



---

**RESEARCH PAPER**

**USA's Pivot to Asia and China's Global Rebalancing through BRI**

Muhammad Asif <sup>1</sup> Dr. Mubeen Adnan <sup>2</sup> Inam Ullah <sup>3</sup>

1. Ph.D. Scholar, International Relations, Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
3. M. Phil Scholar, Department of International Relations, National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan

---

**PAPER INFO      ABSTRACT**

**Received:**  
September 14, 2019

**Accepted:**  
December 25, 2019

**Online:**  
December 31, 2019

**Keywords:**  
USA, China, Pivot  
to Asia, Indo-  
Pacific,  
Geopolitical,  
Security, Quad,  
Multilateralism

**Corresponding  
Author:**  
asif.316@hotmail.  
com

The aim of present study is to bring the understanding of the complexity of networked relationships between the two major powers the US and China. In this study there are two main themes 1) US pivot to Asia and 2) Belt and Road Initiative of China. This study is based on Qualitative research where researchers had done content analysis. Key findings of current research are that Indo Pacific region plays a vital role in global power politics due to its geo-strategic and geo-economic importance that's why US and China two major powers are trying to dominate this region through economic projects in this region. US President Obama proclaimed his policy "Pivot to Asia" to influence region and China announced "BRI" to maintain balance. The study recommends that in present era regions cannot be governed through military presence only. So, economic and financial ties are also important to influence certain regions.

---

**Introduction**

The US president Barak Obama in his 1<sup>st</sup> tenure, shifted the approach of the united states towards Asia especially Indo-Pacific region. The approach he adopted was a more balance one, the main drivers behind the shift were the rising economies of Asian continent mainly the rapid economic growth and transformation of China (Oehler-Sincai, 2016, p.25). In this context Peter Petri argued "Since World War II . . . Asia has grown more than twice as fast as the rest of the world. . . . Although other countries have also experienced rapid economic growth over several years, the recent Asian cluster of sustained, consistent performance has no parallel". President Obama after his victory in the US assumed

that both achievement and disappointment of our grand strategy would be largely determined by advances in Indo pacific region. Moreover, he acknowledged the fact that the imminent security hurdle the US confronts with is the rapid rising China and it will become the sole competitor of the US both regionally and internationally. Subsequently, A plan was initiated and publicized by the US president Obama called the "Pivot to Asia" in order to balance the realm of control in the area (Stuart, 2016).

In contrast to the aforementioned strategy, another approach Adopted by China is BRI. The name "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) emerged from the vision which the president of China Xi Jinping announced in 2013, for the very first time in Kazakhstan as a "Silk Road Economic Belt" and then in Indonesia as "21st-Century Maritime Silk Road". The "belt and road initiative" envisions multiple areas of cooperation such as; building infrastructure and connectivity, efficient financial flows, unrestricted trade activities, coordination in national policies and increase public contacts via "cultural exchange program" across the continents. Under this project China has vowed to finance infrastructure and industry sectors of several countries across the Eurasian and Indo-pacific regions through the investment of billions of dollars. Subsequently, such an enormous investment will undoubtedly create a great competitive geostrategic environment in the region for major powers mainly the US is of great concerned due to the potential threat of rising China. Experts and researchers have assumed that the project is China's grand geo-economic model that can pose grave challenges to the existing prevailing system (Le Corre, 2018).

### **The Indo-Pacific as a new Focus for Global Power Politics**

Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions were the 20<sup>th</sup> century centers for global power politics, but the momentum of power politics have shifted to Indo-pacific in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Number of geopolitical experts and analysts one among them Robert D. Kaplan forecasted that the region stress from Indian Ocean to the Asia Pacific will be the top priorities for the US after 2010. Most of the viewers view, since 70s the region is main concentrative point for power struggles in the domain of geopolitical economy, but by now it will also turns to geopolitical and geostrategic power projection among the regional powers as well as global major powers. Subsequently, competition among the actors have started, budget of China's military over the last two decades has approximately gone twice per annum. Similarly, other regional actors such as Japan and India have also endeavored to expand their military strengths by equipping them with latest weapons and technology (Saeed, 2017).

## **The Growing Strategic Interest of the US towards Indo Pacific**

### **The US Strategy Pivot to Asia**

A greater shift in the US policy reflected when president Obama officially announced his Asian Policy “US pivot to Asia” while addressing the Australian parliament in 2011. The aim of the strategy was to divert the attention of the US from Mediterranean and Middle East to the Asia Pacific or Indo-Pacific in a broader sense. Under the strategy pivot to Asia Obama emphasized on five essential precepts, which would define the shifted strategic interest of the US towards the region.

The first and most vital one was the assurance of security in the vast Indo Pacific. In order to attain this objective, US will have to establish firm armed presence in the region and have to align closely with countries in the region like ASEAN countries, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, and have to spend greater provision of funds and resources to its defence and military budget in order to deter any immense threat in the region. Secondly, the US will seek to reengage with regional organization particularly with ASEAN. Third, to consolidate the US-Asia shared prosperity via free and fair trade and economic joint venture like APEC and TPP. Fourth, the US will endeavor to establish friendly and collaborative relationship with China to avert misunderstanding but it looks self-contradictory. Finally, the US continued efforts for the protection of basic human rights (Southgate, 2017).

### **Revival of QUAD-Plus Mechanisms**

The QUAD or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is the group of the compatible democracies including Australia, India, Japan and the US which was mooted by Shinzo Abe Japan’s prime minister in 2007 for the first time. The main objective was to form a group that will keep watching and enhance control over straits in the region stretched across Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean including the conflicting region “South China Sea”. But the notion was expelled due to a protest in China’s capital Beijing, claiming that security alliance with regional states is targeted the tremendous growth of China (Huang, 2017).

In 2017, the official of Quad group got together in a sideline meeting of the East Asia and ASEAN summit in Manila to revive Quad which was put hold for one decade since its given idea in 2007. There were suggestions for the expansion of Quad by adding the ASEAN countries comprising the Southeast Asian region which is known as “Quad-Plus” mechanism in order to extend the sphere of

cooperation in Indo-pacific region. But it has been assumed that in Southeast Asia there will be no room of interest for Quad, if this is just another form or step towards rivalry among great powers. The reason is more evident from the fact that Southeast Asian region is a center of attraction and also forms the main curve of "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). Hence, ASEAN is less likely to be aligned with one side at the expense of its large interests (Saha, 2018).

### **Trump Administration and the Indo-Pacific Strategy**

Donald Trump, in his presidential campaign openly carped President Obama approach of "Rebalancing to Asia" policy and most certainly the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). After his victory as a president of the United States, he signed a presidential order and announced the departure of the US out of the "Trans Pacific Partnership" (TPP). Approximately a year later his announcement, the first National Security Strategy Report was issued from White House under the authority of president Trump, which states that "We welcome India's emergence as a leading global power and stronger strategic and defense partner. We will seek to increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India." Subsequently, The US strategy of Indo Pacific has established a new parameter for upcoming US tactics in the considerable region of Indo Pacific. Moreover, Under Trump presidency the mishandling relation between US and China also generates fears throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Partners of the US like Philippines are now tend on the way to Beijing predominantly for economic advantages (Saeed, 2017).

### **The New Silk Route: China's Ambitions and the US Pivot to Asia**

Historically, thousands of years ago the widening of China's Hung dynasty towards west established the silk route for the first time. The route was a trade network established throughout the modern day central Asian region comprising of CARs or five Stans and Afghanistan as well as the Indo-subcontinent modern days India and Pakistan in the Southern part. The route was also stretched thousands of miles towards Europe. The idea of 21<sup>st</sup> century "New Silk Route" is envisioned by China to link the adjacent regions such as Central Asia lies in the North Pakistan warm water port lie in South Asia, ASEAN countries located in the South East Asia, Eurasia, Middle East and the African continent. In 2013, It was declared for the 1<sup>st</sup> ever time when president Xi Jinping uttering his dream of a silk route leading by China that will structure international trade, help the development of Asian infrastructure, and ensure stable and secure energy supplies. It was launched after the US concept of greater Central Asian

infrastructure and economic integration with the hope of political stability announced in 2011 (McBride, 2015).

### **Geopolitics via Geo-Economics and China's Strategy**

After Second World War throughout the Cold War era, most surveys of geopolitics absorbed in the domain of security and military. But after the Cold War, many policy makers map up their mind more inclined towards geopolitical use of economic power (Gyula, 2018). Most dominant point of interpretation is that in "the grand strategies of the twenty-first century geopolitics will be pursued chiefly through economic means" (Bernek, 2014). Numerous research works have stressed about the adept utilization of economic means by China for security and political objectives in the modern world (Le Corre, 2018). China's most latest economic proposals, such as "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Investment and Infrastructure Bank (AIIB)", have created significant intellectual curiosity in China's geo-economic approach. The (BRI) represents an utmost striving geo-economic program that China has ever planned (Alice, 2017).

### **Belt and Road Initiative a Step Forward**

China under Xi Jinping presidency has changed and engaged actively in international affairs. It has been transformed from the former president Deng Xiaoping's view of "keeping a low profile" towards Xi's model of "striving for achievements". It is in the framework of this swing that China planned the "Belt and Road Initiative" and has used more comprehensive mantras to explain its leading foreign policy strategy. In 2103, the notion was first presented in Xi Jinping's in Astana capital city of Kazakhstan. The name at the time accorded to it was "Economic Belt along the Silk Road". Xi announced the plan by connecting to the old Silk Road and stressing the plausibility of development in the Central Asian region. The "21st Century Maritime Silk Road", aiming North Africa, Oceania and Southeast Asia was exposed to the Indonesian Parliament in Xi's speech in the late 2013. Together both of the initiatives attained the name, "One Belt, One Road". Later on in 2015, the government hand outrules for official translation of the initiative as a "Belt and Road" from "One Belt, One Road" (Stec, 2018).

This project is driven by sum of extensive objectives. First and foremost it intends to guard state security (China). China plans to form a web of commercial interdependence that will tie her regional control which will allow her to fence in opposition to United States' coalition building in the region and will support its neighbors if they give favor in return. It is a withdrawal from the earlier decades,

when China did not nurture handy interactions with states in the region with the exception of North Korea and Myanmar. After security, economic motivation is another driver at the backdrop of the initiatives. Financial attention is also there as documents released in 2015 titled "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road". To outline and promote such projects and connectivity and establishing new routes for trade both on land and sea, that required a greater amount of financial cooperation. However, the BRI is the most inclusive expression of China. It is a lay out of a strategic vision of China which will turn-off her to the main international mechanism of economic growth, entrenched in the perception that security interests of China are to be assisted by tying up the countries around into stronger financial and trade ties (Miller, 2019).

### **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank**

In Indonesia at "Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit 2013", China's President Xi projected the establishment of a new "Multilateral Development Bank (MDB)", the Asian "Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)". The bank was officially launched with fifty seven member countries in 2015. All of the member nations of the "Asian Development Bank (ADB)" and World Bank are allowed for membership of the AIIB. Two classes of membership are mainly designed in the Articles of AIIB's Accord, regional and non-regional members. The articles of the charter have wasted Seventy five percent of the balloting clout to the regional members in the Bank. Fourteen countries of group twenty (G 20) are also members of AIIB. The United States did not join the bank so far (Weiss, 2017).

The Articles of the Agreement of AIIB illustrates "The purpose of the Bank shall be to: (i) foster sustainable economic development, create wealth and improve infrastructure connectivity in Asia by investing in infrastructure and other productive sectors; and (ii) promote regional cooperation and partnership in addressing development challenges by working in close collaboration with other multilateral and bilateral development institutions" (AIIB official Agreement).

Henceforth, the very purpose of AIIB as its name alludes is to produce funding for infrastructure demands all over the Asia, as well as in adjacent regions. The bank has authorized 9 schemes, financing a total of \$1.7 billion according to estimates of 2017. Moreover, bank is a leading element of regional commercial activities and overseas policies of Xi, and it seeks to increase economic linkage from homeland to the adjacent regions which include the "Silk Road Economic Belt" (South Asian region, Central Asian Region, West Asia or Middle East &

Europe), and along a maritime route, the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” (from Southeast Asia to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe). President Xi has tracked plans to launch trade and financial institutions leading by China, and to further incorporate China in the prevailing global financial institutions. He argued that the AIIB would “promote interconnectivity and economic integration in the region” and “cooperate with existing multilateral development banks,” such as “World Bank and the Asian Development Bank” (Weiss, 2017).

### **AIIB and NDB Vis a Vis World Bank and ADB**

The establishment of “Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank” indicates in strategies of China. To add more friends to its friend list throughout Asia China is willing to construct and aid infrastructure in the region. China had biggest problem to exert influence in order to accomplish its might in the Multilateral Financial Institutions influence and regulated by the US such as “World Bank and International Monetary Fund”. The share of voting rights wasted to China in the world bank is just 5% which is not largely enough in contrast with the share of the US is 15%, whereas 45% voting rights is totally controlled by the US and its allies in Europe and as well Japan. As far as the share in Asian Development Bank is concerned, 26% voting share and 31% capital stock input are in the hands of the US and Japan. On the other hand China is striving to raise its share of 5% for larger representation in ABD but it is choked by the US and its ally Japan.

The infrastructure of Asia is no doubt requires a massive sum of money so there is an adequate space for sponsorships. In 2013, Beijing aimed to establish its own institution rather than to raise its representation in the prevailing control one. As the Asian Development Bank established by Japan to attain its objectives in the region by constructing infrastructure provide aids and loans to its trading partners, similarly China established AIIB that aims to contest for the same ventures in the region. The US views the Bank as a sole contender to the World Bank and the “Asian Development Bank”, and it is profoundly stick to its obligation of rules and regulations.

Moreover, it was unambiguously regarded one of the central organs of China’s economic diplomacy. During its Rite of rectification, Finance minister of China Lou Jiwei argued that AIIB epitomized “an important move on the part of China to fulfill its growing international responsibilities and to improve and complement the existing international order”. Following its establishment another institute was created “National Development Bank (NDB)” by BRICS countries called sister of AIIB. The aim was to “mobilize resources for infrastructure and

sustainable development projects” throughout the countries whose economies are at evolving stage. Both of the institutions are operating in the same space to “Asian Development Bank” and World Bank as competitors (Miller, 2019).

### **AIIB China's Multilateralism Vis a Vis US Multilateralism**

With China as a leader of the “Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)” is the 1<sup>st</sup> ever attempt of developing countries in Asia as a multilateral development financier. The force of attraction in the AIIB rests in its core rules through which it is institutionalized. The China's approach of multilateralism via the AIIB is not like that of the US multilateralism, which is rooted in the Bretton Woods system and empowered the US as a hegemon to further its control in the sphere of world economy. In the contrary, the main purpose of Chinese multilateralism is to enhance global governance, leaning for balance in service of those diminished.

Additionally, the “Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank” addresses the issue of both the requirements of internal restructurings of China, and the hopes of outside world for a liable shareholder and donor. The bank satisfies multilateralism equally both in statutory agreement and values and norms. Moreover, the Chinese model of multilateralism which is interpreted in the framework of AIIB is categorized by the essence of “win-win cooperation” and by a “shared future for mankind” worldwide. Chinese president Xi argued, the international structure of governance is assembled and shared by the international community as a whole, and it should not be controlled by only one state (Gu, 2017).

### **The Global Power Play and ASEAN**

The “Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)” consists of eleven nation states of Southeast Asia which is a crucial region in geopolitically central Indo-Pacific region and gradually gaining the momentum for global power play between China and the US. The region seeks a greater courtesy of the United States and offers massive chances and encounters to the US involvement in the broader Indo-Pacific region on all fronts such as political, diplomatic, and economic and security. On the contrary the tremendous economic growth of China's economy has pursued to broadcast its influence by practicing its growing solid power competences, strategic coercion, and diplomacy. President Xi determines China more visible in the Indo-Pacific and more around to strengthen its sphere of influence and to examine the parameters and responses of its competitor the US.



Most of the ASEAN states favor the presence of the US in the region. On the other hand, most of the Southeast Asia will remain to pursue a impartially offer both the US and China, that is intended to enlarge their sphere of influence throughout the ambiguous period of deepened great power play. China is likely to confronts with so many hurdles while attaining a large sphere of power and influence but it can achieve successes in the region. The leaders of China are striving to balance the ambitions of influence in opposition to increasing anxieties in the region to pursue its interests. The US is also keen to extend its strategic involvement in the region to have a check on the rising China in all fronts such economic, diplomatic and military. A very cautious consideration would be required to choose states as allies in the region, with special reference to their relations with China (Gill, Goh & Huang, 2016).

### **Analysis in a Theoretical Standpoint**

The very purpose of theoretical perspective is to allow the readers and help them to make sense of any international political event or phenomenon in the international community from different point of view in the discipline of International Relations. Since the announcement of the US policy of "Pivot to Asia" the competition between China and the US in the vast Indo Pacific region is concerned, it would be more justifiable from the standpoints of offensive and defensive realism the two variants of neorealism or structural realism. Besides this the means and methods adopted by China is liberal in nature which is analyzed in detail as following.

Stick to the basic notion of neorealism or structural realism, distinct from its antecedent classical realism which emphasized that the struggle for power is rooted in the egotistic and greedy nature of human being, but the neorealism turns the international structure as a responsible factor of struggle for power. Neorealists argued that the international system is anarchic (absence of central authority), where the states live in an uncertain international structure. Subsequently, this uncertainty in the international structure of state system pushes them towards the acquisition of power to ensure its survival and security. In this regard the proponent of neorealism Kenneth Waltz argues "structures encourage certain behaviors and penalize those who do not respond" (Hall, 2017). Neorealism is further divided into two variants offensive and defensive realism which is occurred on the basis of states' behavior. Whereas defensive realist Waltz emphasizes on "Appropriate amount of power", in contrast an offensive realist Mearsheimer emphasizes that "states' main and ultimate goals should be hegemony" (Gu, 2017).

As far as the US approaches are concerned, the United States despite of being a hegemon state in the world and it is still most suspicious and uncertain about the states' intentions in general and the rising China in particular throughout the region. Thus this uncertainty pull her to adopt policy such as "Pivot to Asia" to ensure its security by balancing its power in the region by employing different means like making alliance with countries in the region and increasing military presence in its bases around the region. More generally the US approach of security and uncertainty can be best justified by neorealism, but the means she adopted such as making alliance and establishing an appropriate number of military and military capability is fall under balance of power and can be seen from the perspective of defensive realism.

On the other hand, the approach of China can be seen from the perspective of offensive realism. China is a rising power especially in economic domain, She 1<sup>st</sup> aims to dominate the Asian continent as a hegemon power and then move forward towards challenging the US hegemony. In the context of China's hegemony it is very ambiguous that means she adopted to enhance her influence is more liberal in nature such as connectivity through BRI and multilateralism via AIIB.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Indo Pacific region plays very crucial role in global power politics. As the region has great geostrategic and geo-economics importance due to the existence of straights, Choke pints, sea ports and the transformative and growing economies across the region especially China are of great importance for global trading and energy supply. Subsequently, the region got tremendous attention when Obama announced his policy "Pivot to Asia" to increase influence of the US in the region in order to balance China. Soon after the announcement of the US policy China also announced the "Belt and Road Initiative" other initiatives which is closely associated with this initiative like "Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank" and "National Development Bank" to promote connectivity and economic integrity.

Moreover, through the above aforementioned initiatives China seeks to increase her influence in the region to become a regional or continental hegemon. China's ambition for regional hegemony can be easily possible through a different approach of multilateralism for which the introduction of a new institution would be required which China has already done very prudently. By the initiation of AIIB and NDB China's rules and regulations China offers an alternate to Asian countries for assistance and loans which would meet their demands for

infrastructure building and economic need. These institutions also finance the projects under “Belt and Road Initiative” which aims to increase a web of connectivity and promote economic integration among Europe, Africa and throughout Asia. However, it has been assumed worldwide as a means of China’s strategy to bring countries to her block in order to increase influence in the region to fulfill the ambitions of being a regional hegemon which is prone to the US.

It is recommended that in contemporary era regions cannot be governed through military and other forms of hard power. So, economic and financial ties are also important to influence certain regions. US and China should influence global power politics through soft power to achieve sustainable objectives. Moreover, smaller states should also pay consideration to economic projects at regional level as well as global level.

## References

- Alice, D. (2017). Perspectives on the Emerging Role of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. *International Affairs*, 93(5), 1061-1084.
- Berneke, Á. (2014). The "Grand Chessboard" of the 21st Century Geopolitical Strategies of the Multi-polar World. *National security review -Special issue/MMXV. NEMZETBIZTONSÁGI SZEMLE*, 5.
- Gill, B., Goh, E., & Huang, C. (2016). *The Dynamics of US-China-Southeast Asia Relations*. Sydney, NSW: United States Studies Centre.
- Gu, B. (2017). Chinese Multilateralism in the AIIB. *Journal of International Economic Law*, 20(1), 137-158.
- Csurgai, G. (2018). The Increasing Importance of Geo -Economics in Power Rivalries in the Twenty-First Century. *Geopolitics*, 23(1), 38-46.
- Hall, M. (2017). *A Study in Structural Realism*. Lund University Department of Politics .
- Huang, C. (2017). US, Japan, India, Australia... Is quad the first step to an Asian NATO?. *South China Morning Post*, 25.
- McBride, J. (2015). *Building the New Silk Road*. Retrieved from Council on foreign affairs: [www.cfr.com](http://www.cfr.com)
- Miller, T. (2019). *China's Asian dream: Empire Building along the New Silk Road*. Zed Books Ltd..
- Oehler-Sincai, I. M. (2016). United States'" Pivot" towards Asia-Pacific: Rationale, Goals and Implications for the Relationship with China. *Knowledge Horizons. Economics*, 8(1), 25.
- Le Corre, P. (2018). China's Rise as a Geo-economic Influencer: Four European Case Studies. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.
- Saeed, M. (2017). From the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific: Expanding Sino-US Strategic Competition. *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 3(04), 499-512.

Saha, P. (2018). The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: Why ASEAN remain Cautious (ORF Issue Brief, Issue No. 229).

Southgate, L. (2017). *The Asia Pivot as a Strategy of Foreign Policy: A Source of Peace or a Harbinger of Conflict?* Centre for International Security and Resilience Cranfield University Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.

Stec, G. (2018). *China's Belt and Road Initiative is neither A Strategy, Nor A Vision. It Is A Process*, European Institute for Asian Studies.

Stuart, D. T. (2016). *The Pivot to Asia: Can It Serve as the Foundation for American Grand Strategy in the 21st Century?* Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press.

Weiss, M. A. (2017). *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)*.