



RESEARCH PAPER

Navigating China-US Strategic Competition in Asia Pacific from the Prism of Offensive Realism

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ABSTRACT

The fundamental objectives of this research paper are to explore the enduring patterns of China's strategic competition in the Asia Pacific and to understand the interplay between states and their struggle for power from the lens of offensive realism. China and the US are currently the largest and the most powerful states. There was a time when the world was bipolar as the Soviet Union and the US during the Cold War were at loggerheads, but with the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, the US became the only superpower. However, in recent times, China has also demonstrated a promising rise in its economic and military power, and owing to its active engagement in Asia Pacific. In response, the US has also sharpened its interests in the given region. This research focuses on the broader analysis of China's Strategic Competition in Asia Pacific from the prism of Offensive Realism. This research has employed the qualitative method. Analytical literature (books and journal articles) for descriptive and historical research methods provide ample fresh information on the debate discussed in the research paper. Looking at the power play between the US and China, all states more or less have offensive capacities, but they fall into different levels of interest. With the realpolitik technique, China aspires to maximize cooperation with Russia, China, and India, though currently, China has flared territorial disputes with India. Through its economic and security capabilities, China would try to dominate the Asia Pacific region and exclude the US.

KEYWORDS China-US Strategic Competition, Offensive Realism, Realpolitik

Introduction

The theories of international relations are articulated to understand and highlight the phenomenon of international politics and, in some places, expand the existing theories. Theories are critical assumptions based on observation and experimentation that define the ongoing trends and patterns upon which the states' mutual relations occur. On the other hand, the theoretical framework explains and relates the research problem and helps to understand the existing research and knowledge.

The theories are essential for learning and investigating, and they bring coherence and connectivity to the understanding of the research. These theoretical constructs and carefully carve out the topic's relation with the researcher's ideas and perceptions on any research area. The most profound aspect of International Relations is that it is always in transition and continuity that compels the researcher to predict future political action. Theories help the research evolve into ideas and bring coherence so the researcher can easily prove the point under discussion. Therefore, the discussion under analysis, the given research explores Neo-Realism with different dimensions to broaden the scope of the research for understanding, which is necessary for the data to be conclusive and robust.

Power and interest in any sphere are central to the study of politics. Issues of morality have little flexibility to exhibit because international politics targets "power" as

a central component for domination and control. The intrusion of Power lies upon interest and policy. As the context of international politics grows increasingly complex, the traditional theories of international relations explain the security challenges, most of which are conventional (Yaseen, et. al 2023; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). These traditional theories of international relations explain the ongoing interrelationships between states. The interests of states encompassing them have diverging or converging relations (Udo-Akang, 2012).

The fundamental dynamics of international relations resonate in the context of *realpolitik*, which depends on self-interest and the necessities of a policy. Ultimately, the success of a policy is defined as strengthening and preserving the very foundation of a state, illustrating the concept of *raison d'état*.

Against this backdrop, the theory of Neo-Realism is a broader perspective that helps to understand the motives and intentions of states, keeping in view the international system that generates a security dilemma, further compelling states to either act defensively or offensively. The Neo-Realism theory believes that the state's behavior is determined by the anarchical structure of the international system that has nothing or little to do with the nature of humans, different types of regimes, or various issues at the domestic level. The different types of regimes, whether democratic, theocratic, or authoritarian, constitute analysis at different levels.

Considering the ungoverned sphere of competitive relations and interactions between states, the Neo-Realism theory speculates that every state act according to the principle of self-help, thus striving to ensure survival and security vis a vis other states at the international level. Moreover, under anarchy, this is a rational course of action. The system's structure can be altered only with the advent of a central international system possessing sovereign control.

Literature Review

Felix (2022) discusses the foreign policy dimensions of significant Asian players and their response toward China's strategic competition, focusing on major and minor states around the Asia-Pacific region. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and contemporary understanding of the Asia-Pacific propose a new dimension by considering the reinterpretation of great power politics, which is often contested or conditioned. Felix Heiduk demonstrates the challenges posed from military and economic perspectives by China-US strategic competition. The author also illustrates the practices through which states can address these challenges by smaller regional states.

In recent decades, the relationship between China and the US has levelled up a strategic confrontation, but the point to ponder is how US-China strategic competition and tensions have involved the South China Sea and eventually simmered up as a flashpoint between the two states. These queries are addressed by (He & Feng, 2018), where the authors raise concerns about growing tensions resulting in a war between the two countries over the South China Sea (Ghani et. al. 2017). It is thus essential to understand the underlying causes of China's assertive posture in SCS and, under such assertiveness, how the future role of multilateral institutions in the Asia Pacific would be in resolving any dispute or conflict between the two states.

The emergence of the Asia-Pacific as the hub of strategic competition between China and the US requires adopting an approach that would seek to preserve power sustainability and regional prosperity and stability. (Denmark, 2020) discusses China's

expanding influence and aggressiveness with the US in the Asia Pacific at length. An unreliable role in the changing dynamics in the Asia Pacific region undermines and threatens the region's prosperity and peace and, therefore, requires US strategy with vital perspectives to address the critical roles of America and its future allies. The author argues that the partnerships should represent a necessity in an effort by the US to compete with China's growing influence in the region and beyond. The aim should be to promote and leave an impact on the prosperity and the liberal aspects of the Indo-Pacific region. Consequently, a pragmatic approach is essential to ensure long-term stability for Washington and its allies (Shah et. al. 2020).

A detailed analysis of the evolution of US relations with the Asia Pacific has been shared (Sutter, 2019), along with an overview of Obama and Trump's foreign policy posture. The historical evolution is discussed through the changing power relations among Asian states, like the effect of the growing influence of China and India and reviving interactions between Australia, South Korea, and Indonesia. Moreover, the evolution of growing economic influence, the asymmetrical tensions in Southwestern Asia and the Korean Peninsula, and the US stance towards countering the proliferation of weapons and terrorism. The expanding Asian multilateralism and US policies towards Asian states are also discussed. In addition to all these factors highlighting and explaining Asian Pacific regional political dynamics, the author also analyzes China's strategic partnership with important underlying factors determining the US's growing attention towards China.

Material and Methods

This research focuses on the broader analysis of China's Strategic Competition in Asia Pacific from the prism of Offensive Realism. This research has employed the qualitative method. Analytical literature (books and journal articles) for descriptive and historical research methods provide ample fresh information on the debate discussed in the research paper. The research is purely descriptive in nature. The research method involves an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of a subject of study as well as its related contextual conditions. It involves a comprehensive data collection and scrutiny of the data using secondary data. The collection of the data is based on variables of the research.

Results and Discussion

Neo-realism: A Paradigm of Power and Interest

Neo-realism is more practically feasible to apply for this particular research area apart from other theories explaining the dichotomy of interaction between states at multiple levels. Liberalism, a theoretical view that deals with progressiveness and cooperation, highlights only that side of interaction where security lacks much of a stance to counter. Similarly, liberalism, or Neoliberalism, highlights the idea of complex interdependence, which is not discussed in this research. Therefore, Neo-Realism highlights states' relative gains and losses from an international system point of view and very well explains China-US strategic rivalry that has many glaring ramifications for the Asia Pacific region as a whole.

World politics changed radically after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and respectively after 9/11. These radical changes forced scholars and intellectuals to revamp and search for alternate perspectives to view and explain international and regional changes. They searched for better heuristics for primary schools of thought, such as

liberalism and realism, because the multipolar world proved more conflict-prone than a bipolar world under the Cold War order.

The Tragedy of Great Power Politics

In the last two decades, the multipolar world system placed the role of China in a more and more centered position. China exhibited a different behavior pattern in its new regional and political context, focusing more on "socialism with Chinese characteristics." Under this scenario, one of the most controversial views relating to China became an essential variant of realism, that is, offensive realism penned down by John J. Mearsheimer in his critical text, "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics." Through his book, Mearsheimer dedicated one chapter to highlighting the ambition and rise of China to become a regional hegemon. In this scenario, one can understand that the core assumption of offensive realism is to analyze the presence of self-help under the conditions of anarchy that motivates states to maximize the role and pursuit of power about the power of another state. Keeping in view the core assumptions, Mearsheimer was not the only scholar to understand the foreign policy aspirations of China; there were many other scholars, policy advisers, and analysts as well to get a better comprehension of China.

In the contemporary era of conflicts and confrontations between states, realism is considered a dominant theory of international politics because it provides the most fundamental explanation of war and conflicts between states. The most important core elements of realism are self-help, survival, and statism. Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer are the prominent proponents of the variants of structural realism that share a few common heuristics about efforts for power, competition, and security. The growing aspirations between states provoke controversies and debates, accumulating the understanding of policy advisers, scholars, and authors.

Kenneth Waltz's defensive realism theory is based on great powers' actions. His state-centric international relations theory must consider the state's behavior in a unipolar world, and that is why one can only explain part of the system with this theory. Mearsheimer's offensive realism, on the other hand, affords special consideration to the actions of great powers. However, his theory claims relevance and relation with other states apart from significant powers. Mutually agreeing with defensive realism, Mearsheimer's offensive realism also contributes to anarchy, which compels survival as the state's ultimate goal. The two perspectives differ based on the fact that defensive realism uses power as a means to achieve security as the ultimate end. In contrast, offensive realism assumes and considers power as a tool to achieve power as the ultimate goal for the aspiration to take on the position of a hegemon.

Mearsheimer's Core Principle of Offensive Realism

Mearsheimer's core principle of offensive realism is based on states having an offensive capability that enables them to destroy or harm another state, the existential condition of uncertainty where international politics comes into play, and minimal assurance of actions in the shape of military apparatus being used and at any given time and space. Considering these core principles, the speculation persists as states are always rational actors serving best to safeguard the national interest for survival. Through the theoretical perspective of offensive realism, Mearsheimer assumes that amalgamating all the core principles motivates states to enhance their power relation to the power of other

states. This leads them to take appropriate action and seek paramount supremacy instead of defensive realism. At the international level, all great powers aspire to reach the last pinnacle of absolute hegemony and power.

In striking contrast to Kenneth Waltz's defensive posture, offensive realism demarcates regional and global hegemony, where the latter dominates the region and the former rules the entire international system. Offensive realism holds that a state in an offensive capacity has to enjoy the superiority of its military and be the only great power-seeking state to qualify as a hegemon in the international system.

Dynamics of Anarchy and Hierarchy in International Politics

International politics under anarchic conditions are not explained by offensive realism. John Mearsheimer makes the scenario unambiguous when he elaborates that if a state achieves hegemony, the system transforms from anarchy to hierarchy. Thus, offensive realism speculating on an anarchic international environment needs more information to comment on and elaborate on scenarios under the hierarchic conditions. Therefore, the realist perspective provides important predictions about world politics, as regional politics are determined by the hegemonic capability possessed by a great power.

Through his empirical assessment, John Mearsheimer contends that hierarchy always had a fundamental place in Western Europe and the Western Hemisphere. He asserts that the US has been seen as a superpower with hegemonic capabilities in the Western Hemisphere. Mearsheimer further insists that the significant presence of America in this particular vicinity after World War 2 has the regional transformation from anarchic to hierarchic. With the accumulation of Mearsheimer's assertions (offensive realism being unable to explain international politics under hegemony and Western Europe being hierarchic since 1945 and the Western Hemisphere since 1900), one may assume that offensive realism has been unable to dissect foreign policy attitudes and outcomes within these regions.

However, Mearsheimer's 2012 prior work does not acknowledge the US as a global hegemon and a sole superpower. Thus, it cannot propose an argument that offensive realism has failed to address the explanation of the entire political analysis. Mearsheimer maintains that the era after the Cold War has been a multipolar world with Russia, the US, and China as great power states. However, this creates significant inconsistencies with his empirical and theoretical analysis of the international political system. Mearsheimer highlights that states must have a robust military capacity to adhere to a confrontation against the most capable power in the international arena to claim themselves as a great power state. He claims that the most capable competitor of the US after the Cold War was China, which, back then, by Mearsheimer, did not possess a potential military (today, the analysis should be reevaluated as China's road to military empowerment will increase in coming years) to confront the US in the Asia Pacific. According to Mearsheimer, China does not fulfill offensive realism's criteria of a great state.

Imperial by Design

According to Mearsheimer, the US is a regional hegemon. It should act as an offshore balancer and a status quo partner at the international level until and unless a potential hegemon in the system threatens its position. In "Imperial by Design," Mearsheimer's 2011 article clarifies that the US after the Cold War is not behaving in the manner just discussed. Instead, the US has adopted a flawed grand strategy. The US aims

to attain global domination, and under such conditions, other potential hegemon seekers in the system, like China and Russia, balance against the US.

The United States is the sole superpower, and this shows significant discrepancies in the theoretical and empirical analysis of Mearsheimer's explanation. Though the dominance persists, it is now being threatened by China's growing aspirations in the Asia Pacific. For offensive realism, the explanation of unipolarity is a hierarchy, which Mearsheimer's theoretical analysis has not explained.

Many theoretical variants analyze and challenge the core ideas of Neo-Realism, most prominently in post-Cold War understanding. These variants highlight certain basic factors, such as the relationship between state and society, the perception of state leaders, and, lastly, the motivations of states and institutions with economic and political integration.

Mearsheimer Offensive Realism and US-China Strategic Competition

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US became the sole superpower in the international arena, with foreign policies more refined and well-articulated. Certain scholars then believed the world had transformed into a unipolar world with the US as the sole superpower. However, some thinkers viewed the world as prone to multipolarity because China and Russia were also considered great power states. Mearsheimer's Tragedy of Great Power Politics pinpoints that China and Russia, although having weaker forces, were strong rivals of the US. China's economic development pace is unprecedented and can be transformed into a great power. Now, the fundamental question arises as to whether the rise of China will be peaceful or will promote strategic rivalry with the US (Li, 2016).

John Mearsheimer believes that no one can accurately predict China's future; therefore, there is a need to comprehend predictions with the help of theoretical analysis. For that purpose, offensive realism provides a fundamental insight into the rise of China. China can aspire to attain a profound status in Asia if China continues to maintain its economic growth. However, the US will try to prevent China's rise as a hegemon. Many of the neighboring states of China will also ally with the United States to curtail China's growth. Ultimately, the struggle to contain China can lead to a security competition that can pave the way for a future confrontation.

Balancing and Counter Balancing

The United States' effort to contain China can be seen through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP). On 5th October 2022, Japan, the US, and other states worked on negotiations for TTP, which is the most significant regional trade pact in history. China is not a member of this accord. If this accord is approved, 28 trillion dollars in trade will be accorded as a new set of terms and conditions between the member states, and indeed, this will affect the strategic relationship between the US and China very strongly. To understand the interplay between states and the struggle for power from the lens of offensive realism, China has denounced the TTP, stating that the pact aims to target and contain China. The Trans-Pacific Partnership will shift the alliances and balances in Asia and can also increase the reformation of Japan's economic pattern. This agreement can also place Vietnam closer to the US. With TTP in play, China will face new opportunities and challenges in the Asia Pacific.

Structural realism constantly criticizes Neoliberalism's aspiration to highlight that the institutions are there to preserve the status quo, and in reality, states pursue economic goals to fulfill their national interest. Similarly, the nomenclature of TTP pressures China to pursue more meticulous economic reform and compels China to initiate the Shanghai Free Trade Zone (FTZ). The primary purpose of FTZ is to pilot the measures for external liberalization, but it has yet to be able to perform to its expectations.

Looking at the power play between the US and China, all states more or less have offensive capacities, but they fall into different levels of interest. With the realpolitik technique, China aspires to maximize cooperation with Russia, China, and India, though currently, China has flared territorial disputes with India. However, China seeks to ensure security and prevent other states from harming their status as a regional hegemon. Through its economic and security capabilities, China would try to dominate the Asia Pacific region and exclude the US. The country has repeatedly announced that the US should not interfere in the South China Sea disputes (Roy, 2016).

United States involvement and alliance formation in SCS clearly defines the US's pivot to Asia, which appears to exemplify the notion of the security dilemma, the classic realist approach visible in all versions of realism. Security dilemmas emphasize the irresistible strength of forces and tendencies, which defines four fundamental propositions: the absence of hierarchy, self-proposed relations under attachment conditions, and reliance on self-help for prosperity and protection.

The international system is in constant conflict where states are the only relevant actors, and their actions affect it. So, under such circumstances, the primary concern of each state is survival, and thus, increasing the security in such an environment as China seeking to enhance its security may lead to military expansion, ultimately leading to a security dilemma with greater instability. The state's motivation to balance the power is proof of the security dilemma. Now, there are two ways through which a state balances its power internal balancing and external balancing. External balancing occurs when a state entangles itself into alliance formation to check the capacity of the most powerful state.

On the other hand, the internal balancing pushes a strong impetus for domestic capabilities. From the theoretical perspective of defensive realism, if a state indulges in power maximization, the other states should first and foremost enhance domestic Power and then make a counter-alliance to balance the Power. The primary goal of the defensive realist concept is a balance of power and not the maximization of power concept. Power-seeking devices like a bandwagon may lead to instability because the ultimate goal should be to bandwagon or adopt other balance-seeking strategies to make the option wider for the state's security, not attract preventive war (Baylis, 2020).

Status Quo Subjectivities

The scenario of offensive realism by John Mearsheimer constructs a more pessimistic view of international politics coerced by a dangerous security competition that leads to war and conflict. The concept attempts to provide impetus to the notion of status quo subjectivities penned down by Kenneth Waltz's defensive realist concept. Both the theoretical lenses are offensive and defensive, arguing that states' fundamental concern is maximizing security. However, they do not agree with each other on the degree of power required to attain the said goal. Defensive realists claim that status quo states only aspire to preserve their position in the international system, while the

offensive perspective highlights Power-maximizing aggressive entities. Ultimately, the offensive realists provide states with strong incentives to ensure their sustenance in the international system—the system characterized by anarchy that generates fear and security dilemmas within and between states.

Looking at the in-depth calculation of neo-realism, Stephen Walt, a defensive realist, believes that China and the US can cooperate and coexist peacefully with the assistance of balancing. Though uncertainties and bilateral conflict persist, careful cooperative measures can mitigate contradictory actions. On the other hand, John Mearsheimer analyzes the competition as a driving force for hegemony between the US and China in the Asia Pacific that would further enhance the presence of strategic competition between the two countries. Stephen Walt has dilated the implications of military and economic confrontation between China and the US. He elaborates on the fundamental aspect that with interest aims to achieve objectives, China and the US would maximize their power and the projection indicators related to power. With increased economic aspirations, China will ensure the safety of its energy and raw material imports. This scenario sets back the role of the US in the Asia Pacific, as familiar phrases are used in critical discussions, such as China's military engagement in the Asia Pacific or pushing back the US from the Asia Pacific region. However, a scenario is adrift regarding policy and its implications in Asia.

Balance of Power in the Asia Pacific

The strategy of the balance of power in the Asia Pacific is undeniably shifting due to US-China strategic competition. The gradual rise of other middle-power states similarly engages in soft balancing through institutions, economic instruments, and informal alliances. Soft balancing is defined as restraining the power of a state using institutions and diplomacy to delegitimize a state's aggressive actions. This action eventually makes it difficult for the state to fulfill its foreign policy goals. For a long time, states within the periphery of Asia Pacific have relied upon diplomatic engagement to tackle aggressive states, and an example of that can be seen through the utilization of ASEAN. Although China has undergone some complex balancing to secure its inclining position, it has also, many times and on numerous occasions, leveraged diplomatic engagement as well. China has been a strong proponent of global trade and interdependence, giving importance to multilateralism over unilateralism, and the Belt and Road Initiative is a perfect example of such a multilateral approach. Where China is perceived as an aggressive state from a similar lens, China has also offered some viable cooperative options.

However, survival remains the most crucial goal for the states because the US and China are equipped with nuclear arsenals with the substantial capacity to take retaliatory measures (Li, 2016). Thus, John Mearsheimer believes that the US-China confrontation has the potential to break into an entire fledgling war because geopolitics in Asia are conflict-prone, and strong examples of these are the Taiwan issue and the South China Sea disputes. Another factor that could lead to a war between the US and China is the presence of other great powers in Asia that form a multipolar system. India, Russia, and Japan have subjective narratives that consider China's propagation of nationalism (Ohnesorge, 2016).

In the contemporary scenario, the US is fully alarmed by China's aggressive attitude towards Taiwan. Taiwan requires a strong alliance with the US to counter any alarming threat from China. It is important to flag that the Biden administration should continue advancing strong and meaningful support to Taiwan. The US and Taiwan

policies over the past four decades have been primarily shouldered with partisans' whims, which paved the way for stability and continuity. China's stance on Taiwan through the One China policy impedes US-China bilateral relations and has heightened the unpredictable environment in the Asia Pacific region. The United Kingdom and the United States have raised concerns over China's rapid investments in nuclear weapons. China's rapid investments would create more significant global security concerns. These concerns heightened after China's nuclear test of a hypersonic missile in July 2021. The UK and the US have criticized China's economic retaliation campaigns and diplomatic outbursts on smaller European states, such as Lithuania, that intend to develop cordial relations with Taiwan.

Moreover, China's deepening strategic partnership with Russia and its concerted efforts to eliminate the international rule-based order contradicts US and UK values and interests. The mutual alliance system aimed to counter China's rise can be seen through the involvement of leaders from the Asia Pacific region, namely Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea, in recent NATO commitments to counter China and Russian aggression. The global showcasing of the alliance highlights the growing worrisome crisis in Ukraine. The UK has also shown interest in the region through the AUKUS alliance with the US and Australia. The AUKUS aims to assist Canberra with hypersonic weapons and nuclear submarines. As a result of US pressure, the United Kingdom has also imposed a ban on China's IT company Huawei 5g equipment for its networks. Additionally, in December last year, German and French warships transited the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea (Chinese-claimed waters).

Strategic Implications of China's Economic Progress

John Mearsheimer's offensive realism observes the strategic implications of China's economic progression. Mearsheimer believes that China's strategic competition can be escalated through China's economic rise, where it would make a considerable effort to chase out the US from the Asia Pacific region. China and the US's intense competition would eventually circumvent prominent courtiers of Asia Pacific into a regional alliance. Two of Washington's closest allies in the Asia Pacific, namely South Korea and Japan, made an effort to threaten the needle by exchanging delegates to initiate cooperation and clear up strained relations to counter the growing threat of China in the region.

Japan and South Korea leveled through various upheavals in recent years, gripped by unresolved disputes as a result of Japan's attitude during its Korean occupation from 1919 to 1945. However, with the emergence of the US-led alliance system to counter China in the Asia Pacific, both countries are ready to turn a new leaf, as it is vital to the US that both South Korea and Japan work cooperatively on their national security objectives. The US shoulders both the countries to tackle threats from China and Russia, especially when Russia has invaded Ukraine. Moreover, the alliance demands more consolidation, keeping in view the North Korean nuclear weapon program even though the West has made a considerable effort to impose sanctions and harm not only Russia but North Korea as well.

As a result of Russian aggression, China's behavior has now become more alarming in the Asia-Pacific, resulting in the coalition being built by the US and its allies. This demands a prompter encouraging and collaborating strategic action by Tokyo and Seoul under the Kishida and Yoon administrations, where the Yoon government has set an agenda to melt ties with Japan as the top foreign policy agenda – South Korea intends to enhance ties with Japan by revamping GOSMIA, a joint intelligence sharing

agreement. To deter provocations from North Korea, it also wants to restart trilateral military training. Japan perceives a more hawkish approach towards China because of China's authoritarian and muscular foreign policy goals. Therefore, the need of the hour demands a more coercive and concerted alliance with the US and Japan to counter North Korea and Japan. Regarding the scenario between these states, Mearsheimer rightly points out that various security competitions will lead to the probability of war between China and the US.

Alterations in the Power Distribution

Alterations in the power distribution elaborate the indicators behind US strategic policies in the Asia Pacific. Realism understands power politics as a reinforcer behind the international system, with the distribution of power capabilities as the fundamental bedrock. In recent years, this distribution of power has shifted to Asia, especially with the inclination of China's economic rise. The economic rise of China, coupled with the Western economic downfall after the financial crisis of 2008, has enhanced the redistribution of power process (Raditio, 2015). However, as speculations are that Power in Asia will continue to grow with alterations in the magnitude and meaning of power, this would accelerate the power struggle between China and the US in the Asia Pacific region, which would have implications for relations between states. Moreover, more insights for alliances would also develop in the shape of a new pivot to Asia policy, the Asia Pacific leader's role in NATO, the future goals of AUKUS, and much more. These actions underline a very well-crazed offshore balancing constructed by a realist logic.

The Biden administration's launch of the Pacific Economic Partnership (IPEF) demonstrates the realist logic of practice balancing. This pact would strengthen US involvement with Asian economies. IPEF, shaped as an alternative to China's approach, is articulated by the US as the foreign policy for the middle class. Notwithstanding, Japan and US allies in Asia have wanted the US to revivify economic engagement in the region since President Donald Trump withdrew in 2017 from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

However, there are mixed sentiments about IPEF as the US has yet to include Taiwan in the pact. Seven out of 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members are among the first countries to sign a discussion for the pact. Fiji's decision to join the pact reflects the idea that IPEF would be able to contribute to the economic progress of the Pacific Island nations.

Apart from these economic alliances, what worries China is the US-led alliance, namely the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or QUAD. The QUAD is an alliance of four countries: the US, Australia, Japan, and India. The leaders of these countries share their concerns regarding China's aggressive and assertive attitude in the region. As far as China is concerned, its relationship with the member states has become increasingly tense, and it regards the Quad as Asian NATO. China is concerned about the Indian and US inclinations towards each other, which could potentially harm China's strategic clout in the Asia Pacific region. From this perspective, China Quad's motives would expand as states of Asia Pacific aspire to balance China's strategic ambitions.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, the US strategic goals underline some critical realists' logic, like reviving politico-military alliances and reevaluating military resources to attain idealists' gains and objectives. The US and China cannot be seen as the only realist

actors in the international system. While highlighting their strategic competition, both states use realist means to achieve liberals gains through legitimate claims. However, states behaviors exhibit national interest in the international system as supreme and fundamental for any state. These particular interests motivate states to adopt means that are against the norms of the international system. However, realism has never been a famous school of thought in the US. As Mearsheimer points out, the utopian leaders of the US who mentor liberal values as the basis of their institutionalization values eliminate morality for their benefit, and the same goes for China's aspiration in the Asia Pacific.

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