

The Nexus of the U.S. and China Rivalry: A Case Study of Its Impact in Indo-Pacific Region

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Abstract – The early twentieth-century conflict between Washington and Beijing was neither predetermined nor an anomaly. It was built as each country's domestic constituencies were socialized for confrontation. The final chapter of the Cold War shattered pro-cooperation alliances that had formed in each country to support alignment against a jointly believed Soviet threat. During the first two decades of the post-Cold War era, however, a smoldering US-China rivalry was smothered by an unsustainable accommodation of mutual self-interest by Washington and Beijing. By the 2010s, the rivalry had become fairly obvious, with pro-cooperation coalitions splintering and being replaced by pro-confrontation coalitions in the US and China. Geostrategic reassessments in the United States and China have also contributed to the emergence of competition. The area within this conflict's range is the Indo-Pacific. Many countries residing there face a quite significant impact due to this contest, regardless of their internal situation. China's programs such as BRI and conquering SCS worsened everything

Keywords – The United States, China, South China Sea, Belt Road Initiative, Indo-Pacific.

I. Introduction

Rivalry between the US and China has become a complex discussion in the paradigm of international relations over the years. Where the status quo is shaping the strategic debates and real political, military and economic dynamics, and it seems to be more likely to continue to do so for some time. Both countries put the issues on the hand of the global power equilibria and their status within the international system. Most of the time, the competition between Washington and Beijing, or even great power rivalry in general, determine all other international problems and conflicts. But the rivalry between these two countries brings an increasingly frequently form the lens through which other actors view important developments and events where these countries is getting involved.

The global situation now is influence by the present of the US and China in almost every sector, especially in the engagement of an economic battle that has so far shown little prospect of a positive resolution. But the current dispute between the world's two largest economies goes far beyond trade tariffs and tit-for-tat reprisals: the underlying driver of this clash is a race for global technological supremacy especially in the Indo-Pacific Region. The tension in relations between the US and China has raised concerns for many parties because it has the potential to threaten other countries, even the countries that are not involved in it. Since these two countries almost every time throw several accusations at

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each other to show their respective advantages and have an impact on the global situation considering the influence of the power of the two countries is very complex and dynamics.

The importance of Indo Pacific Region to the US and China lying under the Asia Pacific region as a very strategic global security center in the world, and its economic growth is dynamic and is a center of activity in global politics. This position resulted in a constellation of conflicts and cooperation involving countries in the region and superpowers outside the region. The active role of the IS in the region has given rise to various speculations about regional security stability. After the Cold War, the US security policy seemed to have forgotten about the Asia Pacific region. The presence of China with economic and military power makes the US aware of the meaning of geopolitics and geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific region. This creates a new contest situation between these two global powers.

The study of the interests of these two countries in the Indo-Pacific region is one of the important issues discussed from the point of view of international relations and diplomacy given the increasing rivalry between the US and China. There are interesting issues within the region. Nonetheless, all of the challenges are relatively pre-existing managed by cooperation between countries and the major powers in the region. Regarding China as a new emerging power in Asia Pacific Region, China's increasing power can cause instability and insecurity in Asia Pacific. One of the most fundamental reasons for America to fight for its interests in the Indo-Pacific region is considering the emergence of China in various fields which makes it a major partner in the Indo-Pacific region.

II. Theoretical Discourse

A. US – China Hegemony Context as a Conceptual Framework

Hegemony is established through a combination of coercive power and manufactured consent. The Power Transition Theory posits that conflict is likely when a rising power overtakes the dominant force, especially when it aspires to create a new international order (Dogan, 2021)

The factors on which the superiority of the hegemon may lie include geography, natural resources, industrial, financial and in general economic capacity, military capacity and preparedness, population, morale and unity, quality of diplomacy and government, technological innovation and etc (Morgenthau, 1965). To sum up some of these factors by arguing that ‘the constitutive elements of hegemonic power include military capabilities; control over raw materials, markets, and capital; and competitive advantages in highly valued good.

Hegemony is often to be conceptualized as the possession of overwhelming power (in terms of material capabilities) and the instrumental use of this power to secure leadership or dominance in world politics (Antoniades, 2008). This is in line with the anarchic international system forces great powers to act aggressively towards each other. The great powers are rarely satisfied with the status quo and seek hegemony. The great powers are power-maximizers and they want to increase their military and economic power as much as possible (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Same as the China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea could lead to conflicts with smaller powers and seek to dilute the power and influence of the US through asymmetric strategies. On the other hand, the US has revived its alliance strategies to combine with India, Japan, and Australia to create the Quad strategy to blunt China’s increasing influence in the Indo-Pacific.

The 2020 report of the power metric Research Network ranks countries in the categories of super power, world power, great power, regional power, and local power. According to this, China has passed the US to become the leading economic power globally, while it has attained world power status in military and geopolitical dominance. Currently, the US is a superpower in military and geopolitical power while it is second in economic power ranking. Various studies confirm the growth of China as the world’s leading power by 2050, thus overtaking the US in all categories of power (Kiczma L and M Sutek, 2020).

Power transition theorists have predicted that challenges to US dominance will primarily emerge from Asia in the 21st century (Jacek Kugler, Ronald L. Tammen, and Siddharth Swaminathan, 2001). Similarly, the 2018 National Defense Strategy document of the US Department of Defense (DOD) acknowledges the re-emergence of long-term strategic competition among great powers. It suggests that China's rise as a peer power poses an economic, political, and military threat to the US' dominant position.

China uses the weight of attraction of its economy to increase its power and influence in the Asia-Pacific. China's economic heft, its growing informational toolbox, and geopolitical advantages make the contest for influence primarily non-military in character. Despite the backlash on its poor handling of the Covid-19 related geopolitics, China's influence in Asia seems to be getting better at the expense of the US. An example is a successful conclusion of the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) in November 2020 (Albert, 2020).

This also in line with the best way to survive in this anarchic international system is to be powerful. The great powers are never happy with the power distribution in the international system and try to change the balance of power in their favor. Therefore, the balance of power and geostrategic competition that occurs in Indo-Pacific region currently is a reflection for the rise of China's power which potentially could be a new hegemonic actor in the broader regional order.

This phenomenon has led to the resurgence of Quadrilateral Cooperation (Quad) alliance, run by the US, India, Japan, and Australia by forming steps together in coordinating the Indo-Pacific regional establishment goals as a free, transparent, and based on international law area. The momentum of Quad cooperation that ignore China's membership and implicitly framed in the axis of democracy is certainly lead to the conflict escalation, where China has gradually succeeded in using their growing economic power as well as the strategic conditions of its military forces to spread the great influence in Indo-Pacific geopolitics. This condition brings China is regarded as a major threat and indirectly creates problems that lead to an ideological competition in this region.

As the center of gravity of global power shifts to Asia, the US-China rivalry plays out in major areas of disagreement between the two countries: Taiwan, Tibet, South China Sea, multilateral and international organizations, a potential threat in Asia, strategic alliance, weapons proliferation, human rights, and environmental issues. Besides, China's rise reflects the rise of Asia with Asian values contrasting with Euro-centric values. As a result, countries in the Asia-Pacific have adopted a hedging strategy and avoid taking sides between China and the US.

B. Balance of Power

The long-term viability of the balance of power concept is unquestionable. If the idea of counterbalancing hegemony encapsulates the essence of the balance of power theory, then the theory can be traced back to the work of contemporary historians and political theorists who described and analyzed the relationships between Italian city states in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Nelson, 1943). Since then, it has been commonly assumed that if a great power shows signs of wanting to dominate the international system, other great countries will band together to protect their own security by providing a clear counterweight to the aspiring hegemon.

There is no motivation to try to establish hegemony inside the system because all great powers appear to be aware that this is the likely response to any hegemonic venture. The balance of power theory can be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy in this case. However, it is apparent that it is a prophecy that has been contradicted by reality on several occasions. Over the last two centuries, leaders such as Napoleon and Hitler have attempted to build a Eurasian hegemony, but they were finally faced and defeated by an overwhelming anti-hegemonic alliance, as predicted by the balance of power theory.

The balance of power, on the other hand, isn't just about anti-hegemonic partnerships. It's also tied to the idea that states have historically endeavored to protect their security and advance their interests by forming alliances with other nations. The balance of power thesis assumes that if one set of states forms an alliance to advance their common interests, other governments would band together and form a counter-alliance, fearing that they will be the potential

victims of this alliance. Instead of creating an overpowering alliance against an aspiring hegemon, two sets of rival alliances will produce a power balance in this situation.

Given the current state of the world, it may be worthwhile to discuss some geopolitical and geostrategic issues. Political and strategic events, as well as economic events, necessitate a sense of the vector forces as they touch and change you, especially in our interconnected society where everything is done in real time.

The Cold War was an unexpected enlightenment towards the conclusion of the twentieth century. The Cold War's polarity reinforced alliances in the West, but it also put a stop to the promise and opportunity of post-colonialism for 40 years. Population is once again the primary driver of GDP, as it was before the industrial revolution, thanks to post-Cold War trade and capital arrangements. The states with the most people will once again be the states with the most GDP. The days of the United States' comfortable multilateralism, guided by Jeffersonian values, are giving way to a world of great power organizations and great power politics.

The United States was unprepared for the post-Cold War power transitions. At the end of the Cold War, the United States had a chance to change the world. In a well-known speech, George Herbert Bush discussed it, but he departed office before he could do anything about it. Bill Clinton was a domestic politician who had little interest in changing the world. The United States considered itself as having vanquished the Soviet Union in the triumphalism of the unipolar era. It was all over red rover, we're all Jeffersonians now. The market system has won, when Francis Fukuyama released his book 'The End of History.'

The United States lost both Clinton terms as the post-colonial world changed dramatically. George W. Bush was in charge at the time, together with Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, and Donald Rumsfeld. They blew two administrations in the Middle East trying to spread American values.

Meanwhile, China was expanding eastward, and the European Union was cementing with the addition of East European states. Then there was Barack Obama, who had the biggest potential in history to transform the globe, as well as the most powerful mandate ever. Obama kept the globe clear of catastrophic conflicts and contributed significantly to the American recovery; yet, we lost two more terms due to timidity and a lack of policy ambition when it came to the big game. China, on the other hand, has risen in the east.

When discussing the Atlantic and Pacific, it's essential remembering that the East has never been a collection of states united by a common culture or religion in the same way that the West has. Asia has always been a hierarchy, with China at the head, rather than a power balance or sovereign state equilibrium based on Westphalian ideas. China has traditionally taken a conceptual approach, whereas America has taken a pragmatic approach. China has a Confucian sense of self and a lengthy legacy of hierarchy and authority, as well as a competent administration and government, among its people.

Xi Jinping connects with these qualities, with the underlying characteristics of the ancient imperial system, but now with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the emperor's chair; a competent bureaucracy beneath, a docile community, and an authoritarian management, no doubt. The idea that the growth of liberal democracy underpins the international order is rejected by China. That has always been the basic assumption that has guided American foreign policy.

In this perspective, America's objective has been to prevent hegemony in Asia for over a century. Its problem is that, as a prominent participant, it has a metropolitan home and center of gravity that is far from East Asia's geographic center. China is a continental power that acts as a stabilizing force on the Asian mainland. The United States is a maritime power.

Diplomacy is possibly the most important weapon for avoiding conflict and maintaining the balance of international powers. While diplomacy involves many factors, one that is becoming increasingly crucial is transparency. Information travels swiftly in today's high-tech environment, and keeping secrets is challenging. To minimize misconceptions,

countries—as well as transnational enterprises that frequently impact the balance of power—must be as open as possible about their activities and goals.

III. Discussion

A. BRI Brings US – China Tension in the Indo-Pacific

Since the Indo-Pacific region is discussed as the convergence between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, which intersect in Southeast Asia. The whole of the Indo-Pacific rim of island states, bigger nations like Vietnam and South Korea, and the Indian and Chinese titans have become economically connected and now epitomize the world's largest trade markets. Some studies have revealed that at least 50 percent of worldwide GDP will be shared by the Indo-Pacific region (World News, 2021). From the geographical notion, 'Indo-Pacific' has been in existence for decades. When referring it as political and strategic notions, it has progressively become recognized in the foreign policy lexicon of several nations, particularly in Australia, India, Japan and the US since 2010.

The developments of this region indicate that the "Indo-Pacific" area has become the focus of world economic development and geostrategic competition. One of it by the present of the New Silk Road, is one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects ever conceived. Launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, the vast collection of development and investment initiatives would stretch from East Asia to Europe, significantly expanding China's economic and political influence. Which known as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

By that the United States has been discussing alternative to against China's BRI by raising the term 'free and open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP), which was began to dominate the captions after President Donald Trump's recurring use of the term during his initial journey to Asia as US president in late 2017. In the US National Security Strategy (NSS), the 'Indo-Pacific' was stated eleven (11) repeated times while the previously predominant term 'Asia-Pacific' was scarcely used at all (NSS, 2017). Various observers submit that the alteration in terminology could be emblematic in nature; nonetheless, it designates a possible expansion of the US strategic vision from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific (NSS, 2017).

Nevertheless, China appears to be unwilling to recognize itself as part of the Indo-Pacific. Thus far, no Chinese official document has applied the notion. For instance, in its most recent defense white paper, reported in July 2019, China continues to apply the 'Asia-Pacific' to define its geographical region. The notion 'Asia-Pacific' was employed ten times; the notion 'Indo-Pacific' did not seem at all (Harding, 2019). In reality, China's economic and strategic drives have progressed across both the Pacific and the Indian oceans, as observed from the wide scope of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Glaser, 2021).

The US delivered its Indo-Pacific Strategy by highlighting its aims to oppose China in the region where the US diplomatic sensitivity has been focused towards opposing Chinese "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) infrastructure projects from advancing in the region, as well as deterring regional states from engaging in collaboration with Chinese high-technology firms. The US efforts such as the "America First" policy in the Trump era was influencing its strategy for the region. Where it was resolute to preserve US assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific (Camila, 2020). The US ward off against alleged Chinese contests has been demonstrated in both domestic and foreign policies. US faulted Beijing of undermining the sovereignty of neighbor nations, taking provoking engagements in the South China Sea, using 'predatory economics' in funding Belt and Road projects, and challenging the rules based on order.

One month after the sentence "Silk Road Economic Belt" was announced publicly by President Xi Jinping, he stated the term "Maritime Silk Road" by stating the term "Maritime" in a maritime country is not a coincidence (Akbar, 2019). From this point, the countries in Indo-pacific region are mostly a maritime country. By this emphasizes the need of China in building influence in this region. Now, this issue can be seen from another perspective from Business to Business (B to B) to the Government to Government (G to G) perspective and take into something more down-to earth and simple, since China approached every country who located near the BRI plan. This make more the situation become

more interesting because China is now a head-to-head competitor with USA on the issue of Trade War, and questioning about how would the US position itself in this harsh, unforgiving global competition.

Maritime Silk Road and Economic Belt is both a concept of a work plan that designed to connect the dots that spread widely across Eurasia, Africa, and Oceania (this included Australia on the map as the part of “One Big Asia Pacific Family”) for the benefit of China’s ambitious economic goal. The impact of the BRI is expected to be more salient in the domain of geopolitics than in the domain of global development governance. Under the BRI umbrella, Beijing has pledged to invest billions of dollars in the infrastructural and industrial sectors across Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific. There is no doubt that such a huge investment will inevitably generate significant geostrategic repercussions in regions where geopolitical contestations between China and other major powers, particularly the United States, are already on the rise.

Therefore, in order to counter the BRI, The US is determined to promote the ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ (FOIP) strategy. Because China fears that this US-dominated strategy may constrain China’s influence and thwart the BRI, it seldom uses the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ in its own official policy statements. Apparently, these two cross-regional strategies are in serious rivalry with each other. Whereas, the BRI is also connected to the issue of Trade war to Indo-pacific area, since the trade war has the potential to generate severe stress and uncertainty on the existing rules-based trading system in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, it is also an opportunity for the states of the region to diversify their economies and prepare for a future where they cannot solely rely on China. If they can pull it off, the whole region will be more secure in its future.

The FOIP is come up due to the fears of how this initiative is being used for geopolitical influence where China’s increased assertiveness in its neighboring maritime area, such as border disputes and territorial expansion, and has led to China being described as a security threat. As response to China’s growing influence across Eurasia and the Indian Ocean, as its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) expands. The US also shift the approach to the Indo-Pacific as an indicates attempt to limit Chinese gains, a contrast to previous U.S. administrations’ efforts to integrate China into the liberal order. One of the crucial way is by having a trade war.

A comprehensive deal seemed within reach in May 2019 but fell through when Beijing expunged one-third of the negotiated draft text and insisted that the US remove all tariffs, revise the text so it is ‘balanced’ and respects China’s ‘dignity’, and be reasonable about the amount of US goods the Chinese should buy. Driven by political and economic considerations, the two countries resumed negotiations in October and closed a ‘Phase One’ deal two months later that included significant purchases of American products, modest IP protection, improved access to China’s financial-services market for American companies, pledges by Beijing to refrain from competitive currency devaluations and the rollback of some US tariffs. Thorny issues like cyber espionage of IP and Chinese industrial policies that provide government subsidies to state-owned enterprises were shelved for future talks (Saha, 2020).

The strategic competition is currently the central feature of the bilateral relationship between China and US and it will probably remain the primary animating dynamism for several years to come. Responses from Indo-Pacific nations to growing US–China rivalry have been varied, but most are hesitant: they silently approve the US tougher style and hope it will thrive in influencing China to revise its assertive and coercive policies, but they are also avoiding being coerced into taking sides between Washington and Beijing, and seek to avoid a US–China military clash.

Regional states intend to profit from the opportunities presented by China’s economic clout and sought to dodge having to pick between Washington and Beijing. They oppose a direct confrontational position towards China, choosing instead to manage differences via dialogue and to stabilize rivalry with cooperation on issues of common interest such as non-traditional security issues. Thus, while many nations are at ease with elements of the US pushback against China’s increasing assertiveness, the however prefer to express their support secretly, for fear of antagonising Beijing and inviting retribution.

With the increase in its economic and military power, China has taken an increasingly assertive position for reforms in multilateral institutions to increase the representation of the developing countries' views. It has also played a leading role in creating alternative development finance institutions such as the AIIB and New Development Bank (NDB) of BRICS. These are seen as efforts to reduce the influence of US-dominated IMF and World Bank. China is also emphatic that multi-polar world order is an absolute necessity and is focused on reducing American power and influence in global governance.

The US initiated the trade war against China in 2017, citing a massive trade imbalance and accusation of opaque procedures, technology theft, IP violations, and lack of fair access to China's market. However, the underlying driver for this clash is the race for global technological supremacy as China leapfrogged into cutting-edge technologies like AI and 5G. Where China's growth in space, defense, AI, quantum science, telecommunications, and the 4th Industrial Revolution's disruptive technologies has been rapid and extraordinary and is already eroding the US' military advantage. China's strategies of military-civil fusion and 'intelligentization' are leading to significant capabilities in the application of AI technologies in military operational concepts such as swarming, decision support, and information operations. The convergence of the AI revolution and the re-emergence of great power competition poses grave challenges. It threatens the US' role as the world's engine of innovation and American military superiority.

The US-China strategic competition flows from the essential fact of China threatening to dislodge the US's pre-eminent position as the technology leader. This, in turn, impacts the rules of global governance, financial institutions and monetary system, and multilateral institutions. China's rise essentially threatens the existing balance of power in terms of technology leadership and economic power. China's economic system sucks in the economies of Southeast Asia, Central, and South Asia because of its vast market and purchasing power.

Another point that come up is the trade alliance Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which includes US allies Japan and Australia, is testimony to the power of influence of China's economy. The essence of this strategic competition is focused on the US's attempts to decouple from China to deny it easy access to critical technologies and markets. On the other hand, through its BRI, China is working to dominate Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific to create a Sino-centric global economic order.

Fundamentally, the US-China strategic competition extends the dimensions comprising by the geo-economic and geopolitical contest for power and influence. From those points and explanation, the Indo Pacific matters from the terms of nexus of the rivalry between The US - China strategic rivalry is growing most especially in the Indo-Pacific in the economic issues towards the BRI issues.

B. The Rivalry of US – China in the South China Sea (SCS)

Despite, the BRI and the recent trade war and other shadow-boxing in the South China Sea are two examples of heightened tensions between the US and China that are deeply rooted in their distinctive ideologies and ensuing strategic distrust. As the region of Indo-Pacific has become the central area for maritime geopolitics, security, trade, and environment activities (David Michel and R. Passarelli, 2014). Along with the present of BRI in the region of Indo-Pacific, another rivalry from the US and China can be seen under the dispute in the South China Sea. As we know that in the region of Indo-Pacific was filled with the sea. Whereas the sea has always been a major focus for mankind and international relations and the sea becomes important for the resources it contained, its utility as a means of transportation and trade, its importance as a means of exchanging information and as a source of power and dominion (Till, 2009).

This drive into a power competition between Beijing and Washington have been driving the security dynamics of Indo-Pacific. It was start when the US began to pay attention to China's actions, when at the end of 2013 China began the construction of a large-scale reclamation project in the South China Sea. China builds artificial islands with various facilities for geopolitical and military purposes on former rocks and coral atolls. Connecting the rivalry between US-

China in the Indo-Pacific where the repeated mentions of the Indo-Pacific suggest the US has become progressively focused on China; which further revealed in its troubles to resuscitate the Quadrilateral strategic alliance that likewise comprises Japan, Australia and India. The principal attention of the US in regard to the Indo-Pacific approach is deterring conflict; principally in the South China Sea. The other focus is to further American standards and values, particularly in regions such as Thailand, who choose not to provoke China.

The first actor which involve in the issue of South China Sea between the US-Rivalry. Japan was an initial advocate of the 'Indo-Pacific' notion. The Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, projected his renowned 'democratic security diamond', involving Australia, India, Japan and the US (the member states of the original 2007 Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or 'Quad'), and this idea looked to be revitalized in the form of the 'Quad 2.0 in 2017. Nevertheless, Japan's new 'open and free Indo-Pacific strategy' implemented by Japan in 2016 now embraces economic as well as the security purview, stressing the economic link between Asia and Africa, especially in the infrastructure sector.

The Japanese form of the FOIP strategy predominantly aims to shape and strengthen regional order in the Indo-Pacific region on the foundation of the prevailing rules-based international order. To achieve this objective, Japan has embraced a 'tactical hedging' tactic that allows it to flexibly integrate other regional states' inclinations into its FOIP, therefore making the idea a common vision among regional states and yonder, and building a coalition to manage with challenges from China.

Another actor is India, where India is one of the important actors in the US FOIP strategy for several reasons: first, it is perceived as a natural balancer against China's rise; second, its activism in the Indo-Pacific is predominantly determined by its requisite to stabilize against China (Rajagopalan, 2020). Nonetheless, India is cautious towards joining the US in making the 'Indo-Pacific' a strictly security-focused concept targeted against China. For instance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stressed in the 2017 Shangri-La Dialogue that 'India does not perceive the Indo-Pacific Region as a strategy or a club of restricted members. Nor as an alliance that pursues domination. The government of India are also clear that they did not see it as a means directed against any country. From that it can describes the policy dilemma confronting India in the setting of China's escalation (Rajagopalan, 2020). India will have an 'evasive balancing' tactic, which incorporates the components of balancing and reassurance, might not succeed because it will not gratify either China or the US, nor will it realize an established, non-hegemonic Indo-Pacific order.

Moreover, there is Australia which was the strongest and most active supporters among the Indo-Pacific notion, and was the first nation to adopt the term in official documents. In Australia defense white paper, the notion 'Indo-Pacific' was used 57 times. Brendan Taylor and suggests that Australia's enthusiasm for the 'Indo-Pacific' concept is rooted in the two dominant traditions of its foreign policy: a 'dependent ally' tradition and a 'middle-power' approach. On the one hand, as a dependent ally of the US, Australia follows the lead of the US FOIP strategy. Where, Australia intends to take a middle-power approach or a normative leadership role to mediate Great Power competition through various institutional means. However, as Taylor points out, there is a discrepancy between what Australia says and what Australia does. Its Indo-Pacific strategy, in fact, follows a third 'pragmatic tradition'. It seems that Australia will, just like India, face the strategic dilemma of picking sides between the US and China. Indonesia, though originally lukewarm towards the Quad countries' use of the term, has more recently played a leadership role in promoting the 'Indo-Pacific' concept in south-east Asia.

In the other hand, in order to draw on middle-power theory it seems like Indonesia is behaving in promoting a more positive outlook of the Indo-Pacific region based on cooperation rather than rivalry. This proactive foreign policy serves three purposes: to strengthen Indonesia's unofficial leadership in ASEAN and its status as a global middle power; to entrench ASEAN centrality in regional affairs; and to offer a strategic alternative to offset Great Power rivalries, particularly that between the US and China. Because of ASEAN's inherent weaknesses and disagreement on key regional issues, however, it remains uncertain whether Indonesia or ASEAN as a whole has the capabilities to take up these challenges ASEAN, an intergovernmental organization consisting of ten small and middle powers, has been a

major player in the Asia–Pacific regional architecture since the end of the Cold War. ASEAN has led almost all the main regional institutions, including the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asia Summit, during the years when both the US and China embraced the Association’s centrality in regional affairs. The adoption of the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific at the ASEAN summit in July 2021 can be seen as Indonesia’s major foreign policy victory in strengthening the centrality of ASEAN in the evolving Indo-Pacific construct.

The strategy has now put pressure on ASEAN states to pick sides between the US and China. The escalating rivalry between Washington and Beijing has also undermined the central role of ASEAN in the regional architecture built on Great Power consensus and cooperation in the post-Cold War era. Consequently, the ASEAN states, as a whole, have adopted a hedging strategy in order to maneuver between the US and China by enhancing practical bilateral collaboration with each state. As Tan points out, through this ‘ASEAN plus one’ arrangement, ASEAN has sought to redefine its regional centrality as well as to indirectly limit the negative impact of the FOIP strategy on multilateralism. Clearly, the US FOIP strategy has been a tough test for all regional actors.

While the China has modified its assertive policies towards its neighbors in order to prevent the establishment of an anti-China containment camp led by the US in the Indo-Pacific. Other major powers, such as Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan and the ten ASEAN member states as a whole, are now forced to choose sides between the US and China. Consequently, despite rhetorical support for the FOIP concept, most players have tried hard not to side with the US in order to avoid publicly antagonizing China. The pragmatic approach adopted by Australia (which is a close ally of the US) allows its deeds to depart from its words of support for the US FOIP strategy. The ASEAN states, especially Indonesia, intend to play a proactive role in maintaining the Association’s centrality in building the Indo-Pacific construct in the region.

Those actions by both China and the US and especially the deteriorating US-China relations have put the Southeast Asian claimant countries in a tough spot. The US has now maintained that the Indo-Pacific region and the South China Sea have become a zone of big power contestation, involving China. There are indications that the South China Sea is rapidly getting transformed into a militarized zone. If the American FONOPs have increased this year, China’s military activities have also- the PLA have taken a confrontational response to the US Navy vessels transiting the Paracel and the Spratly. This is raising the chances for a bigger crisis in the US-China relations with regard to the SCS.

The term FOIP implies a balancing or even a containment strategy of the US in dealing with a rising China that may pose grave challenges to the US-led liberal international order after the 2008 global financial crisis. However, regional actors, including other Quad countries—Australia, India and Japan—as well as Indonesia and the ten ASEAN member states as a whole, have refrained from meddling in the strategic competition between the US and China in the region. The success of the US FOIP strategy against China will thus mainly depend on the strategic interactions among the US, China and other regional powers.

Tensions in the SCS have risen sharply in recent times, especially in the past few weeks given the general deterioration in the relations between the US and China. This ongoing turf war is only causing more strain in maintaining peace and stability in these disputed waters. An example of this was the conducting of naval exercises by both the US and China in the disputed area around the same time as it was seen.

The biggest impact of this downward spiral of the US-China relations has been the growing military exercises and deployments in the South China Sea. A barrage of medium range missiles was fired by China across “considerable distances in the South China Sea.” This exercise was a showcase of Chinese capability and a response to the exercises being carried out by US Navy’s super carrier Ronald Reagan and Nimitz around the Chinese nuclear submarine base at Hainan Islands in the South China Sea.

The US has also been hardening its posture and military presence in the SCS, besides openly calling out China for its actions in these disputed waters. The saga of China’s expansionist activities in this territorial dispute is not a new or a

sudden one. China has been engaging in artificial island reclamation activities since 2013, China even considers the 2016 Arbitral ruling as invalid and still upholds its “so-called historic rights” in the South China Sea. The US in the past has also called out China for its actions in the SCS and has been engaging in increasing number of Freedom of Navigation Exercises (FONOPs) with the coming of the Trump administration. High profile exercises, including dual aircraft carrier operations have been conducted by the US Navy in 2014 and there has been increased submarine deployments and maritime air patrols. But the frequency of the FONOPs in the Paracel and the Spratly has increased even further this year with the number of exercises conducted by the US Navy till now in 2020 being seven, in comparison to eight in 2019, five in 2018 and four in 2017 (Danaley, 2018). The presence by the US military has been further stepped up with the deployment of two aircraft carriers in the contested waters in July 2020. The US, in the past, had not taken any sides when it came to the question of sovereignty issue in the SCS dispute.

The other lately issue is on the partnership between Australia, UK, and US which Called AUKUS. The leaders of Australia, the US and the United Kingdom unveiled the alliance. The first major initiative of AUKUS is to provide Australia a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines with the help of the US and the UK. The US has only ever shared this technology with the United Kingdom, so the fact that Australia is now joining this club indicates that the US is prepared to take significant new steps and break with old norms to meet the China challenge.

AUKUS is a new three-way strategic defense alliance between Australia, the UK and US, initially to build a class of nuclear-propelled submarines, but also to work together in the Indo-Pacific region, where the rise of China is seen as an increasing threat, and develop wider technologies. The deal marks the first time the US has shared nuclear propulsion technology with an ally apart from the UK. There are actually only six countries in the world who operate a nuclear-powered submarine, which are America, Britain, China, France, India and Russia—currently operate nuclear-powered submarines. Now, Australia may become the unlikely seventh.

AUKUS is based on an Australian idea. It will cover diplomatic, security and defense co-operation in the Indo-Pacific. It includes joint work on cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and any additional undersea capabilities (Economist, 2021). AUKUS greatly expands the capabilities of the Australian navy in the hotly contested Indo-Pacific region and puts pressure on China, France, a critical ally of the United States, was left on the sidelines after previously agreeing to sell Australia \$66 billion worth of conventional submarines. As a result, France went as far as temporarily recalling its ambassador, and President Biden was also admitted there was a lack of consultation between both countries

This is also lead in to another dispute, where the EU officials expressed dismay with a new security pact between Australia, the UK, and the United States (known as AUKUS) for the Indo-Pacific region. AUKUS is widely regarded as aimed at addressing concerns about China, but EU officials contend that the bloc was not consulted and should have been, in the interest of transatlantic unity and transparency. Moreover, France in particular was angered by AUKUS because Australia canceled a roughly the contract for French diesel-powered submarines. French and EU officials maintain that the new pact raises doubts about the U.S. commitment to transatlantic cooperation on China. The controversy over AUKUS also has heightened EU fears about a U.S. “pivot” toward Asia and whether this could portend diminished U.S.-European ties in the future. AUKUS is going to lead into the global impacts of the AUKUS deal, with a particular focus on how it reshaped the strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific as well as how U.S. allies in Europe and elsewhere are responding (CSIS, 2021).

C. The API and NEXUS

The discussion about the rivalry of US and China in Indo Pacific can be seen an analysis of which actor is involving and affecting the tension or the rivalry between these two countries. The common one is the state actor, where those state actor is having its direct contact with the US and China through the framework of cooperation created between each of these countries.

But the draw-point, the state actor in the Indo-Pacific region, which affecting the rivalry of the US and China, outside these two countries and as what explained above is involving the state actor in Indo-Pacific region itself such as Japan, India, Australia, Indonesia, and of course all the member-states of ASEAN. Also, the state actor from outside the ring of Indo-Pacific region such as France, United Kingdom, or even the member-state of the European Union.

The issue is definitely on the region of Indo-Pacific, to be involve in this region, the actor and the process can simply be attracted in this table:

Indo-Pacific State Actor	Process
China	Belt Road Initiative
Japan	<i>Tactical Hedging</i>
India	Evasive Balancing Tactics
Australia	Middle Power Approach
Indonesia and ASEAN Member-states	ASEAN Outlook to Indo-Pacific

Outside the Region of Indo-Pacific	Process
United States of America	Free and Open Indo Pacific
United Kingdom	AUKUS Partnership
France and EU Member-states	European Union Strategy of Indo-Pacific

Despite from the API analysis and in order to understand the functioning of the identity/difference nexus in the international relation, is by put a highlight the use of discourses of differentiation and identification in constructing state identities and interests. Where the nexus approaches need expertise in all relevant sectors instead of just one sector. The Nexus approaches are increasingly being used in policy implementation (Daher B.T. & Mohtar, R. H., 2015). At the beginning, the “Nexus” approach aims at reconciling the interests of the different sectors and co-optimizing, while respecting environmental needs and human rights, and improving governance. This is in line with the integrated planning, management, and governance of natural resources as the needed & provides the opportunities. Simply, the nexus is aiming to understand how different sectors related each other in order to understand to issues or can be used in analyzing some policies decisions related to the development of the nowadays situation.

In the issue of US-China Rivalry, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, the nexus point can be seen on the below chart:



What began as a trade battle over China's unjust economic policies has now devolved into a "cold war" driven by ideological differences. When then-US President Donald Trump's fixation with trade deficits prompted him to impose punitive tariffs on China in 2018, bilateral relations between the two countries took a fall. Following the tariffs, China's access to high-tech US products and foreign investments was restricted due to security concerns, as well as claims of unfair Chinese business practices.

The fight for global supremacy has always included trade and the oceans. "For whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the wealth of the world, and ultimately the world itself," wrote English explorer Sir Walter Raleigh. It was the case for Great Britain in the 19th century with the Pax Britannica, the United States in the 20th century with the Pax Americana, and it will be the situation for China in the twenty-first century if it wants to establish its own Pax Sinica.

Beijing's South China Sea island-building campaign began around the same time that China overtook the United States as the world's greatest trading nation, which was no coincidence. Meanwhile, in an unusual address in early October, U.S. Ex-Vice President Mike Pence accused China of unfair economic practices and military aggressiveness in the South China Sea (Hudson Institute, 2018). As a result, the escalating trade war, which was sparked by US President Donald Trump, was not just another dispute, but a change from "peaceful coexistence to a new type of conflict" between the two global powers (Rudd, 2018). When you look at the trade war in this light, you have to wonder how it will affect the South China Sea issues.

Economic factors will have the greatest impact. The legitimacy of an authoritarian state like China is based mostly on socioeconomic achievement. When the country faces economic difficulties, it will be tempting for Zhongnanhai authorities to inflame nationalism in order to redirect public discontent. Along with this the US-China strategic competition is not far by the geo-economic and geopolitical contest for power and influence. The same point to the belt and road initiative that grows the rivalry between the US - China strategic in the region of Indo-Pacific. This is also in line with the trade war that happened between both countries.

The trade war had just begun a few years ago, and it is still unclear what lies ahead. The Chinese economy, on the other hand, has already suffered. Its GDP growth slowed to 6.5 percent in the third quarter of 2018, the lowest in a decade, and it could potentially fall to 5 percent if the full consequences of a trade slowdown are felt (Wallace, 2018). Some of China's largest investors have been caught by the negative mindset. For fear of a full-fledged trade war, Morgan

Stanley, Nomura Assets, Jefferies Group, and, most recently, JPMorgan have all reduced their China-based holdings (Bloomberg, 2018). If the current scenario persists, Beijing may be tempted to play the nationalism card by being more assertive in its maritime disputes.

This was alluring because China was capable of doing so. Beijing had spent a significant amount of money to improve its military capabilities, particularly its naval force. According to a report released by the US Department of Defense in 2018, China currently has "the world's largest and most capable marine militia." While the US Navy has 282 deployable battle-force ships, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has "more than 300 surface combatants, submarines, amphibious ships, patrol craft, and specialty kinds," making it the Indo-Pacific region's largest navy force (Erickson, 2018). Professor Robert S. Ross of Harvard University believed that if a naval conflict between China and the United States had occurred ten years ago, the United States would have easily prevailed. If it happened now, though, the conflict would be protracted, unpleasant, and costly to both parties.

That explains why, since the start of the trade war, China has maintained a bullish stance in the South China Sea. A Chinese destroyer confronted a US destroyer in the waters near one of China's manmade islands last month, in addition to the heated exchanges between the two countries (New York Times, 2018).

The possibility of violence increased as Trump's administration did not hesitate to directly dispute China's position. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, his senior diplomat, had promised to challenge China at every opportunity (Delaney, 2018). Through "freedom of navigation" missions, the US has increased its military presence in the South China Sea in recent years. Later, it expanded the scope of the patrol to include the air, when a US P-8A Poseidon flew past four Chinese-built artificial islands in August, despite Chinese military warnings (Steinbuch, 2018). The US even encouraged its allies to follow suit, with France and the United Kingdom answering the call.

Trump's Indo-Pacific plan can be seen as a counter-balance to China's Belt Road Initiative, and Washington was also enlisting the help of the Quad coalition to keep Beijing's maritime ambitions in check. Due to the lifting of the embargo in 2016, Vietnam, a former enemy but now a strategic partner of the United States, can now purchase American weaponry. In the South China Sea conflicts with China, Vietnam is viewed as the most stubborn claimant state.

As the trade war escalated, Trump's aggressive approach, which was part of Washington's hardening narrative of conflict with China, was unlikely to fade (East Asia Forum, 2018). President Xi Jinping of China, on the other hand, was not backing down. Xi didn't want to appear weak in front of the Chinese people, despite being the most powerful leader since Deng Xiaoping. In an attempt to reaffirm Beijing's territorial claims, he urged the military area that patrols the South China Sea and Taiwan to "ready for war." Although the chances of war were slim, they could not be ruled out (Huang K. , 2018).

A year after that, a virus namely Corona Virus-19, or well known as Covid-19, spread out and haunted the world at the fastest time a virus could travel. Tensions in the South China Sea (SCS) have been rising since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is mostly due to China's persistent assertive behavior and the rapid deterioration in US-China ties as a result of China's enormous territorial claims in the South China Sea. Tensions in the SCS have grown rapidly in recent months, particularly in the last few weeks, as ties between the US and China have deteriorated. Maintaining peace and stability in these disputed waters is becoming increasingly difficult as a result of the continuous turf war.

The escalating military exercises and deployments in the South China Sea have had the most impact on the US-China relationship's downward spiral. China launched a salvo of medium-range missiles spanning "great distances" in the South China Sea. According to Senior Col. Wu Qian, a spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of National Defense, the area covered by the drills ranged from Qingdao in northeastern China to the Spratly Islands, affecting the stretch between Hainan Island and the Paracel Islands (Myers & Bradsher, 2020). This exercise was a demonstration of Chinese

capability and a response to the US Navy's super-carriers Ronald Reagan and Nimitz conducting maneuvers over China's nuclear submarine base in the South China Sea.

These Chinese initiatives have hampered the region's capacity to de-escalate tensions and sustain stability. The PLA has mobilized its Southern Theatre Command, which oversees the South China Sea, according to a report in the *Nikkei Asian Review*. These moves are a subtle message to Washington DC and a signal to the rest of the region of China's strategic superiority. They indicate efforts to impose sovereignty over the disputed waters (Gupta, 2020).

In addition to openly criticizing China for its operations in these disputed waters, the US has been tightening its stance and military presence in the SCS. The expansionist activities of China in this territorial conflict are not new or unexpected. China has been constructing artificial islands in the South China Sea since 2013. It even views the 2016 Arbitral judgment to be unconstitutional and maintains its "so-called historic rights" in the region.

The US has previously chastised China for its actions in the South China Sea, and has increased the number of Freedom of Navigation Exercises (FONOPs) since the Trump administration took office. The US Navy undertook high-profile exercises in 2014, including twin aircraft carrier operations, as well as enhanced submarine deployments and maritime air patrols. However, the frequency of FONOPs in the Paracel and Spratly Islands had increased even more in 2020 (Storey, 2020), with the US Navy conducted seven drills in 2020, compared to eight in 2019, five in 2018, and four in 2017.

The US military's presence has been bolstered with the deployment of two aircraft carriers in the disputed waters in July 2020. When it came to the question of sovereignty in the SCS conflict, the US has hitherto taken no sides. However, the US State Department declared the expansive Chinese claims in the disputed waters as illegal in a report titled *US Position on Maritime Claims in the South China Sea* on July 13, 2020, aligning completely with the 2016 decision by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, indicating that the US is now siding with the other ASEAN claimants such as Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines (Tan, 2020).

In August 2020, the US government sanctioned or placed twenty-four Chinese firms on a "trade blacklist" for assisting China in the construction of artificial islands in the SCS's disputed islands and reefs (Whalen, 2020). These businesses "have helped Beijing excavate and construct more than 3,000 acres of artificial islands featuring anti-ship missiles and other military equipment," according to separate declarations from the US Commerce Department and the US State Department. These islands will be used to assert new maritime claims in the region, as well as to 'bully' the Philippines and other countries into relinquishing their rights to fishing waters and offshore energy assets."

In addition, the US has imposed visa restrictions on executives of these firms as well as other individuals involved in the island's construction. On the other side, the Chinese Embassy in the United States has described the move as "an act of hegemony in grave breach of international law and basic rules regulating international relations." (Whalen, 2020).

The Southeast Asian claimant countries are in a difficult situation as a result of both China's and the United States' activities, particularly the deteriorating US-China relations. The United States currently claims that the Indo-Pacific region and the South China Sea have devolved into a zone of major power rivalry including China.

There are signs that the South China Sea is rapidly becoming militarized. If US FONOPs have escalated this year, so have China's military activities: the PLA has responded aggressively to US Navy boats transiting the Paracels and the Spratlys. This raises the possibility of a more serious crisis in US-China ties over the SCS.

Given the gravity of the situation and the reality that the SCS is becoming 'militarized,' it is now time for ASEAN countries to take a strong stand on their own or in concert with the US and other players such as Australia, Japan, and India. Southeast Asian countries also believe Beijing has taken advantage of the crisis to advance and reinforce its claims in the South China Sea. In the long run, during the Code of Conduct (COC) negotiations, this will be

an opportune moment to extract some benefits from the US to help deal with a competitor like China. Southeast Asian countries can only think of methods to better equip themselves to monitor Chinese actions in their Exclusive Economic Zones because of the significant imbalance in naval might and capacity (EEZs).

The US has expressed its willingness to provide more assistance to the claimant countries, including the transfer of equipment such as radar, drones, and patrol boats that can help better monitor China's activities in their EEZs, particularly illegal fishing and the presence of Chinese government vessels. Apart from being able to better monitor Chinese activities, the claimant countries also have the option of hastening the conclusion of the COC and putting pressure on China in multilateral forums such as the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), where other countries such as the United States, Australia, India, and Japan are also present, to quickly engage with the COC process and not stall it any further under the guise of the ongoing pandemic.

The COC might use a "building block" approach, with first sections focusing on preventing illicit fishing vessels from encroaching and harassing claimant countries' vessels engaged in exploration and drilling activities. The building block technique can then be used to focus on reducing military vessel involvement or engagement in disputed waters.

Smaller claimant countries will likely use maritime law as a "weapon of strength." Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam have all sent UN notes verbally opposing China's nine-dash line and claims to "historic rights" in the South China Sea, claiming that they are in violation of UNCLOS. The 2016 ruling has been a source of contention for several countries. Brunei's first comment on the SCS included a reference to the judgment. Despite the fact that international law is a powerful tool, China has already rejected the 2016 Tribunal verdict.

As a result, engaging with China in multilateral fora where other countries with a stake in the dispute, such as the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, are present, and consistently highlighting the need for a binding COC as the more feasible way of dealing with China in the SCS on the agenda.

Given the current level of economic uncertainty during the COVID-19 epidemic, it is clear that the trade war will continue to have enormous ramifications for the global economy, posing both risks and possibilities for many countries. The countries in the Indo-Pacific are at the top of that list. The economies of the region are highly intertwined with China's, and typically produce raw materials and intermediary products that contribute to China's exports, as Australia does.

This means that when the tariffs create uncertainty, which leads to a drop in Chinese exports, it will also lead to a substantial drop in imports into China from other nations. A big slowdown in China will undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on other countries in the region, many of which are US allies.

As a result, the Indo-Pacific countries must begin to hunt for new markets. Because of the massive economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, many corporations are now looking at opportunities outside of China that they may not have considered before. The economic consequences of the pandemic could even complement the trade war, creating new markets in other Asian countries and diversifying the options of American allies whose reliance on Chinese supply chains became vulnerable to COVID-19's disruption at a time when it should be considered separately for strategic reasons.

While the trade war may provide some beneficial economic diversification, it will inevitably have severe consequences. The friction is having seismic global implications, affecting the liberal order's standards, and it's not only about exports and industry. The increase of protectionism signaled by the United States in this process is a dangerous deviation from established free trade principles. With a partial cease-fire in effect, what happens next will have a big impact on the region's future.

The confusion this has caused over the efficiency of a rules-based trade system should serve as a lesson to all states, but it also highlights a conundrum for many. On the one hand, the message should be obvious: "don't put all your eggs in one basket." On the other hand, several states have been obliged to accept the fact that they only have access to one basket at this time. As a result, finding alternatives is a major challenge for countries that rely on China. Can any country, however, take China's place as "the world's factory"? Even if one or many can band together to do the same, the fact that businesses have no idea which country or countries would be involved will cause economic hardship. In the future, relocation fear and the increased expenses of making these adjustments will manifest itself as stifled investment and uncertainty.

IV. Conclusion

The causes of the current deteriorating US-China relationship are structural in nature and are likely to persist despite political and economic changes in both countries. The Phase One trade deal may provide a temporary respite but friction is sure to increase in the years to come on various fronts, especially technology, where both countries are fighting for supremacy so that they can reap commercial and national security benefits. The policies adopted by both sides did not reduce friction; instead they exacerbate suspicion and fuel tension. If Washington and Beijing continue to take a zero-sum view where every gain on one side is a loss for the other, U.S.-China relations could become more conflictual. A clash of values and systems could develop into a massive global ideological rivalry, and competition could escalate in the space, cyber and nuclear domains, making their rivalry more like the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union. Accidents involving US and Chinese military assets in the South China Sea could result in unintentional escalation. However, the US and China are not destined to engage in a new cold war or military confrontation. Policies can eventually be implemented by both countries that allow for better management of their strategic competition. Meanwhile, small and medium-sized powers in the Indo-Pacific region must be diplomatically adept and work collectively to navigate the choppy waters of great power competition.

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