Pukhov from the “Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies in Moscow” notes, Russia values China's support amid powerful adversaries. Similarly, China

³² Ministry of foreign affairs of peoples republic of china, “China, Russia Sign Joint Statement on Strengthening Global Strategic Stability,” Xinhuanet.com, June 26, 2016

³³ Arlington, VA: Office of the Secretary of Defense, “The Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region,” US department of defence, June 1, 2019

³⁴ CNN, “CNN International - Breaking News, US News, World News and Video,” CNN, 2023

³⁵ Aurangzeb qureshi, “Flawed US Foreign Policy Encourages Russia-China Alliance,” Foreign Policy Journal, May 29, 2014

benefits from Russia's alliance to withstand U.S. pressures.³⁶

Table below shows the real essence of the Sino-Russian partnership through the given theoretical realism.

Table 1: Sino-Russian partnership

Concept	Explanation	Examples and Actions
Unipolar System and Balancing	A unipolar system is unsustainable as excessive power leads to balancing by other states.	Sino-Russian internal balancing against U.S. hegemony through increased military spending and strategic partnerships.
Containment and Strategic Pressure	States respond to perceived threats by enhancing strategic partnerships and military cooperation.	Russia's response to NATO expansion and U.S. sanctions with military actions in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014); PRC's response to U.S. "pivot to Asia" strategy.
Strategic Partnerships	Countries strengthen alliances to counterbalance dominant powers.	China and Russia's strategic, economic, and military cooperation formalized by the 2010 "Joint Statement on Comprehensively Deepening the Strategic Partnership."
Security Threats and Responses	Nations react to direct security threats by criticizing and taking countermeasures.	PRC and Russia's response to the US anti-missile systems deployment with the "Joint Statement on Strengthening Global Strategic Stability."
US-led International Order	Threats Identification of PRC and Russia challenges the existing order.	Trump's administration labeled PRC and Russia as "revisionist states" in "National Defense Report," ended the INF Treaty, and named China a primary threat.
Military Cooperation	Joint military exercises enhance trust and	Annual Joint Sea exercises since 2012, significant joint military exercises in

³⁶ Liu Ying, "Strategic Partnership or Alliance? Sino-Russia Relations from a Constructivist Perspective," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2018), pp. 333–354.

	counterbalance dominant powers.	Peter the Great Bay (2013), and in the Mediterranean (2015).
Geopolitical Strategy	Shared disagreements with dominant powers drive strategic partnerships.	The evolving China-Russia relationship driven by their mutual desire to enhance strategic confidence and bilateral cooperation to counterbalance U.S. influence.

2.4 Sino-US competition and Vietnam: structuralism perspective

Vietnam is an important ally for US in IPR, embodying values central to USIS. It strives to safeguard its sovereignty against PRC's economic and military assertiveness, particularly in SCS. Vietnam has made significant economic strides since the 1986 Đổi Mới (renovation policy) reforms, becoming a key global player.³⁷ However, it faces political challenges, including a new cyber security law and lingering Cold War-era suspicions. Vietnam aims to balance relations with PRC and US, leveraging latter support while maintaining stability with China. This balanced approach is vital amid growing U.S.-China competition. Geographical location of Vietnam is important in this competition.³⁸(For seeing area Vietnam in Indo-pacific on map see figure 2)

³⁷ Huong Le thu, "Can Vietnam's Doi Moi Reforms Be an Inspiration for North Korea?," The Asan Forum, August 23, 2018

³⁸ Ibid 27



Figure 2: Map of indo-pacific region

Vietnam’s primary security concern is PRC's evolving and increasing defense power and economic domain, particularly in SCS and through BRI. To mitigate this threat, Vietnam has sought support from the Japan, India and Australia while maintaining a delicate balance with China to safeguard its national interests. Influenced by Cold War-era conflicts with China, Vietnam adopted *Đổi Mới* in 1986 to liberalize its economy and engage globally. Resolution 13 in 1988 and Resolution 8 in 2003 further emphasized a multidirectional national interest’s based foreign policy, enhancing Vietnam’s diplomatic and defense capabilities.³⁹ Vietnam, driven by security concerns, aims to balance relations with US and PRC amid PRC's rising influence in the SCS. While Vietnam values its strategic partnership with PRC, historical conflicts and contemporary issues like BRI lead Hanoi to seek stronger links with the US and other global partners. Despite fiscal benefits from China, Vietnam is wary of overdependence and security risks.⁴⁰ The country's strategy reflects a structural realist approach: prioritizing national security

³⁹ Carlyle A. Thayer, “Vietnam’s Foreign Policy in an Era of Rising Sino-US Competition and Increasing Domestic Political Influence,” *Asian Security* 13, no. 3 (July 31, 2017): 183–99

⁴⁰ Nguyen Cong Tung, “Uneasy Embrace: Vietnam’s Responses to the U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy amid U.S.–China Rivalry,” *The Pacific Review* 35, no. 5 (March 2, 2021): 1–31

while navigating the pressures from a dominant neighbor and engaging with multiple global actors to safeguard its interests. Here is the table explaining relative Sino-US influence

Table 2: Variable for assessing relative US-China influence

Source	Typology	Explanation/Description
Political and Diplomatic		
Political and diplomatic ties	Common interests	How politically and diplomatically significant Sino-US partnership is and to what extent the diplomatic relations is established.
Backing for PRC versus US vision for region	Common interests	How the views of partner state of the ideal regional order supports with the vision of US for the IPR and PRC vision versus US values gauged PRC's vision and values for the landscape
US commitment to IPR and its views	Common interests	How much level of confidence the rival is carrying about the commitment of US or staying power in the IPR
Opinion of Public	Common interests	Relative public perceptions of favorability of the United States versus China
Economic		
Dependence on Economy	<i>Comparative capability</i>	The partner's present fiscal dependence on PRC versus US that is measured by investment, tourism and aggregating trade.
Fiscal opportunity	<i>Comparative capability</i>	How much the partner believes the United States versus China can provide future economic benefits

PRC Vs. US economic threat perception	<i>Comparative capability</i>	How much the other sees PRC's or US fiscal influence as a potential threat?
PRC based on fiscal threat perception Vs. Inclination to work with US.	Common interests	In order to balance against the other economically, whether the other's fiscal threat perception inspires it to work more with PRC or US.
Security and Defense		
PRC vs. US military threat perception.	<i>Comparative capability</i>	How much the partner views the United States or China as a military or security threat
Will to work with PRC vs. US that are based on military threat perceptions	Common interest	For balancing against the other militarily, Whether the partner's military threat perception inspires it to work more with PRC or US.
US-led security efforts support	Common interest	How much the partner supports the US on defense and security issues by its participation in or against major US-led global or regional security efforts
Defense corporation	<i>Comparative capability</i>	How much the other state is working closely with PRC's defense vs. US.
PRC vs. US defense capability	<i>Comparative capability</i>	How the other state sees PRC vs. US defense capability
In conflict with PRC, Perception of US inclination to aid Vietnam.	Common interests	How much the level of confidence about US inclination to come to its military regarding PRC potential conflict.

2.5 Structuralism in Asia: China, Japan, Korea and India

China faces challenges from America's containment strategy and potential anti-China alliances in

its neighborhood. The Trump administration's Indo-Pacific strategy, while globally oriented, relies heavily on regional allies. This approach conflicts with the "America First" policy, which prioritizes U.S. dominance over China and Russia by withdrawing from international commitments. Despite this inward focus, China's rise necessitates countermeasures, forcing the U.S. to depend more on Indo-Pacific allies.⁴¹ Consequently, the Trump administration demanded greater defense contributions from these allies, linking security commitments with economic and trade issues to enhance U.S. strategic interests.⁴²

Under the Trump administration, the U.S. demanded Japan purchase more American military equipment and raised the fees for U.S. forces stationed there, without committing to stronger security ties. Trump even threatened to withdraw U.S. forces from East Asia if Japan did not comply. Additionally, his removal from the TPP disrupted foreign policy of Japan, given its active upgrade of the TPP. The obligation of tariffs on Japanese aluminum and steel in 2018, from which Japan was excluded from exemptions granted to other allies, further strained relations.⁴³ Similarly, Trump's approach to South Korea involved demanding a significant increase in defense cost-sharing, threatening U.S. military withdrawal if South Korea did not comply. The Trump administration also linked trade negotiations and the positioning of the THAAD missile defense system to US military support, exacerbating South Korea's security concerns. South Korea faced additional economic pressures from China's sanctions over the THAAD deployment, alongside the renegotiation of its free trade agreement with the US, which further strained its economy.⁴⁴ From a structural realism perspective, these actions underscore the US leveraging its defense and economic power to coerce allies into compliance, prioritizing national interests and strategic dominance over cooperative alliances.

India initially embraced the Trump government's IPR strategy, aligning with Modi's vision of India's noticeable role in IO. This alignment fostered closer security ties amid US and India, with both nations affirming their partnership as crucial for regional stability and prosperity.⁴⁵ India's active involvement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue further reinforced this strategic convergence. However, the Trump administration's imposition of tariffs on Indian steel and

⁴¹ Aurangzeb Qureshi, "Flawed US Foreign Policy Encourages Russia-China Alliance," *Foreign Policy Journal*, May 29, 2014

⁴² Adam Tylor *The Washington Post*, "Ditching Deals Has Become Trump's Main Foreign Policy," *Washington Post*, October 17, 2017.

⁴³ David J. Lynch, Philip Rucker, and Erica Werner, "Trump Imposes Tariffs on Steel and Aluminum, but Offers Relief to Allies," *Washington Post*, March 9, 2018,

⁴⁴ *CNBC international*, "US and South Korea Break off Defense Cost Talks amid Backlash over Trump Demand," *CNBC*, November 27, 2018.

⁴⁵ Ashley J. Tellis, "India as a Leading Power," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 16, 2016

aluminum and its punitive measures against India's purchase of Russia's S-400 system and Iranian petroleum strained relations. These actions heightened India's distrust of Trump's unpredictable policies.⁴⁶ Consequently, strategic divergences amongst allies of US and US, particularly Japan and India, have undermined the Indo-Pacific strategy's cohesion. This discord has allowed China to exploit the situation, improving its relations with these key countries and reducing strategic pressure from its periphery.

Japan has reconsidered its China policy due to the unpredictable actions of the Trump government, seeing China as a viable trading partner amid US trade war. In 2018, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to PRC aimed to strengthen economic ties, supporting China's BRI and signing several cooperation agreements, including a 200 billion RMB currency swap. This shift in policy improved Sino-Japanese relations, with both nations supporting each other for the period of the COVID-19. Yet, the pandemic's economic disruptions and rising U.S.-China tensions have complicated relations. Japan's recent actions, such as moving production away from China and criticizing Chinese military activities, reflect a cautious approach.⁴⁷ Despite these challenges, both nations express a desire to continue dialogue and cooperation, aiming for stronger bilateral ties post-pandemic. This dynamic aligns with structural realism, where states adjust their strategies to balance power and maintain national interests amid shifting international influences.

China's rapprochement with South Korea illustrates its hedging strategy through regional diplomacy, viewed through the lens of structural realism. Threatened by North Korea's nuclear tests, South Korea agreed to deploy US THAAD system, prompting China to impose economic sanctions, affecting tourism, entertainment, and online trade. Facing significant economic losses, South Korea proposed the "three noes" policy to address China's concerns. China's positive response led to a conference between President Xi Jinping and Moon Jae-in in 2017, signaling a recovery in bilateral relations. In December 2019, foreign minister of PRC Wang Yi's visit to South Korea further emphasized China's commitment to improving relations post-THAAD incident, showcasing China's strategic use of economic and diplomatic tools to balance power and influence in IPR. Under this lens, PRC and South Korea's interactions post-THAAD deployment highlight strategic positioning⁴⁸. Despite tensions, China's outreach to South Korea, exemplified by President Moon Jae-in's visit to Beijing and foreign minister of PRC Wang Yi's visit to Seoul in December 2019, underscores the balance of power dynamics. China aims to mitigate security

⁴⁶ Ibid 17

⁴⁷ Da Zhigang, "Amid COVID-19, Negative Factors Dictate Japan's Attitude toward China - Global Times," www.globaltimes.cn, May 2020

⁴⁸ Leslie Shaffer, "Trump's Aggressive Drive against One 'Horrible' Trade Deal May Break Down," CNBC, September 2, 2017

threats posed by the THAAD system, while South Korea seeks to maintain a stable relationship with its powerful neighbor. The comprehensive rapprochement signifies both nations' recognition of the need for pragmatic diplomacy to navigate the regional power structure and avoid escalation, demonstrating structural realism's emphasis on state behavior driven by survival and power considerations.

After the Dong-long conflict, India moved to restore relations with China by avoiding official meetings with the Dalai Lama, signaling goodwill. Prime Minister Modi and president Xi Jinping met at the 2017 BRICS summit in China, where Xi emphasized cooperation that is based on the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" to build political trust and advance Sino-Indian ties. This marked a positive turn in their relations. Subsequent informal meetings in Chennai in October 2019 and in Wuhan in April 2018 furthered strategic consensus on international issues. Their meeting in Brasilia in November 2019 highlighted China's strong intent to improve bilateral relations with India.⁴⁹ The recent territorial clash in the Galwan Valley significantly disrupted China-India relations, causing at least 20 Indian casualties and sparking strong anti-China sentiment in India. This sentiment pressured India's foreign ministry to adopt a tougher stance towards China. Despite this, China maintained a reassurance-oriented policy to preserve the progress made in China-India relations by President Xi and Prime Minister Modi. From a structural realism perspective, China's self-restraint in publicly disclosing its casualties aimed to prevent nationalistic escalation and create space for negotiations. On the Indian side, Prime Minister Modi's televised statement that no Indian territory had been intruded upon signaled a reluctance to let the relationship deteriorate completely. Both countries showed restraint, leading to a meeting of their corps commanders on June 22, 2020, where they agreed to manage the dispute through dialogue and consultation.⁵⁰ This led to nine series of military and diplomatic talks that includes meetings of PRC's Indian counterparts and PRC's foreign minister. These efforts resulted in a significant easing of tensions, with disengagement confirmed at most border points by July 28, 2020. For China, resolving the territorial tension with India was crucial not only for peripheral security but also to limit the scope for U.S. intervention, as the Trump government sought to empower its security ties with India as part of its IPS.

In nutshell one can say that in this discussed theoretical frameworks, the importance of neo-realism and, more specifically, structural realism by Kenneth Waltz, is stressed. Thus, Waltz's conception of the international structure – the anarchy that reigns in the interstate system and the

⁴⁹ Steve George, "Trump and Modi Reaffirm Indian-US Relations with a Hug | CNN Politics," CNN, June 27, 2017,

distribution of capabilities among the states – offers the best account of the understanding of the state conduct, particularly in power politics. Nonetheless, neo-realism provides useful explanations for the functioning of the contemporary international system but struggles to explain the essence of the post–Cold War world based on globalization, regionalism as well as non-state actors. This chapter also employed structural realism in a critical sense for making the analysis of Sino-Russian relations and Sino-U. S. competition, regarding how these powers acts, to the potential threats by developing strategic cooperation and military alliances. Explaining how states perform such calculations, the application of structural realism in analyzing Vietnam’s strategies regarding balancing between China and the U. S. proves once again pertinent in interpreting the ongoing processes in a multipolar world. Nevertheless, the chapter also brings out the weaknesses of structural realism especially in their ability to capture the subtleties of the economic interdependence and declining characteristics of sovereignty. In this vein, as much as structural realism is a constitutive theory, efforts need to be made to adjust it praxis as well as use in consort with other IR theories in order to understand the current international relations.

Chapter 3

SECURITY POLICIES ADAPTATIONS IN INDO-PACIFIC NATIONS AMID SINO-US COMPETITION

3.1 Introduction

The longstanding Sino-US rivalry has evolved over the decades. During the Cold War, their rapprochement in the 1970s was driven by a mutual threat from the Soviet Union. This strategic alignment dissolved with the collapse of Soviet, leading US to engage China in hopes of fostering economic and political liberalization. Despite these efforts, underlying tensions persisted, particularly as China, under Xi Jinping since 2013, has become more assertive and authoritarian.⁵¹ 2016 US elections marked a turning point, with Trump government adopting a confrontational stance, labeling China a "revisionist" power and implementing tariffs and technological restrictions. This period saw heightened US security measures in IPR, particularly in reaction to PRC's actions in Taiwan Strait and SCS. The Biden government has kept on a rigid approach, viewing the Sino-US relationship as a "full-spectrum" rivalry encompassing ideological, economic, military, and technological dimensions. However, Biden has emphasized a more multilateral strategy, strengthening alliances such as the Quad and AUKUS, and launching initiatives like the B3W to respond China's BRI. China's reaction has been a mix of anger and strategic countermeasures, including reciprocal tariffs and aggressive "wolf warrior" diplomacy. Despite these tensions, both sides aim to avoid military conflict. China's response to U.S. pressure includes the "dual circulation" strategy, emphasizing domestic market growth and technological self-reliance.⁵² The intensifying U.S.-China competition, exacerbated by recent global events like COVID-19 and Ukraine-Russia war, presents new strategic challenges for nations in IPR. Middle powers in the region must navigate this complex landscape, balancing relations with both superpowers while pursuing their own strategic interests.

The security policies of the PRC and US in IPR have been shaped by strategic interests and shifting geopolitical dynamics. The US has maintained significant defense presence post WWII, driven by ally security and assurance to a rules-based order. Key alliances, such as the Japan-US security treaty, US-South Korea Mutual defense treaty and ANZUS, formed foundation of America's Cold War strategy to contain communism and project power in the Asia-Pacific.⁵³ Conversely, China's

⁵¹ George P Jan, *U.S./China Rivalry in the Twenty-First Century* (America Star Books, 2015).

⁵² Camilla Tenna, "U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific | DIIS," www.diis.dk, April 27, 2020

⁵³ Canberra corporateName =Commonwealth Parliament; address=Parliament House, "Chapter 2 the ANZUS Alliance," www.apf.gov.au, 2006,.

security policies have transitioned from defensive to assertive expansionism. Initially, China focused on territorial integrity and sovereignty, particularly regarding Taiwan, Xinjiang and Tibet. However, as PRC showed fiscal upheaval, so did its ambitions. In the early 2000s, China promoted a "peaceful rise" to reassure neighbors while expanding its influence through economic and soft power. Under Xi Jinping, PRC adopted a more antagonistic stance by the 2010s, particularly in the SCS, engaging in militarization and land retrieval of disputed islands.⁵⁴ The 2013 BRI aimed to establish key port presence and secure maritime routes. Concurrently, the PLA's modernization increase power projection capabilities of PRC. In response, US reinforced its regional security commitments, pivoting to Asia under Obama and continuing under subsequent administrations.⁵⁵ Programs like AUKUS and Quad reflect strategic efforts to counterbalance growing influence of PRC, underscoring the IPR as a central arena of Sino-US rivalry.

Key events or turning points in U.S.-China security dynamic in IPR include US post-WWII establishment of alliances such as Japan-US Security Treaty ANZUS Treaty, shaping regional security frameworks. PRC's "peaceful rise" in early 2000s aimed to expand influence while maintaining a non-threatening posture. Under Xi Jinping, the 2010s marked a shift with the militarization of SCS and launch of the BRI, signaling assertive expansionism. The US pivoted to Asia, forming strategic groups like the Quad and AUKUS, intensifying the regional power contest.

3.2 Impact on Regional Security Policies

Sino-US competition is impacting regional security policies in two ways. This study will see general trends and county-specific analyses in running chapter.

3.2.1 General Trends

Sino-US competition is not a new thing in struggle for pursuit of power. States have been to this type of competition through different pacts and agreements. World has witnessed US-Soviet competition and US competition with European powers or within European powers. This all type of competition saw shifts in defense expenditure and military alliances and partnership that is described below.

The IPR has seen vibrant shifts in defense expenditures influenced by the U.S.-China competition. Southeast Asian countries are caught in a balancing act, navigating between enhancing their military capabilities and managing economic dependencies. The U.S. has traditionally been a dominant military force in the region, investing heavily to maintain its presence and alliances. This includes significant defense spending aimed at supporting its commitments under treaties

⁵⁴ Oriana Skylar Mastro, "The Stealth Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* (Foreign Affairs Magazine, December 11, 2018)

⁵⁵ Nadège Rolland, "China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': Underwhelming or Game-Changer?," *The Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 127–42

with Australia, South Korea and Japan. Rise of China has prompted shifts in defense expenditures across Southeast Asia. Increased Chinese military assertiveness and spending, particularly in the South China Sea, have spurred regional nations to bolster their defense budgets.⁵⁶ Countries like Indonesia and Vietnam have ramped up their military investments to safeguard their interests. This trend highlights response of region to perceived threats and the desire to maintain a balance of power. Graph below shows military expenditure in dollars on Y-axis and years on X-axis explaining defense expenditure of countries in billions.

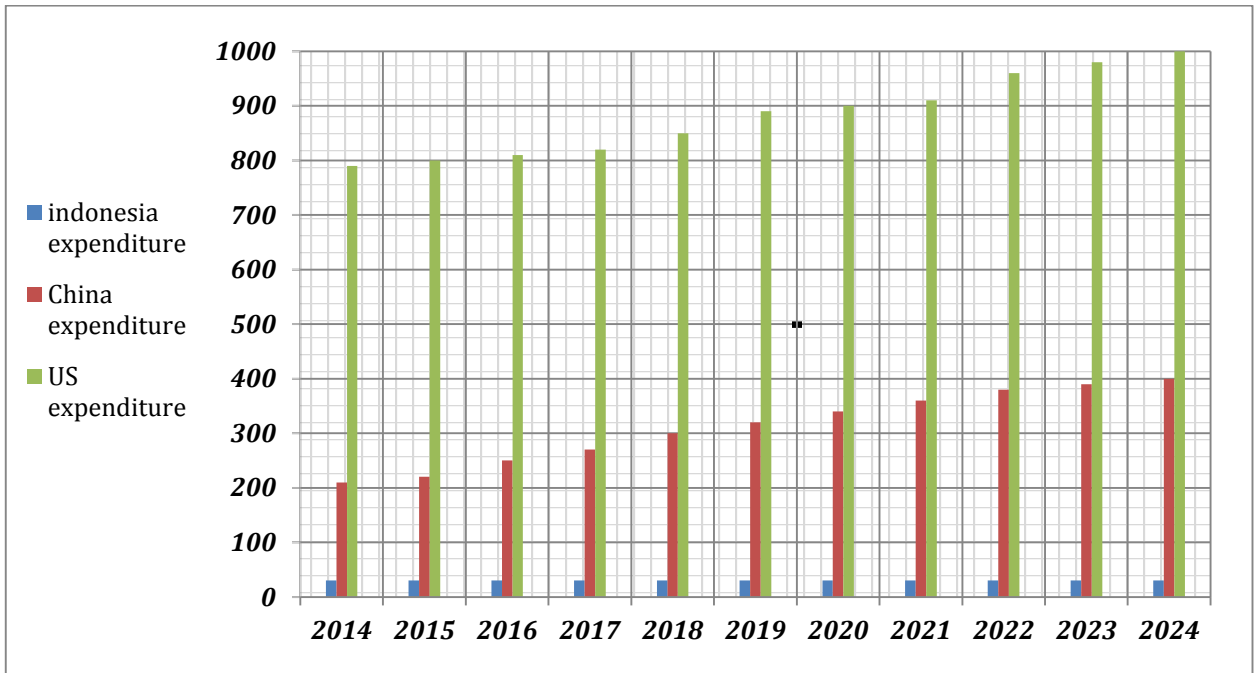


Figure 3: shifts in defense expenditure in indo-pacific region (2014-july, 2024)

Here is the graph illustrating the shift in defense expenditures in IPR from 2014 to July, 2024. Data highlights trends in defense spending by the U.S., China, Vietnam, and Indonesia, showcasing how regional dynamics and the U.S.-China competition have influenced military investments. The U.S. maintains significant expenditures to support its commitments, while China's rising military budget reflects its growing assertiveness. Vietnam and Indonesia have also increased their defense budgets in response to these developments, aiming to safeguard their national interests.

Southeast Asia's military alliances and partnership reflect a strategic effort to navigate the complexities of U.S.-China competition. The region's approach is characterized by pragmatism and a multifaceted strategy to avoid entanglement in a binary choice between the two powers.

⁵⁶ Ian Storey, *The United States and ASEAN - China Relations* (lulu.com; Null Edition , 2007).

ASEAN's framework of open regionalism plays a crucial role, fostering relationships with various global powers. The U.S. has strengthened its alliances through initiatives like QUAD with India, Australia and Japan and AUKUS security pact involving UK and Australia.⁵⁷ These alliances are part of strategy to counterbalance the influence of PRC. The U.S. also engages in bilateral defense agreements and military assistance, reinforcing its presence and commitment to regional stability.

3.2.2 Country-Specific Analysis

While escalating Sino-US rivalry in IPR, individual countries in IPR are recalibrating their strategies to safeguard their national interests. Japan is expanding its defense connections with the US, whereas pursuing stronger regional partnerships simultaneously. Australia, balancing fiscal dependency on PRC by security reliance on the US, is enhancing its military capabilities and regional alliances. Vietnam and the Philippines are fortifying their defense corporation with the US because they are directly affected by PRC's aggressiveness in the SCS.⁵⁸ India remains also playing vital role, reinforcing the aforementioned strategic autonomy while engaging in broader security collaborations with both regional and global partners.

JAPAN

In response to the increasing US-China competition, Japan has made important variations to its defense strategy and strengthened its security alliance with the US. Recognizing the growing regional threats, Japan has elevated its defense spending and expanded its military capabilities. The country is also enhancing or improving its missile defense systems and considering more proactive methods to guard its interests. The US-Japan Security Alliance has been revitalized, with both nations committing to deeper military cooperation and joint exercises. This strategic shift underscores Japan's determination to maintain regional stability and counterbalance PRC's influence in the IPR.⁵⁹ Japan is important for both PRC and US and it has joined several platforms to gain US support at different level such as QUAD, APEC and RCEP.

⁵⁷ Robert G. Sutter, *The United States and Asia : Regional Dynamics and Twenty-First-Century Relations* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019).

⁵⁸ Office of the Spokesperson, "The United States' Enduring Commitment to the Indo-Pacific: Marking Two Years since the Release of the Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy," United States Department of State, February 9, 2024

⁵⁹ Harsh V Pant and Yogesh M Joshi, *The US Pivot and Indian Foreign Policy: Asia's Evolving Balance of Power* (SpringerLink, 2016).



Figure 4: Japan in countries' group sharing major shipping routes.⁶⁰

Defense Policy Changes

Japanese national security and defense policy has evolved significantly in response to multiple threats. Foremost is the threat from China, which encompasses both conventional military challenges and gray zone coercion.⁶¹ To address these issues, Japan has been modernizing its defense capabilities, including its ground, air, maritime, and missile defense systems. This includes the deployment of surface to air missiles, anti-ship cruise missile and ground-based sensors in the Ryukyu Islands to counter PRC's A2/AD strategy.⁶² Additionally, Japan has enhanced its air force by acquiring converting Izumo-class helicopter, F-35A and F-35B aircraft destroyers for fixed-wing operations. The submarine fleet has been expanded, and Japan plans to acquire Global Hawk ISR airframes and Aegis Ashore missile defense batteries. Japan is also dealing with China's gray zone tactics, such as increased air and maritime intrusions and cyber operations. In response, Japan has bolstered its forces, improved coordination between the Japan Coast Guard and the SDF, and deepened security collaboration with the US. This cooperation has been reinforced through statements of support from U.S. leaders and the execution of the 2015 Rules for US- Japan Defense Cooperation, which established mechanisms for a coordinated response to gray zone threats.⁶³ North Korea presents another security challenge for Japan, with its growing missile and nuclear capabilities and cyber operations. Tokyo is concerned about

⁶⁰ The Economist

⁶¹ Japanese think tanks academics, government official, Japan 2019: Inaugurating a New era?, interview by Scott W. Harold, April 2019.

⁶² Toshi Yoshihara, "Going Anti-Access at Sea: How Japan Can Turn the Tables on China," Cnas.org, 2024

⁶³ DoD, "Joint Press Briefing by Secretary Mattis and Minister Inada, Tokyo Japan," transcript, February 4, 2017.

nuclear weapons, cyber activities and North Korea's missile arsenal aimed at revenue generation and intelligence gathering. The possibility of U.S. abandonment has also been a longstanding concern for Japan, influencing its defense policies. Historical instances, such as Nixon's 1972 announcement of relations with China and trade tensions in the 1980s, have contributed to this fear.⁶⁴ More recently, statements by former President Trump and actions like striking steel tariffs and retreating from the TPP have heightened these concerns. Consequently, Japan has sought to reinforce its alliance by the US through arms purchases, revised defense cooperation guidelines, and increased political and diplomatic efforts.⁶⁵

Japan's defense policy changes reflect its need to balance relations between PRC and US. While welcoming the US recognition of China's competitive threat, Japan remains wary of a transactional U.S. foreign policy that could disadvantage Tokyo. Japanese policymakers prefer a balance where the U.S. stands firm against China without forcing regional countries to choose sides. As the U.S. adopts Japan's FOIP language, Tokyo has adjusted its emphasis, portraying FOIP as a vision rather than a strategy to avoid alienating Southeast Asian nations and to signal inclusivity towards China if it adheres to established rules.

US-Japan Security Alliance

The 2017 US national defense strategy and National Security Strategy highlight resurgence of great powers rivalry, particularly in IPR with China. Partners and allies of US are essential in promoting freedom, democracy, and a rules-based international order.⁶⁶ Among these allies, Japan-US alliance is pivotal for maintaining force posture and influence of US in the region, especially in responding to growing influence of PRC. Southeast Asia has experienced significant Chinese influence and coercion, making it a point of emphasis for strategy of US and the DOD⁶⁷. Experts argue that Southeast Asia could shape the broader international order and study emphasizes region's contested nature, where the US and its allies especially Japan are vying with PRC to influence governance and strategic alignments.⁶⁸ Some reports examine how the US can best leverage its alliance with Japan for longstanding strategic struggle with PRC in Southeast Asia, exploring perspectives of US partners and allies in response to PRC's assertive policies and the Sino-US competition. The D.O.D and US Air Force (USAF) can enhance their collaboration with Japan to provide Southeast Asian nations with alternatives to aligning with China. Short-

⁶⁴ Emma Chanlett-Avery et al., "North Korean Cyber Capabilities: In Brief Specialist in Asian Affairs Specialist in International Crime and Narcotics," 2017

⁶⁵ Jennifer Jacobs, "Trump Muses Privately about Ending Postwar Japan Defense Pact," www.bloomberg.com, June 24, 2019

⁶⁶ Robert Blackwill and Ashley Tellis, "Revising U.S. Grand Strategy toward China," 2015,

⁶⁷ Ibid 27

⁶⁸ Dennis Blair, "An updated US-japan strategy for China," 2016

term efforts can yield long-term benefits by complicating China's ability to coerce the region.⁶⁹ The report, drawing on Japanese government documents, secondary sources, media reports, public opinion polls, interviews with over 40 experts and officials and trade data, assesses how US and Japan perceive Southeast Asia and the potential for defense cooperation to counter China's influence.⁷⁰

The Japan-US alliance can challenge PRC's regional strategy via presenting a unified front, with Japan acting as a "wingman" towards US, facilitating continued US relations or access in the region⁷¹. This cooperation is framed not like a binary optimal amid PRC and US but as a multilateral engagement that supports regional autonomy. Japan can complement U.S. military power with security soft power, including maritime law enforcement, training, infrastructure development, humanitarian assistance, professional military education and capacity-building. Japan's engagement can also mitigate Chinese influence where U.S. relationships are strained. For example, Japan maintained affairs with Philippines and Thailand when influence of US waned due to political issues. Researchers argue that alliances extend U.S. power and influence, and Japan's involvement can counteract Chinese narratives portraying the U.S. as an outsider meddling in Asian affairs.⁷²

VIETNAM

Vietnam's position amid the US-China rivalry is both strategic and delicate. Being China's neighbor and a growing partner of the US, Vietnam must skillfully manage its foreign relations. The power struggle between these superpowers shapes Vietnam's policies significantly. To counter China's regional influence, Vietnam is boosting its military strength and seeking diverse economic partnerships. This approach not only balances China's dominance but also strengthens ties with the US. Vietnam's actions are driven by its historical experiences, the current geopolitical climate, and the need to ensure its security and economic progress.

Maritime Security and Territorial Disputes

Vietnam has taken proactive steps to address PRC's assertiveness in SCS. Recognizing disparity cutting-edge defense budgets studies show that Vietnam spends annually about \$5 billion on defense compared to PRC's \$146 billion while Hanoi has diversified its military procurement beyond its traditional supplier, Russia. Vietnam has acquired submarines, anti-ship missiles, and air defense systems from various countries to bolster its maritime security. The Vietnam People's

⁶⁹ Kurt M Campbell, *The Pivot : The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Twelve, 2016).

⁷⁰ Lauren Mosely, "Armitage Nye Reports on the U.S.-Japan Alliance | Projects | CSIS," *Csis.org*, 2024

⁷¹ Japanese government official interview by Scott Harold, *Tokyo*, April 2019.

⁷² Scott W. Harold, "Regional Responses to U.S.-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific: Japan," *www.rand.org*, November 12, 2020

Navy has added Tarantul V-class corvettes and Gepard-class frigates, while Air Force has been advanced with aircraft Sukhoi Su-30MK2.⁷³ To counter China's maritime militia, Vietnam has expanded its largest in Southeast Asia Coast Guard, and now building a fishing militia. Despite advancements, challenges remain in maritime domain awareness, prompting investments in drones, amphibious aircraft, and satellite technology. Additionally, Vietnam has engaged in land reclamation and infrastructure development in disputed areas to solidify its territorial claims and support future military operations.⁷⁴

US-Vietnam Security Cooperation

Since 1995, after the normalization of diplomatic relations, Vietnam-US security cooperation has grown significantly. Initially, progress was slow due to mutual distrust, but shared strategic interests, particularly concerning PRC's actions in SCS, have deepened their partnership. Lifting of the US armaments embargo in 2016 on Vietnam and various joint defense agreements marked key milestones in their relationship. Vietnam and US signed a joint vision statement on defense relations in 2015, which focused on cooperation in war legacy issues, maritime security, disaster relief, peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts. Vietnam has benefited from US support in enhancing its maritime capabilities through programs like the Maritime Security Initiative (MSI) and Foreign Military Financing. Both countries have also expanded cooperation in combating transnational crime, improving cyber security, and addressing security threats including non-traditional i.e. natural disasters and climate change.⁷⁵ Oil rig incident in SCS in 2014 further cemented their security ties. This led to significant diplomatic engagements, including the first visit of Communist Party's General Secretary of Vietnam to the US in 2015 and then US President visit to Vietnam in 2016, during which the arms embargo was fully lifted.⁷⁶ These efforts highlight the increasing strategic alignment between the U.S. and Vietnam, aimed at ensuring regional stability and upholding international law amidst shared security challenges.

INDIA

Role of India in the Sino-US rivalry is significant owing to its growing economic and military stature. India is a major democratic player in the Indo-Pacific so it stands as a key counterbalance to rising influence of PRC. Its strategic position, combined with a burgeoning economy, makes it

⁷³ Derek Grossman Anh Nguyen Nhat, "Deciphering Vietnam's Evolving Military Doctrine in the South China Sea," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, May 11, 2018,

⁷⁴ institute for maritime and ocean affairs, "A 'People's War': How China Plans to Dominate the South China Sea - Institute for Maritime and Ocean Affairs," Institute for Maritime and Ocean Affairs, May 3, 2019,

⁷⁵ embassy of the socialist republic of Vietnam, "VN, US Vow to Build Strategic Partnership | Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the United States," vietnamembassy-usa.org, 2024

⁷⁶ Phạm Chí Dũng, "'US-Vietnam Strategic Partnership' about to Take Shape?," Voice of America (VOA Tiếng Việt, April 6, 2019)

a vital partner for both PRC and US. Its actions and policies are central towards shifting BOP in the IPR, reflecting its efforts to assert its own interests while managing relationships with these two superpowers. Analyzing India's influence helps in deciphering the evolving aspects of the IPR.

Military Modernization

India is actively modernizing its military to counter China's expanding influence. Since Narendra Modi took office in 2014, there has been a strong focus on addressing the disparity in defense capabilities, especially following clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020. Key reforms include restructuring military command and increasing private sector involvement in defense procurement.⁷⁷ Significant changes include the creation of a Chief of Defense Staff position to unify military leadership and new enlistment policies aimed at reducing the average age of troops. Additionally, there is a push for advanced defense technology and greater collaboration with private companies. India is reorienting its defense partnerships, moving away from reliance on Russia and strengthening connections with QUAD members like Japan and Australia and US. India's prime minister 2023 visit to the US resulted important defense and technology agreements, marking a step forward in India's strategy to enhance its military capabilities and respond to China's growing presence.⁷⁸ India defense modernization with the passage of time can be seen by allocation of its defense budget over the years in the graph below

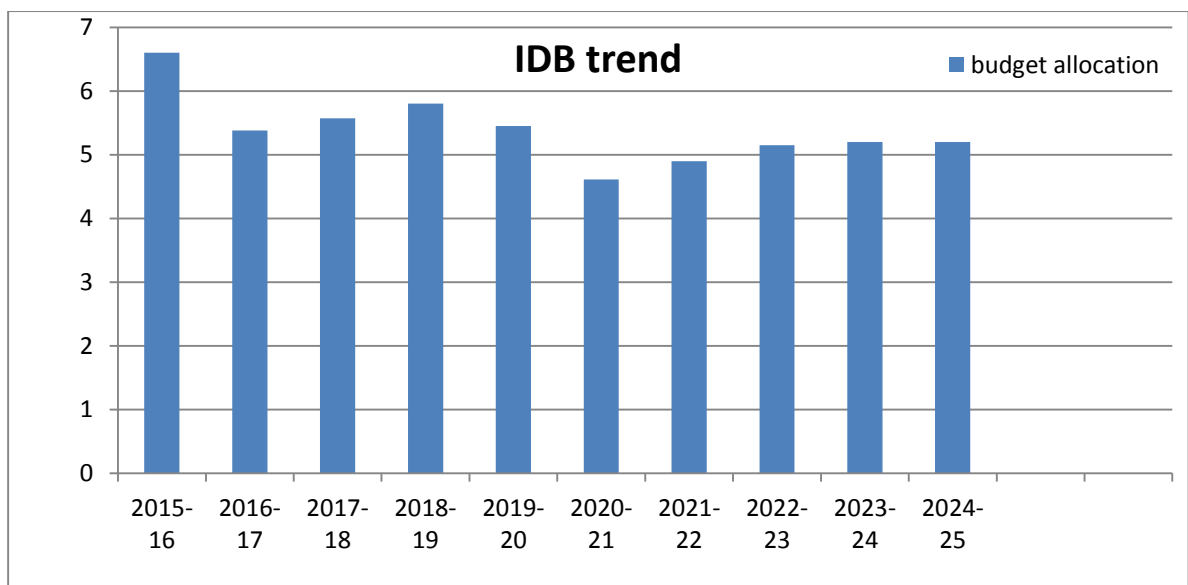


Figure 5: Graph on Indian Defense budget trend from 2015-2025

⁷⁷ Taylor Farvel, "China's Sovereignty Obsession: Beijing's Need to Project Strength Explains the Border Clash with India | 2020 | News | MIT Security Studies Program (SSP)," Mit.edu, 2020.

⁷⁸ Joaquin Matamis, "India's Military Modernization Efforts under Prime Minister Modi • Stimson Center," Stimson Center, May 22, 2024.

Strategic Partnerships (e.g., with the US and QUAD)

India's partnership with US in the IPR is anchored by mechanisms like India's major defense partner status and the 2+2 dialogue. The Quad i.e. India, Japan, US and Australia, is a key institution in IPR and has been a point of apprehension for PRC due to its growing influence. Addition of Australia to the Malabar naval exercises in 2020 has further elevated its importance, aligning it with the Quad's significance.⁷⁹ The Quad's work extends beyond security, tackling issues such as vaccines, climate change, and emerging technologies. This broad cooperation strengthens the ties among the four nations.⁸⁰ To bolster regional security, Quad members could increase joint patrols in strategic locations like the Strait of Malacca. Involving European nations interested in IPR could also enhance region's willingness of being open and free.

While India and US sometimes view IPR differently—where US focuses on doctrinal and strategic aspects and India blends national security with regional growth—the partnership remains strong. India's approach, driven by SAGAR initiative, addresses both traditional and emerging security challenges, including climate change and food security. The Quad's collaboration during the 2004 tsunami serves as a model for disaster response. India's involvement in the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) indicates potential for further collaboration with the US regarding maritime issues. The DTTI aims to improve collaboration on defense technologies, despite past hurdles. Recent advancements in DTTI since 2021 reflect a renewed effort to strengthen defense ties and enhance joint capabilities in the Indo-Pacific.⁸¹

AUSTRALIA

Australia is another significant player in the US-China rivalry within the IPR. As a close ally and partner of US, its geographical position and defense strength enhance its role in countering China's expanding influence. Australia's dedication to regional security and involvement in multilateral groups like the Quad highlight its strategic importance. By navigating its economic relationships with China while supporting US-led efforts, Australia influences how the region responds to the competition between the US and China since it plays an important role in the shifting power dynamics.

Strategic Defense Initiatives

Australia's latest defense strategy addresses its concerns about regional threats, particularly from

⁷⁹ Rajat Pandit, "India May Invite Australia for Malabar Naval Exercise with US & Japan," The Times of India (Times Of India, January 28, 2020).

⁸⁰ US military official, QUAD and Its Influence , interview by jonah blank, May 2019.

⁸¹ Indian security analyst, US -india Strategic Partnership, interview by jonah blank, May 16, 2019.

China. Recently, Australia has accused China of coercive actions in areas like SCS and Taiwan Straits, leading to plan in order increase defense spending by AU\$50 billion over the next decade. Some critics believe Australia is misinterpreting China's actions and exaggerating the threat. They argue that China's efforts to protect its sovereignty are being wrongly labeled as coercion.⁸² This perspective suggests Australia, influenced by the US, is amplifying "China threat" in order to boost up its strategic standing in South Pacific. Australia's move to bolster its military, including plans for a larger and more advanced navy, signals a shift from a defensive to a more aggressive stance. This has sparked concerns about escalating tensions and increasing risks for Australia. Despite being far from major conflict zones, Australia seems to be preparing for unlikely scenarios, which some say is counterproductive. China's recent diplomatic outreach, such as China's foreign minister visit to Australia, aims to strengthen mutual ties through shared respect and cooperation.⁸³ Yet, Australia's strategy appears driven by insecurity and political calculations, trying to balance economic relations with PRC while aligning closely with US strategic goals.

ANZUS and QUAD Participation

Australia's involvement in both the ANZUS alliance and the Quad reflects its strategic approach to the escalating Sino rivalry in IPR. ANZUS, which includes, Australia, New Zealand and US is a critical part of Australia's defense policy, emphasizing its strong military ties with the US to ensure regional security and counter potential threats from China.⁸⁴ Participation in the QUAD, which also includes India and Japan, highlights Australia's efforts in order collaborate with key regional players to balance China's increasing influence. The QUAD emphasizes on a wide range of issues such as vaccine distribution, infrastructure development, and climate change, providing a platform for Australia to engage in regional security and economic initiatives without direct military confrontation. By engaging in both ANZUS and the Quad, Australia aims to influence in the IPR and bolster its security and influence in the Indo-Pacific while managing its economic relationship with China.⁸⁵ This dual strategy allows Australia to strengthen its alliances and participate in multilateral efforts to address regional challenges, reflecting a careful balancing act in response to the US-China competition in IPR.

3.3 Regional Security Architectures

⁸² global times, "Australia's New Defense Strategy a Miscalculation of Asia-Pacific Situation - Global Times," Globaltimes.cn, 2024.

⁸³ China Briefing, "Highlights from Wang Yi's Official Visit to New Zealand and Australia," China Briefing News, May 30, 2024.

⁸⁴ William Tow, "ANZUS: Regional versus Global Security in Asia?," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 5, no. 2 (2005): 197–216

⁸⁵ Adam Lockyer, "Australian Defence Strategy in the Age of Trump and Xi," in *Australian Army Research Centre*, 2017.

Regional security frameworks are shifting in IPR due to the increasing tension between PRC and US. Nations in this region are trying to maintain a careful balance by forming alliances to counter growing influence of PRC, while still engaging economically with both powers. The Quad—comprising the Japan, India and US—aims to encourage an open and free Indo-Pacific. ASEAN nations seek to remain central at the same time and unified to avoid getting entangled in the rivalry. This creates a dynamic where security structures are constantly being adjusted to address the ongoing geopolitical challenges.

a) Role of ASEAN

ASEAN, formed in 1967, has become a central player in the IPR’s security framework. Initially focused on sub-regional security, ASEAN has expanded its influence through initiatives like ASEAN Plus, which includes broader Asia-Pacific engagement. The organization has effectively mediated conflicts among its members and developed cooperative measures on various security issues. These include environmental protection, counter-terrorism, transnational crime, and piracy. The TAC is central to strategy of ASEAN for peaceful dispute resolution, fostering a stable and secure regional environment.⁸⁶ Map of ASEAN countries is given in Fig: 6 for better understanding of its security architecture.



Figure 6: ASEAN countries on world map⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Donald E Weatherbee, *International Relations in Southeast Asia : The Struggle for Autonomy* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, Cop, 2015).

⁸⁷ Research gate

ASEAN's efforts have led to significant security achievements, highlighting its importance in regional stability. The organization's ability to promote cooperation and build consensus among its diverse members underscores its vital role in the regional security landscape. ASEAN's initiatives have strengthened intra-regional relations and contributed to corporation and broader security across the Asia-Pacific.⁸⁸ By encouraging dialogue and collaborative problem-solving, ASEAN continues to talk about the complex security encounters of the region, maintaining resilient and cohesive security architecture.

b) Multilateral Security Programs

Multilateral security initiatives in the IPR aim to address intricate security challenges through cooperative frameworks. Key examples include the Six-Party Talks that focuses on North Korea's nuclear issues with limited success. ASEAN organization plays a critical role in IPR's security, providing mechanisms for conflict mediation and cooperation on challenges like transnational crime, environmental sustainability and counter-terrorism. ARF and the EAS are notable for promoting dialogue and CBMs. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) extends its influence through partnerships, addressing terrorism, separatism, and religious fundamentalism. These initiatives highlight the region's effort to foster stability and security through collective action and dialogue.

i. QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue)

The Quad is comprised of Australia, US, Japan and India. It has strengthened cooperation to support open and free Indo-Pacific amid Sino-US competition. Initially it was formed to aid tsunami victims in 2004 but then it lost momentum in 2007 due to political changes and concerns about provoking China. It revived in 2017, focusing on areas like vaccines, technology, climate change, and security. Regular meetings and initiatives have solidified this renewed collaboration. The Quad has also enhanced bilateral and multilateral ties, creating agreements and launching the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. Challenges remain particularly India's strategic autonomy and its stance on Russia, evident in its continued arms imports and participation in Russian military exercises.⁸⁹ Despite these differences, the Quad prioritizes practical cooperation where consensus exists, avoiding pressure on contentious issues to maintain unity. This pragmatic approach has enabled significant progress while recognizing the group's limitations.⁹⁰ The Quad's evolution reflects a strategic balance of shared values and practical collaboration in response to

⁸⁸ Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia : ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London ; New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2001).

⁸⁹ The White House, "Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: 'the Spirit of the Quad,'" The White House, March 12, 2021.

⁹⁰ Ibid 53

regional dynamics.

ii. AUKUS (Australia, UK, US Pact)

The concept of ‘AUKUS Plus’ gained attention after a 2023 UK Foreign Affairs Committee report suggested extending AUKUS cooperation to Japan and South Korea under ‘Pillar Two.’ This initiative focuses on advanced military technologies like AI, cyber warfare, hypersonics, and electronic warfare. While ‘Pillar One,’ which involves nuclear-powered submarines, remains exclusive to Australia, the UK, and the US, the potential for expanding ‘Pillar Two’ has sparked public debate.⁹¹ This proposal aligns with the UK’s Indo-Pacific ‘Tilt’ strategy, emphasizing regional support and a balanced power dynamic. However, significant shifts in Indo-Pacific relations are necessary for such cooperation to materialize, and several challenges must be addressed before any expansion can be seriously considered.

Despite interest in expanding AUKUS, consensus among current members is lacking. Australia, the coalition's initiator, has previously dismissed including Japan and South Korea, emphasizing the need for institutional consolidation first. US officials have expressed caution, stating that any new members must make substantive contributions. Meanwhile, existing US-Japan-South Korea trilateral cooperation already covers strategic areas similar to “Pillar Two”.⁹² Given these frameworks, there is no immediate need to merge AUKUS with trilateral cooperation. However, expanding AUKUS platform is seen as a strategic move in order counter PRC’s assertive behavior, with South Korea and Japan showing cautious interest.

iii. Regional Security Forums (e.g., Shangri-La dialogue)

Held annually in Singapore, Shangri-La Dialogue is a crucial multilateral security platform in the APR. Established in 2002, this forum provides a key platform for discussing defense and security issues among global leaders. By 2024, the dialogue had convened 21 times, reflecting its significance in regional security. The 2024 conference highlighted the forum’s role in managing geopolitical tensions. Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Defense (US) underscored importance of communication, stating that "dialogue is not a reward but a necessity". He stressed the U.S. willingness to a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" and highlighted the role of alliances in countering PRC’s expanding influence.⁹³

On the other hand, Chinese Defense Minister Admiral Dong Jun criticized U.S. policies, arguing that China would not accept "hegemony and power politics" in APR. Dong accused US of

⁹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan-Australia-India-U.S.(Quad) Leaders’ Video Conference,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, March 4, 2022.

⁹² The White House, “Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS,” The White House, March 13, 2023,

⁹³ US department of defense, “‘The New Convergence in the Indo-Pacific’: Remarks by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin,” U.S. Department of Defense, June 1, 2024.

destabilizing the region in SCS and around Taiwan through its actions. He warned that “any attempts to interfere with China’s core interests would be met with strong resistance”.⁹⁴ The Shangri-La Dialogue remains a vital mechanism for fostering stability and security in the Asia-Pacific, facilitating high-level discussions to address regional challenges and promote cooperation.

3.4 Strategic Responses to US-China Rivalry

Responding escalating US-China rivalry, Indo-Pacific nations are adjusting their security policies. Japan, Australia, and India are enhancing alliances, particularly through the Quad, to counter China's growing influence. They are increasing defense spending, upgrading military capabilities, and engaging in joint exercises with the US to support regional stability. Southeast Asian countries are employing a hedging strategy, balancing relations with both superpowers to gain security and economic benefits without siding explicitly with either. These policy adaptations demonstrate the region's efforts to navigate the complicated dynamics of US-China competition while protecting their own interests.

Hedging Strategies

China's hedging strategy amidst US-China rivalry is distinctive due to its rising power status within a unipolar International system. PRC's approach is driven by the unique challenges posed by the post-Cold War order unlike US. Soviet collapse ended bipolarity, elevating the United States to a solitary superpower, which reinforced its dominance through multilateral institutions and alliances promoting economic openness and democratic values. This network not only solidified US hegemony but also created dependencies among other states.⁹⁵ Rapid rise of China differs after the historical ascent of the US, occurring under a unipolar system with declining traditional Western powers and Russia. This rise has captured the strategic focus of the US, which aims to curb China's expanding influence. Furthermore, China's geographic positioning as a land-sea state surrounded by major powers like Russia, Japan, and India, along with several smaller nations, heightens its need to be vigilant about regional responses. Neighboring countries, perceiving China's growth as a threat, might form coalitions against it.⁹⁶

In response, China's hedging strategy combines reassurance and coercion. It employs varied tactics depending on the policies of the US and neighboring countries. This strategy enables China

⁹⁴ Ji-han Lim, “The 2024 Shangri-La Dialogue: Strategic Rivalries and Cooperative Futures | beyond the Horizon ISSG,” Behorizon.org, June 11, 2024

⁹⁵ institute for global corporation and understanding , “A Study of Hedging Behavior in International Relations - the Case of Asia-Pacific Countries (Chinese Edition: 国际关系中的对冲行为研究——以亚太国家为例)-Institute for Global Cooperation and Understanding, PKU,” Pku.edu.cn, 2023,

⁹⁶ G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West - Can the Liberal System Survive,” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 23 (2008): 23,.

to address the strategic containment efforts of the US while managing potential balancing actions from regional states.⁹⁷ By navigating between competition and cooperation, China aims to sustain its rise and mitigate the pressures from both the global hegemon and its neighbors. Table below is describing china’s strategic reactions.

Table 3: Strategic combinations in china’s hedging

Peripheries reaction to China	The hegemon strategy towards China		
	Containment	Congagement	Accomodation
Balancing	Competition-oriented Coercive-oriented	Half-measure Coercive-oriented	Coorporation- oriented Coercive-oriented
Hedging	Competition-oriented Half-measure	Half-measure Half-measure	Corporation-oriented Half-measure
Reconciling	Competition-oriented Reassurance-oriented	Half-measure Reassurance-oriented	Coorporation- oriented Reassurance- oriented

Bandwagoning vs. Balancing

Southeast Asia's response to the US-China rivalry involves a delicate balance between bandwagoning and balancing strategies. Owing to historical experiences and geographical proximity, many Southeast Asian countries harbor fears of Chinese dominance. These fears are rooted in the presence of wealthy ethnic Chinese communities in the region, China's sheer size and long history. Bandwagoning refers to aligning with a stronger power to gain benefits and security.⁹⁸ This is evident in how Southeast Asian countries engage economically with PRC. Substantial increase in trade between Southeast Asia and China and the foundation of the Sino-ASEAN free trade area are examples of this approach. These countries hope to secure economic advantages and stability through cooperation with PRC.

In contrast, balancing involves countering influence of a dominant state by aligning with other

⁹⁷ Xuefeng Sun, "Why Does China Reassure South-East Asia?," *Pacific Focus* 24, no. 3 (December 2009): 298–316,.

⁹⁸ DENNY ROY, "Southeast Asia and China: Balancing or Bandwagoning?," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 27, no. 2 (2005): 305–22.

strong nations. Southeast Asian countries employ a "soft balancing" strategy by strengthening relationships with major powers such as the Japan, India and United States. This includes participating in multilateral defense agreements and encouraging presence of US military forces in the region like the Five Power defense Arrangements. These measures aim to mitigate the potential threat posed by China's growing power.⁹⁹ Study reveals that Southeast Asian countries navigate the US-China rivalry by adopting a dual strategy. They seek economic benefits through bandwagoning with China while simultaneously balancing against China's influence by fostering ties with other major powers.¹⁰⁰ This approach helps them maintain regional autonomy and security amidst the complex dynamics of great power competition.

3.5 Case Study: Taiwan Strait Tension

Taiwan holds strategic significance for both the US and China due to its location near SCS and Taiwan Strait, key global shipping routes linking Europe and Middle east with Northeast Asia. Control over Taiwan would impact global trade and economics. For the US, Taiwan is a "critical node" in the first island chain, essential for limiting the deployment of the PLA in the western Pacific. For PRC, Taiwan's reunification is integral to its goal of "national rejuvenation," as part of a historical and political narrative essential to the Communist Party's legitimacy. The US keeps a policy of "strategic ambiguity," recognizing Beijing's position without endorsing it, and supports Taiwan's self-defense and participation in international organizations.¹⁰¹ Geographical location of Taiwan is represented below on map.

⁹⁹ US department of state, "Keynote Remarks for China's Military Modernization: Implications for Regional Security Track 1.5 Dialogue," United States Department of State, June 28, 2023,.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid 72

¹⁰¹ Jack Lau, "Why Does Taiwan Matter so Much to Both Mainland China and the US?," South China Morning Post, January 8, 2024,

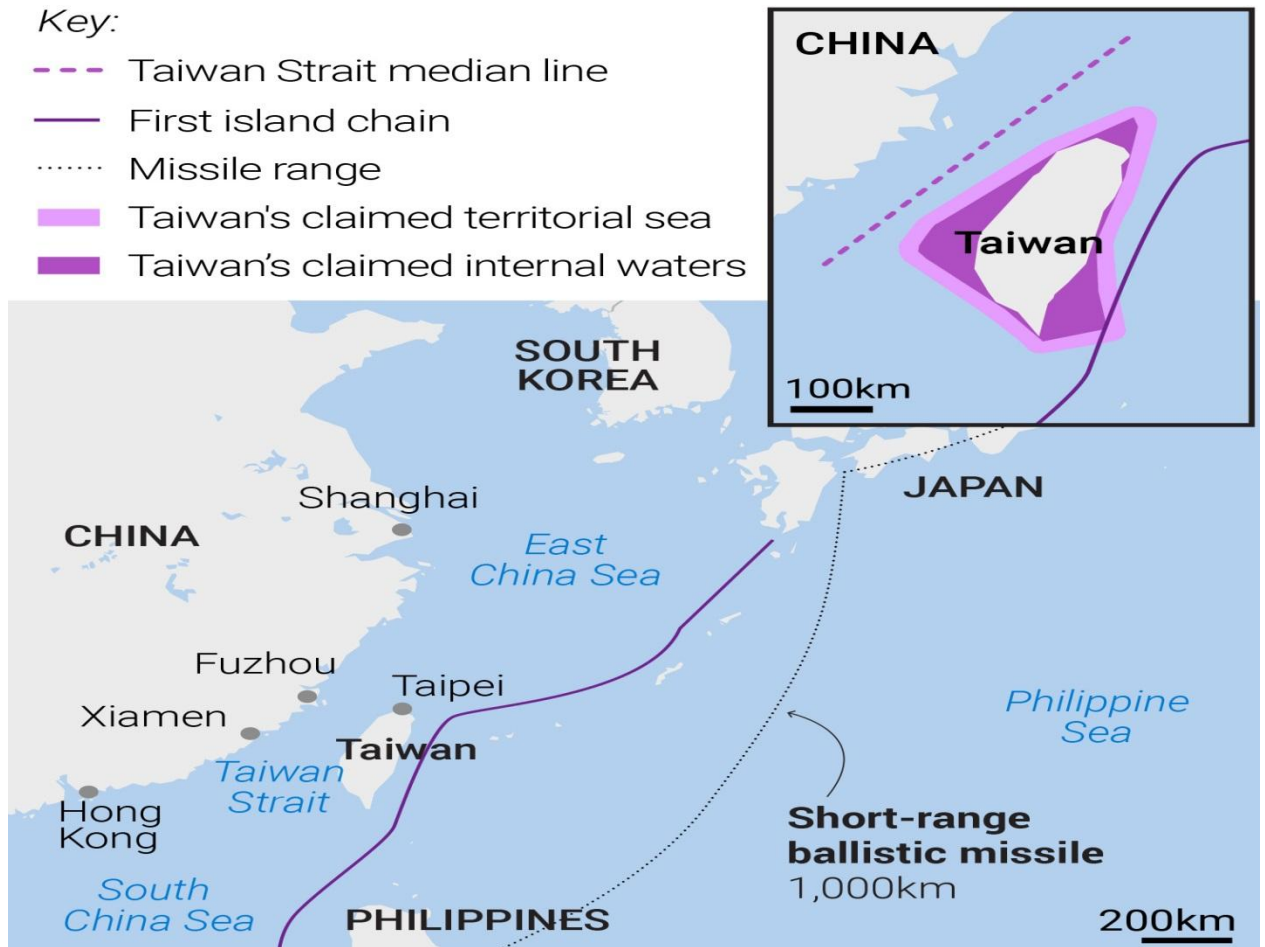


Figure 7 : Taiwan¹⁰²

In reaction to rising tensions due Sino-US rivalry across the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan has adjusted its security policies significantly. Facing a growing military threat from China, Taiwan has ramped up its defense capabilities by increasing its defense budget. This boost in funding allows Taiwan to modernize its military equipment, enhance its cyber defense systems, and ensure its armed forces are always ready. Taiwan has also focused on asymmetric warfare, which involves strategies and technologies that can effectively counter a larger and more powerful adversary.¹⁰³ This includes acquiring advanced missile systems and strengthening its naval and air defenses to guard against potential Chinese aggression.

Additionally, Taiwan has deepened its security connections with its main ally - US. This partnership includes regular purchases of modern and advanced military equipment from the US, such as fighter jets, missile defense systems, and naval vessels, all aimed at deterring China. Joint military exercises with US forces further enhance cooperation and demonstrate a strong, unified

¹⁰² SCMP

¹⁰³ Andrew wagner, "Innovating Strategic Ambiguity: Empowering Taiwan's Defense amid a Persistent Threat From," *Air University (AU)*, July 31, 2023,.

stance against threats.¹⁰⁴ On the diplomatic front, Taiwan has worked to build international support by fostering relationships with countries that share its values and by participating in international organizations, despite opposition from Beijing. These diplomatic efforts are crucial for gaining global backing for Taiwan's security and sovereignty.¹⁰⁵ Overall, Taiwan's security policy adaptations are aimed at bolstering its defense and maintaining regional stability amidst the growing US-China tensions.

3.6 Implications for regional Stability

The security policy adjustments made by Indo-Pacific nations in response to the US-China competition have profound implications for regional stability. As these countries enhance their military capabilities and form new strategic alliances, they contribute to a shifting power balance that affects the entire region. Nations such as Taiwan are increasing their defense budgets and modernizing their armed forces in response to China's growing influence.¹⁰⁶ This military buildup often leads to heightened tensions and could spark an arms race, destabilizing the region as countries attempt to counterweight China's expanding power.

Strategic partnerships with the US are also reshaping regional dynamics. Countries like Japan, South Korea, and Australia are engaging in joint military exercises and strengthening their security ties with the US to enhance their defense capabilities. These alliances can promote stability by creating a united front against potential threats. However, they might also provoke China, which may view these moves as efforts to encircle and limit its influence. This reaction could lead to increased military tensions and complicate efforts to maintain peace in the region. Furthermore, Indo-Pacific nations are actively seeking international support and participating in global forums to build a rules-based order and reduce risks from great power rivalries. While these diplomatic efforts aim to secure stability and international backing, they often face opposition from China.¹⁰⁷ The ongoing balance between strengthening defenses, forming alliances, and pursuing diplomatic engagement will critically influence regional stability, with outcomes ranging from cooperative to contentious. This Fig: 8 explain implications for regional stability.

¹⁰⁴ Michael S. Chase, "The United States Security Partnership with Taiwan," Brookings, 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Shashank Mattoo and Sitara Sirinivas, "Taiwan's Battle for Diplomatic Space," orfonline.org, September 22, 2022

¹⁰⁶ Ibid 75

¹⁰⁷ Ibid 73



Figure 8: A flow sheet diagram briefly explaining implications for regional stability

In conclusion, the study tells that the security policies throughout the Indo-Pacific region are particularly influenced by the competition between the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China. Currently, countries like Japan, Australia and the countries of South East Asia are flexibly adjusting the budget spending for defense purposes and are forming tactical

partnerships. This reorientation has been perceived as measure to offset intrusions to China and sustain stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Such is the impact of the bipolarity between the USA and China; defense spending, enhanced military technology, and as well, strategic alliances and more. These countries endeavored to manage the rising power of China, while protecting their national security and trying to maintain a relative balance of power and regional order in the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, the security and political architecture of the Indo-Pacific is in the middle of a subtle and calculated realignment along this vital geopolitical axis.

Chapter 4

DIPLOMATIC SHIFTS IN INDO-PACIFIC REGION UNDER SINO-US RIVALRY

4.1 Introduction

The IO and the Pacific Ocean (PO) have long been considered separate geographical entities. However, with the advent of the era of great biogeographic, ethnographic and navigation studies began to merge Indian and Pacific Ocean into a unified marine ecosystem. Over time, geopolitical discourse transformed this bio-geographical region into a geostrategic one. At the beginning of 21st century, the strategic importance of this confluence has led to the emergence of the term "Indo-Pacific," drawing significant attention from academic and strategic circles. Shinzo Abe - the late Prime Minister of Japan is often credited with popularizing the idea, calling for a "broader Asia" spanning the Indian and Pacific Oceans in a 2007 speech.¹⁰⁸ Although he did not explicitly mention "Indo-Pacific," his vision laid the groundwork for the Indo-Pacific strategy of US.

During the APEC Summit in Vietnam in 2017, Donald Trump- then US President formally introduced the concept of a "free and open Indo-Pacific." This was followed by National Security Strategy 2017, which defined the Indo-Pacific as "the region stretching from India's west coast to the U.S. Pacific shores".¹⁰⁹ The Trump administration further cemented this strategy with the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report 2019, which outlined objectives of US through preparedness, partnerships, and regional networking. This strategy was inherited and refined by the Biden administration, which emphasized comprehensive regional engagement.

The implementation of Indo-Pacific strategy of US has intensified super power competition, particularly amid PRC and US. Strategy of US towards China that is marked by containment and confrontation identified China as its foremost competitor.¹¹⁰ The Indo-Pacific Command's renaming in 2018 and subsequent strategic documents underscored the US view of China as a "revisionist power seeking regional hegemony". Biden administration continued this approach, identifying China as a significant challenger in National Security Strategy, 2022. Regional hotspot issues, including Taiwan Strait, SCS and on Korean Peninsula, have exacerbated security tensions.

¹⁰⁸ Shinzo Abe, "MOFA: Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, at the Parliament of the Republic of India 'Confluence of the Two Seas' (August 22, 2007)," www.mofa.go.jp, 2007,.

¹⁰⁹ The White House. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, DC: The White House, December 2017.

¹¹⁰ Farhan Hanif Siddiqi, "US Indo-Pacific Strategy and Pakistan's Foreign Policy: The Hedging Option," *Strategic Studies* 42, no. 1 (2022): 1–16

Traditional security threats, alongside rising nontraditional threats, pose significant challenges to the region.¹¹¹ The advancement of the Indo-Pacific strategy of US and the growing Sino-US rivalry has profound implications for security dynamics and diplomatic relations in the IPR.

4.2 Economic Impacts on Diplomatic Relations

The roles of economics and diplomacy are difficult to separate in the now interlinked political framework of the world. Economic relations define the degree of entanglement that normally dictates diplomatic relations between or among countries. The nature of these economic interests in turn can mean that they have adversarial relationships or that they can secure mutual benefits.

Commerce occupies the honorable place in the sphere of diplomatic relations. The economic consequences of two countries' trade are seen to bear a positive and very close relationship when the two countries trade in large volumes. It raises symbiotic trade relations and a mutual desire to uphold stability, as the disruptions can harm both. For example, the Daily Trading Network of the European Union has not only developed unity and cooperation but also stimulated economies of the member countries, and therefore social harmony and economic balance in Europe.¹¹²

Diplomatic relations can be affected by Investment, of which FDI was found to play a very key role. In most cases, when one country invests in another country it feels the need to protect its investment and this means that it will have an interest in economic or political stability of the host country. This commonly creates better diplomatic relations since the investing country may wish to dictate policies that safeguard the investment. A good example is present day China investments in Africa, Chinese economic presence has boosted diplomatic ties; this is due to the need to protect the investments as well as ensure access to critical resources.¹¹³

Despite this, economic features are often intertwined with diplomacy, and very often the two, can be in conflict. Economic differences mean different levels of power and influence and trade imbalances, as well as beliefs regarding the fairness of trading partners are in disagreement can lead to tensions in diplomatic relations. The details of the Sino-US trade relationship make an illustration of how economic rivalry translates to diplomacy¹¹⁴. Some of these variables include tariff wars, intellectual property rights, and market access; not only have these challenges affected global trading but they also slowed diplomatic relations between two of the biggest economies in the world.

¹¹¹ The White House, "The White House," The White House (The White House, 2022),

¹¹² Eurostat, "EU Trade in Goods with China: Less Deficit in 2023 - Eurostat," ec.europa.eu, March 4, 2024,

¹¹³ Mathieu Duchâtel, "Critical Infrastructure and Power Games in China-EU Relations," TheDiplomat.com (The Diplomat, June 27, 2024),

¹¹⁴ Alexis Crow and Sir Robin Niblett, "How US-China Relationship Is Impacting the Global Trade," World Economic Forum, January 5, 2024,

For period from 2014 to 2024, trade balance between the USA and China serves as one of the tangible signs of the shift in the economic competition. The trade balance as understood as the difference between exporting and importing between two countries has been a shuttle on this period. The mutual trade between PRC and US in 2014 had US in the negative side importing more goods and services that it exported to China. This deficit keeps on increasing in following years and raise in the higher position up to 2018. The increasing trade gap agitated and disrupted relations or engaged, and ended in the US putting levies on Chinese goods, signifying the start of the trade war.¹¹⁵ It later intensified between the period of 2018 and 2019 and disrupted the trade balance of the two countries. Trade between US and China, under US tariffs on Chinese products and China's reciprocated tariffs bore fruits in that the exports between both countries decreased. Towards the year 2020, there was a slight change of the trade balance where the deficits were declining and were minimized as both countries worked on minimizing the economic effects of their existing disputes. Nevertheless, such actions kept the deficit high indicating the level of trade integration amid PRC and US. In the years leading to 2020, the trade balance continued to rise and fall due to factors such as; COVID-19 which all affected the countries trade balance, supply chain disruptions and changes in the global trade. As it arrived at 2024, the trade deficit with China was still a touch point for the US, though through trade talks and attempts to reduce it through tariffs was partially successful.¹¹⁶ This continuous trade deficit has maintained on some extent continue to test diplomatic relations through fostering this larger geopolitical structure that affects regional economic bodies such as APEC and ASEAN. Graphical representation of trade balance between US and china is given below

¹¹⁵ Da Zhigang, "Amid COVID-19, Negative Factors Dictate Japan's Attitude toward China - Global Times," www.globaltimes.cn, May 2020,.

¹¹⁶ Lawrence J Lau, *The China-U.S. Trade War and Future Economic Relations* (Hong Kong Chinese University Press, 2019).

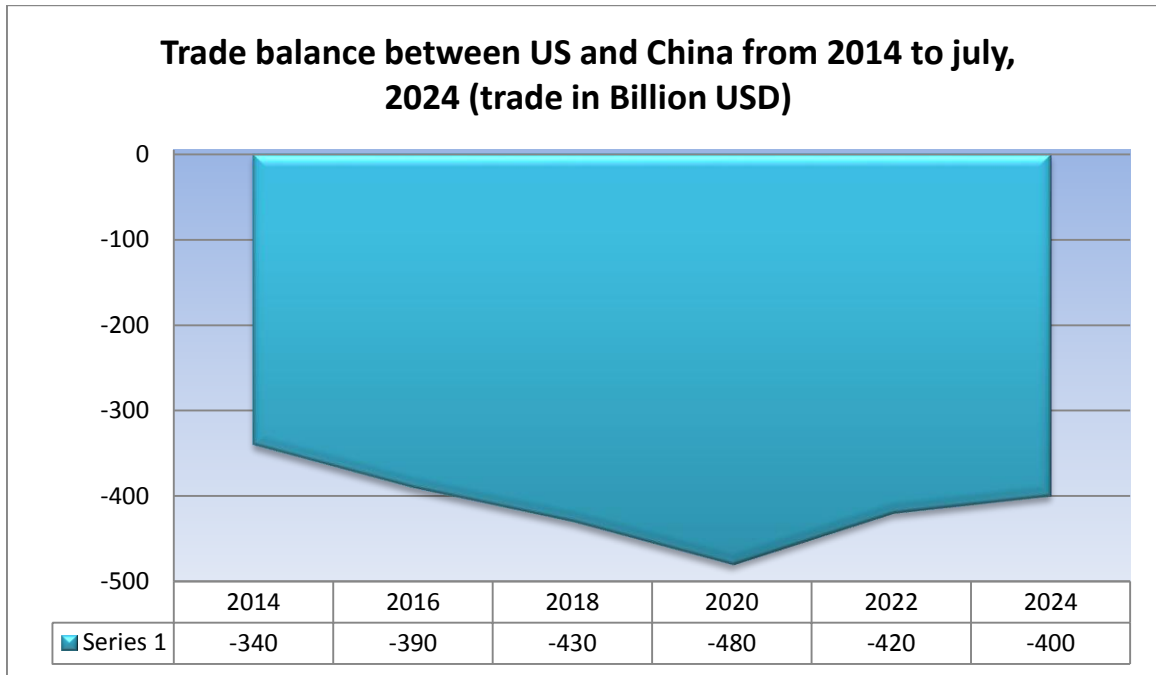


Figure 9: Sino-US trade balance

Besides, trade and investment can be viewed as tools of foreign policy. Sanctions, investment inflows and outflows, and trade policies can therefore be used by nations to exert pressure on other countries and in the process attain foreign policy goals. It has been found out that US has frequently relied upon economic sanctions as a tool of pressures such as applied on nations like North Korea and Iran with an intention to modify policies in the trajectory of these countries. Similarly the BRI can be seen in the same light because China seeks to foster economic diplomacy with Europe, Asia and Africa by investing in the infrastructure there.

However, Trade and investment are not only economic processes, but they are also processes, which play a vital role in diplomatic relationships. In terms of trading and investment partners the webs of cooperation can be generated hence a mutual understanding and corporation but as research has shown they also result in competition that may lead to conflict.¹¹⁷ By making these economic relations part of international relations, their character defines the directions of diplomatic interaction. The premise that links economic liberty and diplomacy shall continue to be integral drivers in formulating the coming international political economy given the progressive nature of the global economy.¹¹⁸ Emergency aid and Infrastructure creation are also strong-signal issues in the field of international relations because they are in part ‘Development aid as ‘development catalysts’ and also ‘development instruments’, as well as serving as a kind of lever

¹¹⁷ Global Affairs, “Are Economic Sanctions Effective Foreign Policy Tools?,” Tufts Now, July 8, 2024,.

¹¹⁸ The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), “The New Sanctions Regime against North Korea and Its Implications for U.S. Policy | the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR),” Nbr.org, 2017,

in diplomacy. They are rationally used by the nations in order to put pressure on other countries, advance their own foreign policies and consolidate the friendly states. When great powers battle for clout in crucial parts of the planet then diplomacy and the economic help intersect.

China's BRI is an example of the goal-to-goal interaction as a modern phenomenon that has become widespread all over the world. Some of the major infrastructure projects are in Asia, Africa, and Europe where China has pumped billions of dollars through this program. These tend to be executed through terms and condition that put Beijing's strategic interests in sync with the policies of the recipient countries. It is for this reason that the effects of such projects are not only confined in economic development but also provides a channel through which China can guarantee diplomatic support and political allegiance.¹¹⁹ Reception countries of BRI projects are more likely to share China's foreign policy objectives and back it in international organizations including the position on sovereignty in the South China Sea. Map of BRI countries is given below

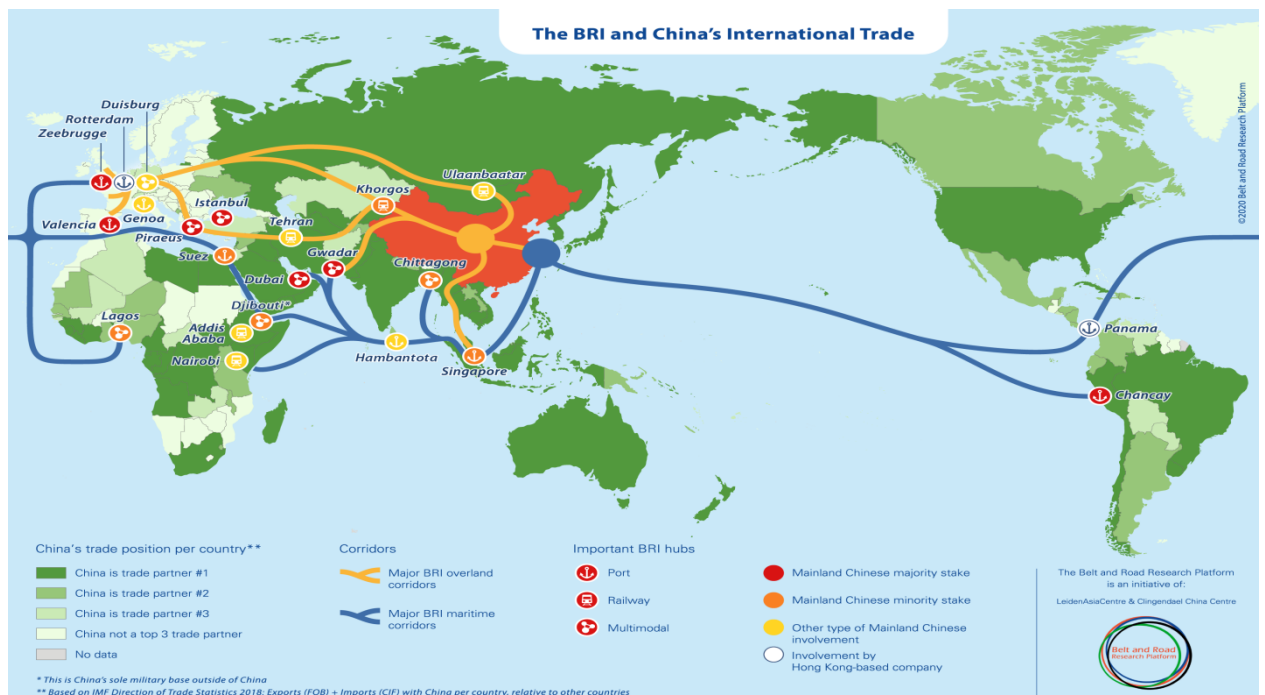


Figure 10: New map of belt and road initiative

On the other hand, countries such as the United States of America and other allied nations have also learnt that development assistance and construction plays a key role in diplomacy. Programs such as the Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network (ITAN) and the Blue Dot Network have been introduced to provide development prospects and non-traditional funding sources to the nations requiring them.¹²⁰ These initiatives are to introduce measures of environmental

¹¹⁹ Michael Galant, "US Sanctions Policy: Frequently Asked Questions," Center for Economic and Policy Research, May 10, 2024,

¹²⁰ Robert Bociaga, "China's Oil Gambit in Africa's Conflict Zones," thediplomat.com, July 31, 2023.

responsibility, provide clarity to markets, and work against those, who demonstratively move towards Chinese models of governance. Thus, the U. S. wants deeper cooperation with its partners and to persuade countries to implement measures acceptable for the West in the framework of these programs. The effect of all these development initiatives as far as diplomacy is concerned is evident in Southeast Asian region. Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines and other countries in this region have strikingly managed to balance between the powers of United States and China. These nations continue to allow infrastructure investments from these powers while at the same time have been able to record growth in their economy, all the while balancing their relation with the super powers. This has subsequently led to a more complex diplomatic sextant whereby the country has cobbled economic relations with China as well as the U. S. For example, when China invests in railways, energy facilities and ports in African countries, there is creation of economic relations that turns to political loyalty. These states get benefits from the Chinese investments and infrastructure and as a result support Chinese stance on the global issues and affairs making the global influence of China greater.¹²¹

These relations establish that diplomacy in the African region is influenced by the development aid in form and the development of infrastructure. These tools are more employed to gain political support, garner and forge partnerships and champion key agenda because nations struggle for power and influence.¹²² The contest for power and sensing antagonism especially in the ASEAN and African geopolitical regions distinguishes the dynamism that is associated with economy aid diplomacy in today's diplomacy. The continuity of this trend will only strengthen the link between the economic development and diplomatic stances as it will shape the relations between the countries in the future.

The economic rivalry between the two countries is also mainly at play in determining diplomatic interactions in organizations that have economic cooperation as their objectives for instance the APEC or the ASEAN with traditional objectives of integrating and enhancing cooperation among countries in the South East Asia region, and is now struggling with added pressure from both giants. Member states are being pulled towards China or the U. S. to set up this competition undermines the unity of ASEAN and the organization's neutrality.¹²³ Such pressures are still diminishing the capacity of ASEAN in realizing its mission of supporting the development of stability and economy in the region since it can contribute to the split within ASEAN. Another

¹²¹ Dan Steinbock, "U.S.-China Trade War and Its Global Impacts," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 04, no. 04 (January 2018): 515–42.

¹²² Ibid 115

¹²³ Ann Marie Murphy, "Southeast Asia amidst US-China Economic Competition | Perryworldhouse," global.upenn.edu, June 12, 2023,

important regional platform that is APEC is also restrained by the rivalry between the US and China. Since its objective is to encourage investment, and the freeing up of, and creates linkages for trade in the Asia-Pacific, the agenda of APEC is increasingly being shaped by the diametrically opposed economic approaches of the two powers.¹²⁴ In such schemes as the “Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, the US hence wants to set new trading regimes that more often than not are targeted at drawing a restrictive ring around Beijing’s sphere of influence in the region. On the one hand, China fosters such projects as BRI and RCEP, the result of which is only the strengthening of its economic position and the response to the actions of the United States.

The implications of this competition are that these organizations are transformed in terms of dynamics because they turn into forums of geopolitical struggles. It has profound effect on diplomacy as member states are drawn as indirect actors of both powers’ interests. This ever-evolving situation does not make easy the attempts at establishing regional economic cooperation and the future interaction of these organizations with the US and China becomes unpredictable due to the strategic realization of economic integration to geopolitical goals in the Indo-Pacific.

4.3 Security Impacts on Diplomatic Relations

China has also concentrated much investment on security and defense matters but the US remains to have more security and defense influence in the IPR. This influence is supplemented by the American military bases and good working relations with cooperating partners such as South Korea, Australia and Japan. These alignments have served to help to contain China’s military expansions, more especially in the SCS.¹²⁵ Japan is still significant ally for the US in the APR due to the perceived increasing PRC’s assertiveness in the military domain and conventional dangers. Chinese grey zone engagements, including flying and sailing through the JIDF-IZ and the Senkaku Islands have increased friction. In turn, Japan has actively participated with ASEAN for the principle of an open and free Indo-Pacific and significantly deepen defense cooperation with the US.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, 51% of the Japanese population expresses confidence that the US would defend Japan in a war with China, despite the existence of an extremely solid defense treaty with the US.

Another valuable partner in the structure of the US allies is Australia, though it is not threatened by a military confrontation with China. Nonetheless, activities like the military drills in SCS and

¹²⁴ Alice Ba, “In Southeast Asia, U.S.-China Competition Is More than a Two-Player Game,” United States Institute of Peace, September 6, 2023

¹²⁵ Weixing Hu, “The United States, China, and the Indo-Pacific Strategy: The Rise and Return of Strategic Competition,” *China Review* 20, no. 3 (2020): 127–42.

¹²⁶ David Shambaugh, “U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia: Power Shift or Peaceful Coexistence?,” Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2018,

construction of artificial islands are seen as aggressive intention of Beijing. A majority of Australians have said that Australia's government should be more aggressive in how it responds to China's military buildup and stand ready to risk trade relations with Beijing for it. Also, the options of PRC having a military base in the Pacific Island nations pose a lot of concern in many Australians.¹²⁷ Thus, South Korea which hosts the troops enjoys a formidable defense wall that denies threats by North Korea and China. Security organizations, American bases and hi technologies, safe guards of South Korea and BOP on Korean peninsula prevent PRC's dominance in Asia.

Chinese military actions particularly in the SCS region have attracted the concern of different counts in IPR. China's reclamation of some features and building of military facilities are seen as efforts to assert control on overseas presence that undermines status quo and over vital sea lines of communication.¹²⁸ In return Vietnam and other countries that are members of ASEAN have beefed up security cooperation with the US. The number of joint military exercises between these nations highlights Americas military might in the region and US. This is also evident from the Australian Lowy Institute index of global military capabilities where the U. S. is ranked way ahead of China and although the Chinese are pursuing modernization of their military and present a growing challenge to the US.

Among the most notable modern security regimes in the APR is the QUAD that took on a more profound importance due to the escalating the American –Chinese rivalry.¹²⁹ After its establishment, the Quad has emerged as a crucial forum for both political, economic as well as security cooperation between these four democracies and its chief objective has been to respond to PRC's rising influence in the region. Fig 11 gives geographical location of Quad

¹²⁷ Heung-Kyu Kim, "South Korea's Strategic Dilemma amid US-China Competition • Stimson Center," Stimson Center, February 28, 2022.

¹²⁸ Wilborn, Thomas L. Dr., "International Politics in Northeast Asia: The China-Japan-United States Strategic Triangle" (1996). Monographs, Books, and Publications. 876.

¹²⁹ Michael Wesley, "The Impact of China on the Australia-US Alliance," Pursuit, February 2, 2022.

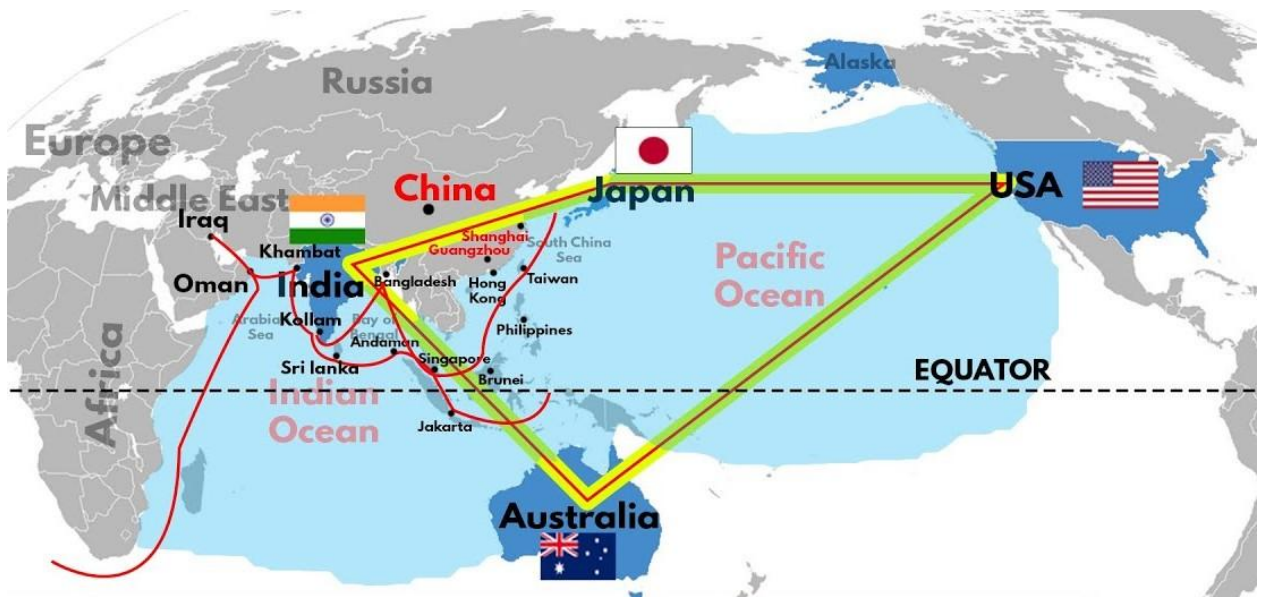


Figure 11: QUAD and its participant countries

Speaking at the Quad’s high level, the goals of the cooperation include ensuring an open and free and inclusive IPR with specific reference to Southeast Asia. QUAD activities in the U.S are coordinated through the NSC and D.O.D; The U.S consults with members of Quad bi- or trilaterally to discuss compelling politico-Strategic concerns.¹³⁰ Such are traditional and innovative multilateral communications as trilateral discussions of the Australia, Japan and USA or the USA, Japan and India where the issues of naval security, counter terrorism, and the relief of natural disasters are discussed. The State Department of US and D.O.D use 2+2 format which involves using of diplomacy and defense with Australia, Japan and India to further and enhance defense relations and cooperation.¹³¹

Ambitious as it is, the Quad has not been very successful in providing a smooth cooperation structure among all the members. Challenges that relate to planning and budgeting include uncertainty of cycles that are involved in planning and budgeting, wrong pairing of institutions, and multiple offices in the U.S that are involved in joint planning. On the resource aspect the US stands out to offer much information on probable interactions and has been less successful in harmonizing different steps to perform synergistically. Further, a majority of the ministry offices of the U. S. government still give emphasis on bilateral relations while the multilateral relations needed in collaboration for a common cause in third countries are often sidelined.

The strategic affiliations of China such as with Pakistan and Cambodia bring in some uncertainty to the security condition in the IPR. They allow Southeast Asia – averse to the QUAD’s desire for

¹³⁰ Anonymous, “Quad Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific: Regional Security Challenges and Prospects for Greater Coordination | the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR),” Nbr.org, 2017,

¹³¹ Tanvi Madan, “The Quad as a Security Actor,” *Asia Policy* 29, no. 4 (October 2022): 49–56,

stability and PRC to expand its footprint in South. An example of this is Pakistan's devotion to China which gives Beijing tactical influence in South Asia; similarly, Cambodia's support of China enhances Beijing's say in South East Asia.¹³² All these indicate that the Quad ensure that the Indo-Pacific remains a region of peace, stability, prosperity and freedom and has a balanced the power of China. Nevertheless, the Quad's credibility of dealing with security threats in the region is hampered by Sino-US rivalry. The ARF and EAS are the major structures of regional security; however, the two superpowers have made this cooperation ineffective.¹³³ The ARF, designed to foster a positive discussion of security and political affairs, has one major problem: It is very difficult to come to a consensus because the members of the forum are usually sharply divided in their sympathies amid the PRC and US. This division has definitely made this forum a much less effective instrument of regional stabilization.

Likewise, the EAS as a mechanism, allocating East Asian leaders and international actors to negotiate strategic issues, has problems in performing as the security dialogue forum. The Sino-US rivalry has caused factions within ASEAN regarding the vision of what kind of Indo-Pacific the two powers want and their attitudes toward the liberal, rules-based order, and international human rights.¹³⁴

Despite the continuation of the American dominance in security and military realm in the domain of the IPR, the character of security in the region has been much defined by an emergent bipolar rivalry between the two large powers: the PRC and US. The ARF, EAS and QUAD are instrumental in addressing the multifaceted challenges to maintain stability in IPR, however, independent dynamics of the Sino-US relation and broader changes in the strategic environment decrease its efficiency. With the increasing growth of PRC's military buildup and expanding strategic alliances, there is an increasing necessity for intensification of coordination among the countries of the IPR and in the first instance QUAD members to secure the future of the region open and free.

4.4 Political and Diplomatic Impacts

This means that the Anglo-Chinese bipolar conflict has played the most primordial role in making the character of regional policies and governance in the IPR. This rivalry is expressed in various forms, as both the powers strive to regulate the internal policies of the countries of the region.

¹³² Sigfrido Burgos and Sophal Ear, "China's Strategic Interests in Cambodia: Influence and Resources," *Asian Survey* 50, no. 3 (May 2010): 615–39,

¹³³ Jie Zhang, "Rebuilding Strategic Autonomy: ASEAN's Response to US–China Strategic Competition," *China International Strategy Review* 5, no. 1-17 (April 30, 2023),

¹³⁴ Julio S. Amador, "Asia Pacific Regional Security Environment and Security Architecture: Choices and Prospects," *SSRN Electronic Journal* 12, no. 4 (2010),

Self-interests through economic muscle supported by infrastructural- connectivity projects such as the BRI have seen China easily align several South-East Asian countries developmental agendas. The recent political course of such states as Cambodia, Laos and Malaysia reflects their growing orientation on China, including the incorporation of Chinese infrastructural initiatives into their own state programs.¹³⁵ This is done usually at the antagonist of the western aligned policies, which underlines the power China has over these nations. Meanwhile, U.S. that also understands the significance of the Indo-Pacific has also used military force and sanctions in order to check China¹³⁶. In the countries like the Vietnam and Philippines, the US made an attempt to influence their foreign policies more to fit into their concept of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” through defense cooperation and economic partnership through International Organizations such as IPEF introduced during the Biden administration stands as a strategic tactic that offers these countries a foil to Chinese model of economic partnership and push the more conventional western model of economy among the partner countries.

Partner countries have also devoted a lot of efforts in soft power and public diplomacy to gain influence in the region.¹³⁷ China has a soft power policy that includes cultural interchanges, the opening of the Confucius Institutes, and the production of texts that tell a positive and constructive Chinese story. This is participated by China’s State controlled media that desires to orient the views in support of Chinese policies. On the other hand, among other countries, US has always encouraged democratization and human right through public diplomacy. Subsequently, the educational exchange programs such as YSEALI and Fulbright Programs foster such pro-American perception among youthful leaders in the Southeast Asia.¹³⁸ Furthermore, U.S., media like VOA, contribute vitally in the battle against narratives from China, especially in their conceptualization of the Indo-Pacific as forward looking, liberal and rule based.

The color and form of the bilateral relations within the IPR have to some extent been dictated by the over-arching competition between PRC and US. As for the global context, one can mention the way the geopolitical rivalry has affected Sino-India relations. The clash occurred in 2020 in Galwan Valley changed the situation and made India increase the level of its cooperation with the US. This partnership has been experienced in terms of enhancing defense relation, selling of arms, and sharing of intelligence which has further enhanced the relations between New Delhi and

¹³⁵ Xue Gong, “The Belt & Road Initiative and China’s Influence in Southeast Asia,” *The Pacific Review* 32, no. 4 (November 14, 2019): 1–31,

¹³⁶ *Ibid* 53

¹³⁷ Chiara, “Chinese Soft Power and an Emerging Global Influence - Stratheia,” *Stratheia*, January 14, 2024,.

¹³⁸ Wen Zha, “Southeast Asia amid Sino-US Competition: Power Shift and Regional Order Transition,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 16, no. 2 (May 16, 2023): 241–61,.

Washington.¹³⁹ Therefore, in an effort to offset this transition, China has tried to strengthen ties with Pakistan and conduct military operations at the LOC. This appreciable tactical reorganization more aptly captures India's new assessment of China as an aspirant competitor rather than an ally. Like in the case of US, Japan's relations with PRC have also been shaped by rivalry with China. As China grows more assertive, Japan has more often and more systematically moved its defense policy in line with the U. S. In the present tenure of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Japan has increased defense budgets and Japan's Self-Defense Forces have improved their abilities to address Chinese activities near the Senkaku Islands.¹⁴⁰ This shift has been well underpinned by the Japan-US security alliance which involve conducting of military exercise as well as improving on operational compatibility. China has embarked on diplomatic and economic diplomacy to penetrate into Japan, these have only bore limited fruits for the change of strategic partnership with the US.

The Sino-Australia relationship has become rather hostile in the last couple of years mainly informed by the escalating US-China tussle. Australia has become more aligned to the US especially after the creation of AUKUS that includes United Kingdom. There is a perceptive view that this trilateral security partnership is aimed at countering China's hegemonism in the Indo-Pacific especially in relation to involvement of Australia in the South Pacific¹⁴¹. Consequently, PRC has targeted and put economic embargo on some of Australia's exports and tried to diplomatically isolate Australia. Yet, Australia has reciprocated by expanding its cooperation with other power players of the region such as Japan and India, not to mention bolstering of its defense with American assistance. Such dynamics give a strong background to understanding the influence of Sino-US rivalry on the bilateral relations of other nations of the IPR.

This is best seen at the changes in diplomatic loyalties and alignment as a consequence of the Sino-US rivalry. Many countries in IPR, especially the Philippines and Vietnam have transformed from a stance of neutrality to a pro- American stance. Sometimes the reorientation is motivated by security issues, for instance, as an outcome of PRC's aggressive behavior within the SCS. These nations have tried to share their fiscal reliance on PRC with their security reliance on America tilting the diplomatic scale.¹⁴² On the other hand, Cambodia and Lao are perspectives of China due to their economic reliance by the Chinese investment and donations. This alignment is

¹³⁹ Japan center for international exchange, "East Asia Insights | Navigating China Relations and the US-Japan Alliance," JCIE, October 14, 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Hemal Shah, "The US-India-Japan Trilateral: Economic Foundation for a Grand Strategy," *The Diplomat*.com (The Diplomat, February 4, 2017),.

¹⁴¹ Camilla Tenna, "U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific | DIIS," www.diis.dk, April 27, 2020,

¹⁴² Prashanth Parameswaran, "Minilateralism, ASEAN Centrality and Indo-Pacific Institutional Flux amid Strategic Competition | Wilson Center," www.wilsoncenter.org, April 3, 2024,

manifest in their foreign policy postures, and as such, most of them have been supporting China in regional and international bodies. Still, these countries are guarded about relying too much on China, from time to time turning to other players in the region and US to have more options on the diplomatic table.

The significance of the competition between the US and China could not be overemphasized on the multilateral diplomacy and regional forums. ASEAN, APEC, and EAS are among the regional organizations which have been entangled in the emerging contest between PRC and US. Particularly ASEAN, which has been facing challenges of retaining the centrality amid this phenomenon¹⁴³. They are one of the major sources of discord within ASEAN as member states are divided into those who support China's territorial claims and those who do not. These two divisions have made it difficult for ASEAN to speak out in unity on important security questions, which has thereby reduced its capacities as a regional organization. In the same way, APEC and the EAS have not escaped the strategic rivalry between the PRC and US. The United States has been using these forums to lay stress on its conception of "Indo-Pacific as Free and Open", while China has been standing for a peaceful and collective way to progress which focuses on the non-interference in the internal affairs of the country and economic partnership.¹⁴⁴ This split in strategic approaches has resulted in the proliferation of regional platforms where member states are now gravitating towards either the PRC or US in a materialization of a true multilateralism system.

In light of the growing competition between PRC and US, most states of the IPR are balancing diplomatically. It works by approaching both powers in various fields without siding with them in the larger dynamic of great power rivalry. For instance, Singaporean government has continued to trade and invest with China, and simultaneously allowed the US to base troops and help to coordinate security efforts in the APR. Like Vietnam, Indonesia has tested military assistance with both the USA and China whilst advocating for ASEAN centrality and neutrality.¹⁴⁵ Yet, in the face of the emerging Sino-US rivalry in terms of competition, such diplomacy is proving to be rather challenging. Now the power struggle is increasingly dragging even the countries that have historically followed the policy of non-alignment – for instance, Malaysia and Thailand. Therefore, the countries are gradually turning more clearly to either PRC or US, which, in turn,

¹⁴³ Bonny Lin et al., "Regional Responses to U.S.-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific: Study Overview and Conclusions," *Www.rand.org* 1 (November 12, 2020),

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid* 134

¹⁴⁵ Association of South Asian Nations, "ASEAN-China Joint Statement on Strengthening Common and Sustainable Development," November 12, 2022.

causes a division in the region.

Therefore, the political and diplomatic effects of the competition between the USA and China in the Indo-Pacific region are vast and complex. Thus, both powers have attempted to make the domestic policies of the other nations of the region, relying on diplomacy in order to accomplish their own strategic goals and combination of military force. This has been a major factor that has been leading to changes in bilateral relations wherein countries that include, but are not limited to the likes of India, Japan and Australia, have shifted their alliance with the US due to assertiveness from China. Hyping superpowers conflict the regional cooperative forums such as ASEAN and APEC have been impaired with confictions between the U. S. and China canceling or causing difficulty for the organizations to effectively further the interests of a cooperation forum. For this reason, most of the nations of Indo-Pacific have diplomatically positioned themselves as “swing states” that aligned themselves with both PRC and US but seek to avoid getting entangled in the great power competition. However, international relations between the U. S. and China have been escalating in the recent past, limiting the room for such maneuvers thus escalating also regional polarization. This dynamic demonstrates the nature of the diplomatic and political relations in the IPR and challenges in facing countries in the middle of Sino-US rivalry.

In nutshell, the competition between China and the United States has shifted considerably in the diplomatic context within the countries of the Indo-Pacific region. The middle powers of the region are rather careful to cooperate with both superpowers and try to protect their national interests and avoid dangerous fields of the geopolitical games. This rivalry has made nations reconsider their alignment and thus had a web of relationships coupled with autonomy, especially due to assertiveness of both the US and China. These shifts of these nations also raise the question about the proper balance of how these states coordinate their economic relations with China’s growth while as the same time strengthening their security relations with the US and other allies. A changing state of affairs in the diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific is evidence of the region’s effectiveness in managing change and uncertainty resulting from the increasing brinkmanship between the US and China.

Chapter 5

KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The intensification of the conflict between the USA and China in the region of the Indo-Pacific has brought about certain consequences regarding the security laws and diplomatic affiliations of the states in this area. This rivalry, based on the protection of the vital interests of both superpowers requires the regional states to align their security policies as well as diplomatic stands to fit in the existing political landscape. The hypothesis that Sino-US competition is leading to more tensions in the Indo-Pacific region is evidenced by these changes in national strategies, militarization, and diplomatic obscure.

The first and one of the most important changes of the competition of the USA and China in the field of security policies in the Indo-Pacific region is the diversification of alignments and affiliations. For example, the Indonesian government has pursued a policy of hedging: developing a strong economic cooperation with China, on the one hand, and maintaining strategic partnership with the USA on the other. This hedging strategy helps Indonesia not to lose its sovereignty and at the same time not to be dependent on one power, which is typical for the whole South-East Asia. Likewise, Vietnam, which harboring historical animosity with China has looked to closer security ties with the United States while still maintaining economic relations with China. This twin process shows that the nature of security policies of states in the region is becoming more and more multi-layered as states attempt to secure as many strategic advantages as possible under present circumstances.

The Philippines offers the typical example of a state characterized by oscillating security policies which reflect the changes in its foreign allegiances. During Duterte presidency in Philippine, the political relations shifted more toward China to get more economic advantages but at the same time Philippines remain in military alliance with USA. This fluctuation between China and the U. S. established how political leadership in any country affected security policies and in turn worsened stability in the region. Australia's stance to BRI is that it has deepened its security guarantee to the United States, an illustration of how the threat that accompanies Chinese power makes countries enhance the long-standing partnership with America. Instead, Japan has collaborated closely with the United States on security, as well as on a long-term strategic approach to Asia that seeks to sustain the status quo, in the form of the FOIP policy. America's ally, Japan, plays in checking China's aggressive posturing primarily in the ECS and the SCS. This kind of alignment is a perfect manifestation of what Sino-U. S. competition is redefining

security strategies because more actors perceive the U. S. as an indispensable actor in managing the rise of China.

Laying building blocks of multilateral arrangements, for instance, the Quad is another way clear-line-of-sight stemming from Chinese assertiveness. The Quad which consists of the U.S, Japan, India, and Australia improves on the Defense cooperation and the four-nation vision for a free Indo-Pacific region. This is a measure of how the rivalry between these two superpowers is provoking new security structures and the militarization of the whole region. The competition is not limited to the bilateral relationship but cuts across the region's diplomacy of the Indo-Pacific space. The economic and diplomatic balancing seen through ASEAN countries, and particularly Singapore and Malaysia's ability to maintain relations with both superpowers but cannot afford to offend either, shows the strategic method of hedging but on the long-term creates instability.

The move to China by the Philippines under Duterte's administration while remaining an important ally of a U. S. demonstrates the fluidity of diplomacy in the South China Sea region. In a similar manner, Australia, Japan, and India gradual rapprochement to the U. S are indicators of a shift within the region to more of countering China. This positioning is visible in multilateral forums where states have started speaking about the liberal international order more assertively – a position that is diametrically opposite to China's geostrategic calculus.

It is also seen in the multilateral bodies of Asia-Pacific region especially in ASEAN with the rivalry between the U. S. and China. Also, both superpowers aim to exert influence on the regional structure with the help of ASEAN each representing their vested interests. The BRI on the side of China and the IPEF on the side of the U. S. are the best examples of how economic rivalry is embedded into diplomatic attempts to forge alliances in the region, which do not only capture the economic aspect of the competition but also the overarching strategic conflict. At the same time, there has been a new round of militarization in certain areas such as the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, the former of which has become one of the sources of confrontation due to China's continued construction of military facilities on artificial islands and the latter due to the U. S. 'indication' of support for Taiwan, which in response is accompanied by growing Chinese military activity.

The alterations that have been made to the security strategies in the areas are in a bid to respond to the newly realized emergent threats posed by the Sino-U.S. rivalry. All three of them, Japan, India, and Australia, not only have increased their defense capacity, but also intensified their security relations with the United States. Such steps, although undertaken in an attempt to contain Beijing's influence, inevitably increase the possibility of armed conflict in the region at the same time. The policy of hedging seen in the Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia is a way of maintaining

strategic flexibility and yet bring uncertainty especially in case of constant changes of alignment or policy.

Another set of factors relates to the economic realm, which describes an important aspect of the region's interactions with competition in the US–China context. In this scenario, countries that depend much on China as a trading partner are always reluctant to shift fully in support of the U.S. but at the same time they are not fully comfortable with China's power to punish recklessly. Due to this economic reliance on China such weaknesses hence pose a risk to several of the countries within the Indo-Pacific region hence the insecurity on the region. It will be for more than a decade the confrontation between Washington and Beijing will be one of the most critical indicators for the development of the Indo-Pacific region. It is due to rivalry between those superpowers that they intensify conflicts and alter the security setting of the region. The way regional organizations like ASEAN and Others like the Quad orchestrate over these tensions will be important though contentious in regard to the strategic axioms of the U.S. and China paradigms.

In conclusion, challenging the global multipolar post-Cold War structure, superior nexus power contest, the clash of influence within the Indo-Pacific region is getting intensified. This competition shapes the regional states National Security policies, informs their Foreign Policy, and reorders the international system of relations in the regions. Thus a multitude of policies which ranges from closer cooperation with the U.S. to policies of hedging can be said to be indicators of a complex and dynamic landscape. To what degree these tensions are going to metamorphose and how regional countries are going to be able to maintaining the balance between the US and China is going to decide the future security and stability of the indo-pacific region.

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