

Middle-Power Responses to China's BRI and America's Indo-Pacific Strategy

A Transformation of Geopolitics

Edited by
Dean Karalekas,
Fu-kuo Liu
Csaba Moldicz



Middle-Power Responses to China's BRI and America's Indo-Pacific Strategy

This page intentionally left blank

Middle-Power Responses to China's BRI and America's Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Transformation of Geopolitics

EDITED BY

DEAN KARALEKAS

University of Central Lancashire, UK

FU-KUO LIU

National Chengchi University, Taiwan

And

CSABA MOLDICZ

Budapest Business School, Hungary



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2022

Editorial matter and selection © 2022 Dean Karalekas, Fu-kuo Liu, and Csaba Moldicz
Individual chapters © 2022 the authors
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

Reprints and permissions service

Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80117-024-6 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-80117-023-9 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-80117-025-3 (Epub)



ISOQAR

REGISTERED

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

ISOQAR certified
Management System,
awarded to Emerald
for adherence to
Environmental
standard
ISO 14001:2004.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Table of Contents

About the Editors	vii
About the Contributors	ix

Part 1 Perspectives on the Competing BRI-FOIP Strategies

Chapter 1 Geopolitical Templates, Trends, and Transformation: The Evolving Maritime Security Architecture and Implications for the Indo-Pacific	3
<i>W. Lawrence S Prabhakar</i>	
Chapter 2 Analysis of Legal Warfare and Corresponding Actions in the South China Sea	25
<i>Ruei-Lin Yu</i>	
Chapter 3 Clash of Interests between China and the United States along the Development of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road	39
<i>Judit Szilágyi</i>	
Chapter 4 The Romance of Three Economic Blocs: EU-China Economic Relations Evolving in an Era of Uncertainty	53
<i>To-hai Liou</i>	

Part 2 Responses by Individual Countries/Regions

Chapter 5 Europe-Asia Connectivity Strategy: A Balancing Act vis-à-vis China's Belt and Road Initiative?	75
<i>Mor Sobol</i>	

Chapter 6 China's Central Asian Nexus and the New Silk Road Project: Comparing the Cases of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan <i>Pál Gyene</i>	91
--	----

Chapter 7 The Sino-American Geopolitics and Geo-Economics from Taiwan to Sri Lanka and beyond <i>Patrick Mendis and Joey Wang</i>	105
---	-----

Chapter 8 ASEAN's Perspective on the Belt and Road Initiative and Indo-Pacific Strategy <i>Hank Lim</i>	129
---	-----

Chapter 9 Philippine National Security Interests and Responses to China's Belt and Road Initiative and US Indo-Pacific Strategy <i>Rommel C. Banlaoi</i>	141
--	-----

Part 3 Competition in the Digital Domain

Chapter 10 Great Power Politics on Information and Communications Technology: Between the United States' Blue Dot Network and China's Belt and Road Initiative <i>Hon-min Yau</i>	163
---	-----

Chapter 11 The Fight for Economic and Digital Supremacy in the New Bipolar World Order: The EU's Response to Global Challenges <i>Teodora Wiesenmayer</i>	179
---	-----

Chapter 12 Assessing the Economic and Political Success of the Digital Silk Road throughout the Indo-Pacific Region <i>Tobias Burgers</i>	197
---	-----

Index	211
-------	-----

About the Editors

Dean Karalekas is a Research Fellow affiliated with the Centre for Austronesian Studies at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston, UK. He is also Cofounder and Editor-at-Large of *Strategic Vision for Taiwan Security*, published by the Taiwan Center for Security Studies and the ROC's National Defense University. His research focuses on civil-military relations, self-identification, nation building, and traditional ecological knowledge. He spent several years as a journalist, educator, and immigration consultant in East Asia, and authored the book *Civil-Military Relations in Taiwan: Identity and Transformation*.

Fu-Kuo Liu is a Research Fellow at the Institute of International Relations and Professor in the International Doctoral Program in Asia Pacific Studies (IDAS), College of Social Sciences, National Chengchi University. He is also Director of the Taiwan Center for Security Studies (TCSS). His research focuses on Asia-Pacific security, Asian regionalism, national security, and the South China Sea, the peace process across the Taiwan Strait, US strategy in Asia, Asian maritime security, and Taiwan foreign and security policy.

Csaba Moldicz, PhD, is Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations, Faculty of International Business and Management, Budapest Business School, Hungary. His main research area is the economic integration process of the European Union and China, with a special focus on the Central and Eastern European region. Currently, he is a Head of Research at Oriental Business and Innovation Centre, which was established in 2016 by the Budapest Business School and the Central Bank of Hungary. He is an Associate Research Fellow of the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Hungary) and the China-CEE Institute.

This page intentionally left blank

About the Contributors

Rommel C. Banlaoi is President of the Philippine Association for Chinese Studies (PACS) and a member of the Management Board of the World Association for Chinese Studies (WACS). He is also a Professorial Lecturer at the Department of International Studies of Miriam College Philippines, an Adjunct Professor at the National Institute of South China Sea Studies in Hainan, Chairman of the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research (PIPVTR), and a member of the board of the China-Southeast Asian Research Center on the South China Sea (CSARC).

Tobias Burgers is a Project Assistant Professor at the Cyber Civilization Research Center, Keio Global Research Institute, Keio University, where he is researching a wide array of topics regarding the (further) integration of cyber technologies into our societies. His research explores how new technologies change the dynamics of conflict and subsequently, the relationship between conflict, politics, and society. He is increasingly interested in understanding how new technologies are changing the relationship between states and citizens in East Asia, and in particular, the high-tech governance model of China.

Pál Gyene is an Associate Professor at Budapest Business School, Faculty of International Management and Business. His main fields of research are comparative politics and transitology, with a special focus on the post-Soviet Central Asian region.

Hank Lim is Director for research at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs. He has extensive experience and exposure in international and regional cooperation issues. His areas of specialization include ASEAN, APEC and East Asian economies. He was the first Singapore Representative to the APEC Eminent Persons Group (EPG). From 1990 to 1993, he served as the first Director General of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) International Secretariat in Singapore.

To-hai Liou is a Professor of diplomacy and Director of the Center for WTO Studies at the College of International Affairs, National Chengchi University. He has been a Visiting Fellow at the University of Melbourne (2001–2002), the University of Calgary (2002), Australian National University (2006–2007), Masaryk University (2008 and 2009) in the Czech Republic, Hallym University of Graduate Studies (2010), and at the Centre for Dialogue at La Trobe University

(2011) under the Executive Endeavour Award of the Australian Government and Kyungpook National University. He is the author or coauthor of multiple books on Korea. He received his PhD from the University of Arizona.

Patrick Mendis is a former American Diplomat and military Professor, and is currently a Taiwan Fellow of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China and a distinguished Visiting Professor of Global Affairs at the National Chengchi University in Taipei.

W. Lawrence S Prabhakar is currently an Author, Researcher and Professor of International Relations and Strategic Studies. He is Advisor to the Centre for Public Policy Research, Kochi, India and formerly Associate Professor Department of Political Science at Madras Christian College in Chennai, India. He specializes in academic and policy research on the following areas: Nuclear Missile issues in Southern Asia; on Maritime Security issues in the Indian Ocean and the Asia Pacific Region, Grand Strategy of China and on research in India-United States Strategic Relations; Grand Strategy of India.

Mor Sobol is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Diplomacy and International Relations at Tamkang University, as well as an Affiliated Research Fellow at the European Union Centre in Taiwan (EUTW). His main research interests center on European and Chinese foreign policy, Mediterranean politics, Taiwan/China–Israel relations, and institutionalist theories.

Judit Szilágyi is an Assistant Professor at the Budapest Business School. Her main fields of research are global shifts in economic and political power between the US and China and specific areas of the Belt and Road Initiative. She previously worked as a research fellow at the Institute of World Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and more recently has conducted research projects with the Oriental Business and Innovation Center of the Budapest Business School, including a research scholarship at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan.

Joey Wang is a Defense Analyst as well as an Alumnus of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Teodora Wiesenmayer is an Editor at Budapest's *Helikon Publishing* and formerly served as Head of International Affairs at Budapest Business School, Faculty of International Management and Business. She received her Doctorate from the Modern English and American Literature Programme at Eötvös Loránd University's Faculty of Humanities, Doctoral School of Literature and Literary Theory. She also holds an MA in International Relations, and has qualified as an International Relations Expert.

Hon-min Yau is an Assistant Professor at the Graduate Institute of Strategic Studies (GISS), War College, ROC National Defense University. He received his PhD from the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth University in Wales. His research interests focus on global security, technology, and national security policy.

Ruei-Lin Yu received his PhD from the Graduate Institute of National Development, National Taiwan University. He also holds an MS of Electronic Engineering from New York's Columbia University and an MA in International Relations from Salve Regina University. He also graduated from the Naval Staff College of the United States for his military degree. He currently serves as an Associate Professor and the Director of Graduate Institute of Strategic Studies, National Defense University, ROC. He is also an active-duty Navy Captain who spent more than 10 years at sea. His research fields include international relations theory, international law and politics of the sea, social system theory, national security, and nontraditional security.

This page intentionally left blank

Part 1
Perspectives on the Competing BRI-FOIP
Strategies

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 1

Geopolitical Templates, Trends, and Transformation: The Evolving Maritime Security Architecture and Implications for the Indo-Pacific

W. Lawrence S Prabhakar

1.1 Introduction

The evolving global order, and specifically the regional economic and security order throughout Asia, has spawned various derivatives of unprecedented turbulence in the Indo-Pacific region. This systemic turbulence was the ironic consequence of unmatched economic growth and trade expansion in Asia (Acharya, 2014). Combined with this economic growth and the lateral expansion of Asia's civilizational powers was the indisputable reality that such growth had also fostered interdependence and integration through various new regionalism frameworks that were primarily economic, and which coexisted with the overlay of the US-led postwar hub-and-spokes arrangement of bilateral security partnerships (Acharya & Buzan, 2010). The first two decades of the post-Cold War period saw the prevalence of relative stability due to the hegemonic role of the United States then prevailing in the region (Ikenberry, 2014).

The onset of global-scale asymmetric wars, however, and the manner in which these intertwined with the reconfigured global and regional posture of the United States, began to test the endurance of stability and security in the global arena, and more specifically in the Indo-Pacific (Kang, 2003). As globalization led to global and regional transformation, the rise of a "China as civilizational power" narrative emerged as the single catalyzing impact for the region and the extended region's economic growth, interdependence, and hopes for integration. The assertiveness of China's "peaceful rise" presented tremendous challenges and constituted the single primary variable that has since been a source of global and regional turbulence. The economic rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) was robustly complimented by a strategic rise, replete with conventional military and strategic nuclear modernization.

It is highly significant to note that the nature of both the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific concepts encompasses an overwhelming maritime component, impacting the region's economic growth, the interdependence of commerce and trade, and integration via the new regionalism of free trade areas. This new regionalism has spawned an alphabet soup of regional groupings, with a view to establishing an Indo-Pacific “circumferential highway of markets and connectivity” (Oba, 2019).

Assessing the dynamics of global and regional transformation in the context of China's assiduous Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it is pertinent to point out that the PRC has been tremendously successful in repositioning itself as a maritime power and eliciting a civilizational legacy using a 3Cs – commerce, connectivity, and culture – template for pushing its rise on the back of the postglobalization order that followed the colossal global crisis of 2008.

Inflated in its rise, Beijing leveraged the continental and maritime axes of the geopolitics of its BRI, and in a very consummate scope, China has achieved substantial and significant progress in establishing the maritime corridors of the BRI's Maritime Silk Road component that radiate out on all sides, particularly into the Indo-Pacific. Beijing now has its eyes set on the Southern Ocean and the African and Latin American heartlands (Prabhakar, 2017).

Since 2009, when the People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN) emerged as the senior service of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the transformational dynamics of the Indo-Pacific saw the reaffirmation of China's repositioning of its maritime legacy and power. Even as the United States progressed with its Global Posture Review, sequencing it from 2004, the realignments that were evident were once again reaffirmed in the reconfiguration of the Indo-Pacific by the administration of former President Barack Obama and the US Pivot (later “Rebalance”) to Asia that followed in 2011, with a planned 60:40 rebalance of naval and air assets in expeditionary-strike and amphibious formations. This latter significantly bolstered the forward presence of US forces, with Port Darwin in Australia now used as a forward operating base hosting naval infantry to support Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in the region.

Elucidating its civilizational legacy was a classic *tous azimuths* gambit by China. Beijing had begun to realize that extending domain influence up to the Third Island Chain would necessitate a reaffirmation of its hoary civilizational history and a reconceptualization of that narrative premised on the maritime domain – hence the renewed focus on the celebrated voyage of Admiral Zheng He of Ming Dynasty era. Cartographic and geographic claims predicated on this “lost heritage” have been pressed by the PRC in its quest to establish itself as a central power in global and regional geopolitics.¹

China's Maritime Silk Road project hints at its strategic vision of a Three Island Chains domain in the years to come, whereby Beijing is recapitulating its tributary system (with contemporary Chinese characteristics) and enacting a pacification strategy to establish a Mandate of Heaven paradigm derived from the confluence of oceans and seas that it inherently claims to be its domain (Zhou, 2011; Zhu, 2015).

This chapter endeavors to analyze (1) the transformational dynamics of the Indo-Pacific maritime security architecture; (2) the catalysts of Indo-Pacific

maritime security dynamics; (3) the reemergence of a great-power power play in the Indo-Pacific in terms of its templates and trends; and (4) the vistas of the Indo-Pacific maritime order.

1.2 Transformational Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Architecture

The security and economic dynamics of the Indo-Pacific maritime realm has been in the throes of continual transformation since the end of the Cold War. The two phases of the post-Cold War period – between 1991 and 2001, and from 2001 to the present – have seen fundamental power shifts that have affected the region in its economic profile and strategic dynamics (Auslin, 2010).

The transforming nature of Indo-Pacific stability has been a critical issue for the region as a whole. There have been five critical issues that have had a pertinent impact on the stability of Indo-Pacific maritime security and have been transformational in scope by the regional and extra-regional stakeholders in maritime transit, trade, and security in the region, viz: (1) the avoidance of a major war, (2) a stable distribution of power, (3) the stability of norms and institutions, (4) domestic political stability, and (5) financial and economic stability (Ayson, 2005).

The Indo-Pacific Region has a very large and complex share of territorial disputes and maritime claims that arise primarily from China's assertive claims in the South China Sea's Spratly and Paracel Islands. The challenge that Beijing poses to freedom of navigation and its construction of artificial islands, as well as its claims to the seas around these islands, pose a challenge to the existing archipelagic claims of Southeast Asian states, especially those of Vietnam and the Philippines. Even as maritime trade has grown as a form of economic integration and interdependence, spawning several overlapping economic cooperation agreements of new regionalism within maritime corridors of trade, the new momentum in military modernization, arms buildup, and the growing potential for an outright arms race has reached a high intensity and continues unabated (see Rolland, 2015).

The US rebalance and recent realignments have sparked a relative decline in the influence of the United States (despite maintaining a colossal economic and military presence) and thus the resilience of the US-centered Asia-Pacific alliance system is now being tested by China through a variety of Anti Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategies (Tellis & Mirski, 2013).

In this dynamic environment defined by a Chinese challenge to the US hegemonic presence, it is increasingly important for middle maritime powers like India, Japan, and Australia to live up to their respective roles and responsibilities in the Indo-Pacific region (Auslin, 2012).

The inevitable emergence of a new Cold War in the Indo-Pacific is a prevalent view, given the tensions in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. Chinese challenges to the US Navy's FONOPs, and Beijing's strident opposition to the US

naval presence in the region, show that the PRC is contesting the very idea of a free and open Indo-Pacific (Parameswarn, 2019).

Is a new Cold War on the horizon? Will there be a power transition? If so, what contexts and what levels of absolute and relative categories are evident? Is a power shift evident? If so, whose calibration of power has been in relative rise or decline? These are some of the pertinent questions that arise (Pardesi, 2020).

China's restrictive Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) is complimented by the swarming of its littoral naval craft confronting extra-regional naval passage. China's actions in the South China Sea – treating it as its own semi-enclosed sea – and challenging the FONOPs of extra-regional powers like the United States, India, and Japan support the supposition that a new Cold War is brewing. It is within this context that the US presence in the Asia-Pacific is of increasingly critical importance, and the deployment of forward-based naval and air assets would serve to enhance America's deterrence capabilities and calm the nerves of regional states. Recent trends, however, reveal the vagaries of US defense outlays as fluctuating, challenging the sustainability of forward-deployed capabilities (Couture, 2016).

The new regionalism of trans-regional cooperation is now the main narrative used to offset the cruel blow of the recent trade wars. China's assiduous BRI and the ever-shifting goalposts of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and Regional Comprehensive Partnership contest and yet ensure the region's economic growth, with prospects for enhancing integration and interdependence.

China launched the BRI in 2013 by combining its Silk Road Economic Belt (consisting of trans-Eurasian continental economic corridor linkages) with its Maritime Silk Road initiative. The latter aims at maritime Asia-Pacific linkages encompassing a population of 4.4 billion people and a collective GDP of US\$21 trillion in mostly emerging markets, with a huge potential for growth (Elek, 2015).

Is a *Pax Sinica* in the Indo-Pacific inevitable? This hypothesis emerges as a natural consequence of the growing PRC influence in the region combined with robust Chinese investments in Asian maritime and continental connectivity. With its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, China's trans-regional economic initiatives are being built on buoyant economic strength that has attracted Asia-Pacific countries to bandwagon with China for economic gain even as they would prefer to align with the United States for security reasons (see Vuving, 2012).

Would a *Pax Sinica* necessarily entail the supplanting of the Westphalian system with a reconceptualization of the ancient Chinese tributary system? Could China's take on international relations contribute to a stable and peaceful Asia and Indo-pacific as it emerges stronger? History informs us that China's periods of weakness have resulted in chaos (Epp, 2013).

The prospects for Beijing's establishing of a hierarchical order in the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific with itself at the apex is not without its own challenges, including growing domestic unrest, flattening economic growth, and the intense rivalry with Japan (Buzan, 2015). With the United States supporting the regional powers in the Indo-Pacific, and the ongoing crackdown on freedom in Hong Kong, how would China respond to a persistent US (and allied) naval presence in

the region? How would the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus, and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) as an informal working arrangement, work out?

Reinforcing American primacy has to be the counterresponse to the PRC's assertion of its *Pax Sinica* (Evans, 2011, p. 112). The relevance of US primacy is only possible given the enduring scientific and technological edge, despite numerous challenges, that the United States continues to enjoy over its rivals, especially China. Scientific innovation and technological leadership would be the mainstay of Washington's efforts to maintain dominance in the economic and military sectors. Continued US bolstering of allies and efforts to rebalance China would reconfigure the strategic, economic, and eventually the maritime balance in the Indo-Pacific (Beckley, 2011).

What is the future of US offshore balancing? If the United States resorts to a recessed posture due to a combination of economic difficulties and deep cuts in its defense budget resulting in complications to forward deployment, would the US global reach of expeditionary strike forces and the amphibious capabilities of its naval, air, space, and cyber forces provide assurance of extended deterrence in the Indo-Pacific? This is a moot question (Walt, 2011). The United States enjoys preponderant strategic, military, scientific, and technological resources that give it that capability to develop and deploy assets for long-range precision offensive strikes. This could result in a temptation to effect a significant reduction in US forward base commitments, making offshore balancing an attractive strategic option for the United States ("Indo-Pacific Strategies," 2020).

How credible could the concert of middle powers be? This is the critical question for Indo-Pacific stability and order. The maritime-based economic interdependence and security architecture in the Indo-Pacific – Asia's middle power coalition gains even greater significance in the context of US realignments – bring convergent economic integration and security cooperation of the maritime powers (Medcalf & Mohan, 2014).

India, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and Indonesia would emerge as partners in such a middle powers coalition, with the strong support of Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam in the process. The middle powers coalition would thus work on bilateral economic and security convergence and partnerships that would form the axis of a coalition. Shared interests in geography, capabilities, interests, and functional objectives would create the foundation for minilateral alliances.

The middle powers coalition would pivotally act in promise of resolving regional challenges and crises and would serve as strategic insurance to the US-China relationship: be that a potential US-China confrontation, or conflict, Chinese hegemony, or an accommodation between Washington and Beijing.

1.3 The Catalysts of Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Dynamics

There are strong catalysts in the new regionalism and security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. What are these catalysts? What will be their impact? What

derivatives are evident? The Indo-Pacific's maritime security dynamics is replete with several catalytic effects and impacts.

The contestation of terminology and its scope is an important aspect. The post-Cold War vista of the Indo-Pacific has been both an American invention and a Japanese elucidation of the confluence of oceans intended to catalyze the seamless nature of economic integration and security convergence (Chacko, 2012). In the absence of an overarching NATO-style security architecture, the informal working arrangement of the QUAD has found currency, yet it has not been very effective.² The etymological emphasis and the prominence of the "Indo" in the binary concept of the Indo-Pacific has been most important for India, yet protestations from China – and, earlier, Indonesia – about the "Indian" of the Indian Ocean or "Indo" of the Indo-Pacific have been challenged (Chacko & Willis, 2018). Extending the narrative, even from an Indian point of view, it is debatable whether the politics of this term "Indo" refers to India in the Indian Ocean context, or whether it is an American stratagem to build coalitions that would involve India as the fulcrum in a new architecture that the United States intends to build counter China (Shambaugh, 2013). The politics underlining this usage have evoked some debate in India on its stance. The debate, however, is largely focused on whether India should act with strategic autonomy to build its own conception of the emergent security architecture in a region in multi-alignment, or follow the great-power alliances led by the United States?

The Indo-Pacific is largely defined by the triangular strategic transactions in the region between the United States, China, and India. With the United States hinging its strategic pivot in the region on deployment of its naval and air forces and its economic reengagement in the region, it is widely acknowledged that the United States is responding to the economic and strategic assertion of Chinese might in the region; in essence, responding to the concerns of its allies (Cheung, 2014). The US rebalance is also seen as augmenting its resources in the region in an era of its own relative decline. As a geopolitical construction, the Indo-Pacific provides new heft to the United States, envisaging and providing the means to bolster its presence and also engage in coalition-building, strengthening the existing hub-and-spokes alliances with Japan, South Korea, and Australia (Scott, 2018). The United States also wishes to engage in a strategic partnership with India to provide a hedge against China on the western flank, complementing Japan's role on the eastern flank.

The Indo-Pacific formulation and the strategic engagement of India combine to serve as a catalyst to Indian action in the region at America's behest. At this juncture, India needs to assess how its strategic interests would be promoted and to what extent its strategic autonomy would be preserved (Scott, 2012). Given India's engagement with the Pacific powers through naval diplomacy (see Chellaney, 2020), is India working for the US architecture to contain China, or is India balancing its own interests? Would such a power shift result in a power transition between the United States and China, given the increasing acrimony of trade disputes, economic relationships, the fight over 5G technology, and the race for dominance in artificial intelligence (AI)? This is a critical factor that is