

Indo-Pacific Region in the 21st Century: Geostrategy for Making or Breaking an Emergent New World Order

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Abstract

The world order is currently evolving and there is an evident shift as the Western-centric United States unipolar order's is relatively weakening and its hegemony is challenged by the rising Non-Western-centric multipolar order. This is happening across different strategic geopolitical regions, including the Indo-Pacific region. The decline of a hegemony can be heralded by an increasing level of competition and conflict between different geopolitical actors in the international system, when the 'old' hegemonic order is not yet 'dead' and the 'new' hegemonic order is not established. A situation arises where interpretations and representations of geostrategic imperatives take place as 'informational geopolitics' as the various international actors seek to be subjects and not objects of the unfolding process and events, such as India that inhabits a unique position, but not without its risks. This paper analyses academic literature on those geostrategic imperatives of the different actors and finds a rather transactional US approach to maintain its hegemony and a more relational approach by actors in the emergent new world order.

1. Introduction:

An order consists of and is sustained by a delicate balance between two aspects – power and legitimacy – managing this delicate state is the essence of statesmanship (Kissinger, 2015, p. 367). Throughout the history of mankind, orders have risen and eventually fallen, to be replaced by another order. There is an increasing level of consensus that the 21st century is in the process of witnessing the relative decline of the Western-centric United States unipolar order, and the relative rise of the non-Western-centric multipolar order (Jiang, 2023; Cooley and Nexon, 2020). Further, Weixing and Weizhan (2020, p. 143) state that “the US-China relationship defines geopolitics in the 21st century.” These geopolitical moments in history are accompanied by an increased level of geopolitical competition between different powers that seek to either defend the existing hegemony or to position themselves independently as a subject rather than object of international relations.

This creates the demand and need for the various sovereign actors to develop a geostrategic approach for managing and regulating various risks and opportunities in international relations (Brzezinski, 1997). Around the globe, strategically important regions become increasingly contested zones by the rising power(s) with the hegemonic power. Geostrategic shifts have been focusing increasing attention, competition and conflict in the Indo-Pacific region, where different powers have been positioning themselves to protect or project their national interests and national security (Lambert, 2022). The US has decided to

defend its world order, including in the Indo-Pacific region, which has given major actors in the region pause to consider their geostrategy to the US geostrategic imperatives and goal of hegemonic consolidation at the expense of the rising world order. This poses potentially complex and serious risks for countries that seek to play a non-aligned balancer role in international relations, such as India for example.

This paper seeks to understand the role of information and knowledge production by academic knowledge producers that seek to create a theoretically informed geostrategic policy narrative on balancing and mitigating perceived geopolitical risk. Great powers are currently competing in a contest concerning whose geopolitical discourse shall delineate and define the world order of the 21st century (Hakata and Cannon, 2021, p. 18). This raises two research questions to analyse the geostrategic interpretations and representations of the pool of research papers on the topic that were collected. What are the most common and prominent attributions of geopolitical risk assigned by the researchers, and the suggested geostrategic remedies?

There are a total of four different sections to this article. In the first section, the aspect and phenomenon of informational geopolitics is introduced, defined and explained. US geostrategy is the topic of the second section, in terms of it being a concept as well as a practice. The third section gives a brief overview of the evolving global order, which is in the process of the relative decline of the old world order and the rise of a new world order. Finally, the fourth section focuses on the case study interpreting academic text on geostrategies

being proposed for the Indo-Pacific region and whether they focused on coping or adapting to geopolitical change.

2. Informational Geopolitics

The human environment is divided into three different realms: the physical realm where events and processes take place in an objective manner (in so far as they occur, and without analysis); the information realm, which is where those people, place, events and processes in the physical realm are interpreted and represented introducing bias; and the cognitive realm as the place in the human mind that makes sense of stimuli from the other two realms to create a world view. Geopolitics currently goes beyond the traditional strains of classic, critical and so forth, when geopolitics employs the fifth dimension of strategy (information and knowledge) the operational environment is subjected to subjective interpretation and representation to create opportunities for the communicator and obstacles for the opponent (Simons, 2022b). However, not all information and knowledge are considered equal in terms of its reliability and utility. Gaffey (2021) notes that some sources of knowledge (such as mass media or academia) are trusted, especially when there is an attempt to navigate, understand and avoid risk in an increasingly uncertain world.

Vultee (2023) seeks to address in his book how academics and professionals are able to address the problematic challenge to a public's role in decision-making process that is created by the manipulation of perception and practice of 'security.' This is found in how and why the construction of threats to societal structures and political-institutional structures through security framing that involves the manipulative use of identity or culture or exceptionalism (Us versus Them) as well as vague and threatening forms of risk and hazard. Knowledge and information are used as a weapon in 21st century international relations, especially given the increased competition and conflict resulting from an evolving world order. The US attempts to create an orthodoxy of knowledge, which is attempted by attempting to dominate the global information space with their narrative to the point that this is taken as a 'truth' (even if it is a lie) and other explanations are ignored as the cognitive realm of the audience has already been colonised. This is the basis for enabling obstructive foreign policy, which is the ability of the holder of the orthodoxy of knowledge to interfere with the foreign policy of other states by imposing perceptions of increased weakness and threats in the ability of the target country to articulate and implement foreign policy that meets its interests and security (Simons, 2021). Hence the informational-psychological game of cat and mouse between the US and other international actors that it seeks to render as its useful objects in international relations.

3. US Geostrategy as a Concept and a Practice

The US and its key alliance members are maritime and airpowers in terms of the ability to best project international force and influence, a number of those international actors that they seek to constrain and restrain ('opposing' and neutral powers) are continental powers (China, India, Iran and Russia). Hence, the US need for other continental powers, such as India, are needed to have a chance to

successfully implement their geostrategic imperatives and priorities. Geostrategy are the pragmatic operational aspects of realising geopolitical goals, which is set forth and envisioned in terms of the purposeful management of geographic space, the ability to exercise influence and power to one's advantage over competitors. For example, after the end of the Cold War, Brzezinski clarified the formulation of US's Eurasian geostrategy in the form of two basic steps.

First, to identify the geostrategically dynamic Eurasian states that have the power to cause a potentially important shift in the international distribution of power and to decipher the central external goals of their respective political elites and the likely consequences of their seeking to attain them; and to pinpoint geopolitically critical Eurasian states whose location and/or existence have catalytic effects either on the more active geostrategic players or on regional conditions; second, to formulate specific US policies to offset, co-opt, and/or control the above, so as to preserve and promote vital US interests, and to conceptualise a more comprehensive geostrategy that establishes on a global scale the interconnection between the more specific US policies (Brzezinski, 1997, pp. 39-40).

This was conceived at a point in time when the Cold War had not long ended, leaving the US as the sole remaining superpower and global hegemon. It marked the beginnings of the unipolar world order, where the US sought to further expand its influence and fulfil their ideological prophecy of the 'End of History.' Through articulating the goals of geostrategy, geostrategic imperatives are derived in form and substance. "The three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together" (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 40). These imperatives that Brzezinski articulated for the expansion and maintenance of US global hegemony perfectly illustrates a quote associated with Henry Kissinger who was once credited with saying (paraphrased) that the US has no permanent allies or enemies, only permanent interests.

In the 21st century at this moment in time, the US is desperately seeking to preserve its hegemony, hence the pertinence of Brzezinski's geostrategic imperatives are highly relevant and actual, even though they are being attempted in a period of the relative decline of US global hegemony (see further on for more detail under emerging new world order). As such, both friend and foe alike run the risk of becoming a victim of US geostrategy that seeks total dominance of the global geopolitical space (Simons, 2022a). Jiang (2023, p. 175) notes that the US has simultaneously rather than consecutively confronted their challengers in key global geopolitical regions – Russia in Europe, Iran in the Middle East and China in Asia-Pacific. Furthermore, the geostrategic approach seems to be in the process of failing and accelerating rather than arresting the transformation of the global order. In order not to become an object of US geopolitics, actors need to be highly attune to the information and cognitive aspects of contemporary geopolitics.

4. Emerging New World Order

Henry Kissinger noted that "every international order must sooner or later face the impact of two tendencies challenging its cohesion: either a redefinition of legitimacy or a significant shift in the balance of power" (Kissinger, 2015, p.

365). In the first tendency, values and norms that manage and regulate international interactions are radically altered or abandoned by the hegemonic actor or overturned by those who successfully confront and defeat the hegemon. The second tendency occurs when it becomes impossible to accommodate a major change in power relations, where survival of the power(s) that can adapt to the new environment and the collapse of powers that are unwilling/unable/incapable of the necessary change. Kissinger (2015) understood the US global hegemonic order was under pressure and a challenge from different non-Western orders, such as Islamism, China and Russia. This required a rethinking of the US place in the world, their underlying philosophy, mission and relations with other powers.

Other US academic authors were more precise as to the nature of the challenge to US global hegemony, and to possible responses that consider the declining capabilities and capacities of to confront those challengers. Brooks and Wohlforth (2016) classified the US as a hegemon in relative decline, which was facilitated by two decades of exhausting wars of choice, economic setbacks, and rapidly rising rival powers. They believe that the US 'deserves' to continue in its global leadership role as international retrenchment would create security risks for the US. However, to manage to successfully defend and keep its position, fundamental changes and reforms need to be enacted and implemented. This includes the task of focusing on its core interests that include reducing great power rivalry and security competition in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Furthermore, to cultivate economic globalisation and the system of multilateral institutions, all of which advance US interests.

Although Cooley and Nexon (2020) agreed that the US was in a state of relative decline as a global hegemon, they did not believe that the situation could be reversed and therefore the US should focus on managing and regulating that decline as much as possible for a smoother transition. The US, its international system of liberal democracy and accompanying institutions were in a state of stress and decay. Three paths of risk and threat were identified: China and Russia have positioned themselves as challengers to the US world order with alternative values, norms and institutions; medium and small states in the international system seek patronage and security partnerships from alternative sources to the US and its allies (such as countries from Asia, Middle East, Africa and Latin America), hence any patron-client relationship there is less durable than between US and its Western-centric partners that share the ideology of liberal democracy; the political ideology challenge in terms of identity and world view, both internal and external through the rise of 'illiberalism', nationalism and culturally conservative forces. The 'old' world order, which is currently in a state of relative decline, consists of Western-centric countries subordinated to a US unipolar system that is in a state of aggressive defence. The 'new' world order that is in the process of emerging is constituted of Non-Western-centric countries that coalesce around a multipolar order of different sized powers in different global regions (Simons and Glaser, 2019). Of course, such a highly complex and volatile global operational environment creates threats and challenges for formulating an appropriate geostrategic approach that can mitigate the

weaknesses and threats while leveraging the strengths and opportunities.

5. Geostrategies in the Indo-Pacific: Coping or Adapting to Geopolitical Change?

After conducting a targeted internet search for suitable texts to analyse and interpret, using the search term "geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific", some 15 texts were selected for narrative analysis. The focus was on texts that have been published since 2015, which approximately coincides with the increase in competition and conflict between great powers of the Indo-Pacific region, most notably the US and China. In turn, academic researchers are drawn to attempting to understand the geopolitical risks and hazards, and in some cases to propose a geostrategic approach that may alleviate or mitigate weaknesses and threats from the perspective of national interests and national security.

The Indo-Pacific region is an ideational construction of a geographical political reality, it is a geopolitical representation that is intended to permit the cognitive task of imagining the convergence of strategic interests, national priorities and interests, identifying an appropriate geostrategic programme to mitigate risks and take advantage of opportunities (Hakata and Cannon, 2021). It is also a means of engineering political consensus and public consent for the conceptualisation and implementation of the geostrategic approach that can make or break a world order. Historically speaking, the idea of an Indo-Pacific region has been present in geopolitics since 1920, the rapidly increasing competition and conflict between the US with China since the 2011 Asia Pivot has ensured much more political and policy attention (Bishoyi, 2016; Choong, 2019; Khurana, 2019). The increased significance and relevance of the Indo-Pacific area as a region of interest and geopolitical ordering has risen in tandem with the China's increased political and economic power. In particular, the China's articulation of its Belt Road Initiative (BRI) has been seen as a geopolitical and geo-economic threat to US hegemony, which relies heavily on military strength to enforce the dominance of its 'rules-based order' (Henderson et al., 2020; Khurana, 2019). An assessment of the US decline provides an interesting insight into possible constraints and restraints on the US and how it may engage in developing its geostrategic response. "The US now accepts that it needs assistance to uphold its position in the Indo-Pacific space" (Henderson et al., 2020, p. 5). Interestingly, China does not use Indo-Pacific region in its official documents but continues to use the previously used Western term of Asia-Pacific region. The reason for this is simple and clear, "Chinese leaders believe that the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy aims to contain China's rise" (Kai and Mingjiang, 2020, p. 2). In another sharp criticism of the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical concept, one conclusion was that the "concept is not simply an objective geopolitical descriptor, but rather a controversial and contested discursive field, subject to multiple interpretations. Such a polarising concept will likely contribute to further sharpening of strategic mistrust and geopolitical competition among the region's major powers" (Wilkins and Kim, 2022, p. 415). In the context of the world order transformations, the various global regions have mutual impacts and influences upon each other.

Lambert (2022) notes that geostrategic shifts have impacted the Indo-Pacific region in response to China's rise, the geopolitical and geo-economic transformations have started the process of moving the world order from an Atlantic to an Asian focus. This being further reinforced by Russia's strategic pivot from the Atlantic to Asia resulting from increasing levels of conflict. Countries from different regions (such as Africa or Middle East) are increasingly being drawn towards realigning their foreign and trade policy with China. This geopolitical situation leaves South Asian countries, such as India, with a potentially pivotal role in the redistribution and balance of global and regional power.

Rivalry and competition between the US with China existed before the BRI, however, as an expression of the law of relativity applied to international relations (an action creates an equal, but opposite reaction), the level of competition and conflict has increased. Mingjiang (2020, pp. 186-187) made a four key statements of assumption on the Chinese motivation and perception of the role and function of BRI for China and her foreign policy.

1. It appears that the BRI is regarded as a legacy project to shape and influence Chinese foreign policy for decades ahead. As such, it features very highly in Chinese foreign policy and their international strategy. However, it shall also have an equally profound effect upon international politics and international security. Beijing has a very ambitious geostrategic agenda behind the BRI, which is related to geo-economics rather than geopolitics. Geopolitical realities and objectives in the Indo-Pacific have emerged after the launch of the BRI.
2. China's geostrategic imperative expressed in its strong desire to protect its economic interests in the BRI regions that is tied to the context of retaining its development interest (of China) is incrementally changing Chinese international strategy and massively affecting and influencing security policy. This is seen in in expanding role of the Chinese military in protecting development interests, resulting in an increased Chinese military presence beyond Asia, in the BRI regions there is a more active role of the Chinese military in security issues, evolving Chinese military activities in the area of non-traditional security beyond the national borders, the enhancement of military-to-military partnerships with numerous other countries.
3. A more visible and assertive foreign and security strategy and presence from China is likely to draw counterstrategies from other powers. This is already seen with respect to the BRI as a geo-economic project that the US counters through its military oriented geopolitical representation of freedom of navigation activities, "free and open Indo-Pacific" concept and QUAD.
4. The creation of a geo-economics-security nexus, where a state as China that creates and develops geo-economic projects can also initiative them to develop new geostrategic interests and objectives. This in turn transforms a state's international security strategy that impacts and affects its security ties with other countries owing to the creation entirely new dynamics. Weixing and Weizhan (2020, p. 169) note that China

has not so far acted in kind to the increasingly aggressive and conflict-based US geostrategic approach to China and the BRI as Beijing does not want to risk a Cold War with the US at its current stage of development as this may risk its development aims and goals. There are, however, increasing calls from inside in China for greater vigilance against the US containment policy. At this stage, China prefers to engage in a longer-term, smarter and more sophisticated geostrategic game compared to the rather blunt and unsophisticated US approach in order to ultimately prevail. Although, it is plainly clear that the US has initiated a Cold War with China (and Russia) at this stage, whether or not China likes or admits to this point. The US geostrategic imperatives, which were given by Brzezinski in the Grand Chessboard are clear, to keep its system of vassal and client (tributary) states dependent, protected and obedient and to prevent the rise of competing powers. In general, the rise of China was seen as a potential threat to uncontested US global hegemony, the announcement of the BRI accelerated and compounded those fears. These are processes that are greatly influenced and shaped the interpretations and representations at play in the information shape that in turn influence and engineer perceptions, opinions and world views in the cognitive realm. From the 2017 US National Security Strategy under the Trump presidency, the US openly represented China as a revisionist state and a strategic competitor that sought to challenge US power, influence and interests and to erode US security and prosperity, which was followed by the US initiated trade war in early 2018 (Kai and Mingjiang, 2020, p. 2). Thus, the US geopolitical strategy began to shift from cooperation of the 1990s, to competition and has since the transformation into conflict.

In terms of its Indo-Pacific China containment strategy, the US considers itself to have three main QUAD partners (Australia, India and Japan), and attempts to woo other Asian powers to its cause. Non-QUAD states, such as Indonesia, South Korea and Vietnam differ in their perceptions and approach and tend to prefer to tame and not contain China. They attempt to stand outside the constraints of formal alliances shaped for serving US geostrategic goals and interests. Furthermore, the reasons for resisting being drawn in as objects of the US is "mainly because of the declining hegemon's (seemingly) weakened commitment to a liberal international order and the rising challenger's (potential) opposition and punishment" (Jung et al., 2021, p. 53). History is rife with examples of the need to show caution and not become an object of US geostrategic imperatives, such as the role of the US armed and supported Iraq in its war with Iran (1980-89), used to weaken, contain and if possible, to overthrow the Iranian government that had recently humiliated the US and exited its orbit of influence. Therefore, there is a fear that if they join a formal alliance they become objects of US geostrategic rivalry with China, becoming expendable given the US is a maritime and air power that needs continental powers to challenge and confront China. It is not in the interests of other powers in the Indo-Pacific region to forego economic opportunities with China, especially when they are lacking with the US. Hence, the best geostrategic option in terms of balancing interests, opportunities and risks is by maintaining strategic ambiguity with the rival great powers, preserve the liberal status quo and to facilitate economic cooperation (Jung et al., 2021, p. 67).

India takes a principled stand in international relations where it adheres and differs to the authority of international law, which is where it differs from the West's 'rules-based order' that relies on coercing other countries to 'do as we say, not as we do.' It is understood that the construct of a rules-based order is a form of representative card stacking that intends to bestow undue advantage to the US-led Western order to retain their geopolitical imperative of hegemonic maintenance. "India has its own geostrategic imperative in its growing engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. It has been developing a multidirectional engagement with the regional and extra-regional powers to protect and promote its national interests" (Bishoyi, 2016, p. 98). The imperative interpreted for India in this instance is a need to counter emerging security challenges in the region, including military, global transportation routes and economic. Bishoyi went further and stated the urgent need for India to be able to influence and shape the economic and security architectures of the region, which required greater integration with other countries through enhancing economic cooperation, connectivity, cultural and people-to-people exchange and capacity building.

India has embarked upon a programme of relational diplomacy with various regional powers as a means of hedging and mitigating various geopolitical and geo-economic risks and hazards in the Indo-Pacific and Eurasian regions. This is a process of attempting to build a system of reciprocal networks and alliances with partners as an equal, which are respectful of each other's national interests. The strategy of counterbalancing involves the use of collaboration that is mutually beneficial to all parties involved within the framework of a symmetrical relationship. India has had a complicated historical relationship with China, which has included conventional warfare and the annexation of territory, there are periodic border tensions. The historical memory of these events can be potentially exploited by the US in its work of engineering anti-Chinese alliances and the potential for India to be emotionally pushed towards a war with China as a proxy continental power to weaken and contain China. This is not in India or China's interests, it is unlikely the US would get involved directly in any such conflict as they are not a continental power; it would ensure India would become a client state of the US that is dependent on protection and therefore has no choice but to continue its compliance with Brzezinski's geostrategic imperatives. Competition that involves conflict is not in the national interest or security of India.

Considering the abovementioned aspects, Vietnam is becoming an increasingly important regional actor in India's counterbalancing strategy. Vietnam also shares a complicated history of relations with China along with India. Therefore, these two regional powers in the Indo-Pacific region share a common security interest. Although, this relationship should not be solely based on security concerns, but rather a broad spectrum of collaborative political, economic, security and environmental projects (based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, for example) to engineer a long-term and more sustainable mutually beneficial outcome (Aswani et al.,

2022). China has engaged the region to build an image as a reliable economic and military power in Asia, which is where India needs to increase its qualitative and quantitative engagement in informational geopolitics as a means of projecting its image as a major Asian power to attract partners for collaboration.

As a geopolitical representation in a period of a transforming world order, a closer look at the significance, effects and outcomes for India in balancing its interests and relationships with China and the US. Although the Indo-Pacific region is a geopolitical representation, it also needs to be interpreted by the powers of the region that are economically or militarily active there to serve as a guide for informing their geostrategic approach in relation to other actors. For example, to interpret the US and China as a threat or as a challenge to Indian interests and security (Ali and Kamraju, 2019). The ever-present problem of becoming an object rather than a subject of events and processes necessitates a pragmatic, proactive and apt strategy. "Despite having differing foreign policy objectives against the core Indo-Pacific fundamentals, Prime Minister Modi is constructing a robust, proactive, and influential role of India in the Indo-Pacific region without formally aligning with the United States or gesturing any confrontational behaviour against China" (Liu and Jamali, 2021, p. 5). This is an essential matter and geostrategic imperative of ensuring that India retains strategic autonomy and can act in its own interests and security, rather than being forced to act in the interests and security of another power. There needs to be an understanding of the need to separate geo-economics and hard security issues, but at the same time recognising that there can be effects between these two domains that can reinforce or negate the pursuit of national security and national interests. Thus, in order to serve India's geostrategic interests, Modi has pragmatically aligned India with China geo-economically to take advantage of the economic security potential from that relationship, and to not be seen as a security threat by China while at the same time, more geopolitically tied to the US to hedge and balance its security concerns and to avoid being 'punished' by the US for being too 'soft' on China (Liu and Jamali, 2021, p. 31). Every actor and active participant in international relations has various restraints and constraints upon their actions and policy, where power and influence can be unevenly distributed across the five domains of strategy (land, water, air, space and information). It is as important and critical to understand and define oneself as it is other actors and their intentions. National survival during a transforming world order is highly sensitive and depends on the retention of strategic autonomy, the ability to articulate and implement appropriate foreign and security policy in the physical and information realm.

6. Conclusion

A research question was posed in the introduction to this article. What are the most common and prominent attributions of geopolitical risk assigned by the researchers, and the suggested geostrategic remedies? The world order is undergoing a significant transformation, which is increasingly acknowledged by the academic community (Kissinger, 2015; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016; Cooley and

Nexon, 2020), with the Western-centric US unipolar order in a state of relative decline and the non-Western-centric multipolar order on the rise. As global hegemon, the US had three geostrategic alternatives – do nothing, manage the decline or actively seek to regain its previously uncontested hegemony. The final option has been chosen, where the geostrategic imperatives of Brzezinski (1997). The result is there has been a resurgence of geopolitics and geo-economics in the 21st century as different powers compete to position themselves for the possible outcomes of the world order.

In their strategic approach, the US is using short-term strategy, a transactional and asymmetric stance in their relations with other countries. There is a tendency for the US to focus on a coercive approach applied to friend and foe alike to achieve what they believe to be securing their national interests and security, the power of attraction is greatly diminished owing to various crises – political, economic, military, environmental and social (such as the highly corrosive woke ideology that is destroying the foundations of Western civilisation). Therefore, in the current global geopolitical phase, it is crucial to retain agency and strategic autonomy. It should be noted the central role played by informational geopolitics in representing and interpreting the operational environment of international relations, creating the façade of orthodoxies of knowledge to cognitively imagine people, places, events and processes (Simons, 2021). This is seen in the use of representations of geopolitics, specifically the establishment of geopolitical regionalisms as the Indo-Pacific region that places certain cognitive constraints and restraints on some actors while simultaneously releasing others from their restrictions. The ability to control information flows can be used as a means of affecting the operational choices imagined or considered of other actors as a means of obstructive foreign policy, to bestow relative advantage to oneself.

As noted above, maintaining strategic autonomy is critical, especially during periods of change in the world order. There is a need for independent foreign and security policy that supports and promotes national interest and security. To stand a better chance of successfully managing this outcome there is a necessity to create, maintain and communicate a consistent foreign and security policy identity for a country, which is not only concerning branding and reputational management aspects, but also the important function of signalling the country's intent to other countries. In this respect, India has thus far positioned itself rather well to hedge and counterbalance against various risks, threats and opportunities present in the Indo-Pacific region. Pragmatically engaging with all actors in the region and not aligning with one side against another, making deft use of strategic ambiguity to maximise potential opportunities and to minimise potential risks.

By identifying and analysing geostrategic imperatives, which are conceptualised and established to support the geostrategic priorities of India in terms of the goals and end states that are desired. This in turn gives an answer to the research questions posed. Three broad geostrategic imperatives that are interrelated seem to be present in India's case.

- A deliberate and consistent geostrategic approach using pragmatism as opposed to ideology in the operational environment is observed in the writings. This employs relational (not transactional) and reciprocal international interactions. This tends to consist of 'friendly' competition

and cooperation to balance against other powers. Although, there is an urgent need to develop awareness and counterstrategies to US informational geopolitics, not to lose sight of an objective operational understanding and situational awareness.

- As a strategically significant Asian continental power, India tends to balance and hedge its strengths and opportunities against weaknesses and threats. It is an apparent means of balancing between different great powers (namely China and US), yet not being drawn in to the geopolitical competition/conflict between the US with China through being forced to choose sides in a win-lose scenario, achieved through the use and employment of strategic ambiguity. Thus, a win-win scenario is the objective of this imperative.
- The final imperative relates to the goal of avoiding becoming an expendable object in the geopolitical games of the great powers. To achieve this end, a clear and consistent foreign and security policy identity, which should never be compromised. The heavy price of becoming a client (tributary) state of the US is illustrated with clear lessons from history – Iraq (1908-89) used against the new US foe Iran and Ukraine (2022-) being used to weaken and contain Russia. Both countries were/are locked in a state of weapon dependency to continue the war and not to lose, with no strategic autonomy remaining. They were selected for the task as the US is primarily a maritime and air power, which is why it requires other continental powers as a proxy against its challengers to US hegemony – China, Iran and Russia. The US has as its geostrategic goal to maintain their hegemony, no matter the cost to any other country. An actual war between India and China would not benefit either country, it would only serve the interests of US geostrategic imperatives. To re-emphasize Kissinger's words once more – the US has no permanent allies or opponents, only permanent interests.

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