

BOOK REVIEW

Asian Geopolitics and the US-China Rivalry,
Felix Heiduk,
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The evolving US-China competition dominates contemporary international politics. The intensifying rivalry between the two big powers has merited the attention of scholars from various fields such as international relations, foreign policy, strategic studies, and economics. Many experts are writing to explain the nature of their contestation which is impacting almost every aspect of the international system in an increasingly globalized world. This contestation is unique as the two great powers remain entangled in complex interdependence and are unable to decouple relations particularly in the economic domain.

Asia is predominantly affected by rising tensions between the US and China and is viewed by many experts as the battleground for a new Cold War. In this context, regional states face stark choices amidst great power competition. They are struggling to keep a balance between a US-centric and China-centric regional order. *The Asian Politics and the US-China Rivalry*, edited by Felix Heiduk, comprises twelve essays by distinguished scholars who analyze foreign policy responses of regional states in the face of growing China-US competition.

The first five chapters of the book provide an overview of the US-China competition in the Asia-Pacific region. In the first chapter, Felix Heiduk discusses the causes of US-China contestation and its manifestations in the form of strategies such as the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This chapter also provides a brief theoretical account of middle

and small powers' strategies including neutrality, hedging, band wagoning and alignment.

The second chapter is authored by Rosemary Foot. It explains factors contributing to relative peace and stability in the region over the past forty years. She identifies that phenomena such as globalization and regionalism have ensured stability and economic development and have avoided inter-state wars in the region. Nevertheless, regionalism is weakening because of changing geopolitical dynamics, and may further deteriorate in the coming years, adversely impacting regional peace and security. In the third chapter, Rory Medcalf explores the concept of Indo-Pacific and how different states perceive it. He underlines that Indo-Pacific as a term represents multipolarity and inclusiveness as opposed to the US-centric or China-centric interpretations. Fourth chapter is contributed by Joo Hee Kim who analyzes the significance and relevance of multilateralism. He argues that middle powers can promote a rules-based multilateral order as an alternative to the waning US-led international order to meet global challenges.

In chapter five, Lee Jones presents a critique of the traditional Asian security based on realist and quasi-realist assumptions and explains the implications of narrowing down the security debate to military security only. He writes, "For scholars of Asian security who uncritically adopt realist or quasi-realist understandings, there is a real danger of fueling the very conflictual dynamics that their frameworks are supposed only to analyze."

The remaining seven chapters of the volume present case studies of Asian middle powers amidst the developing major power competition. In chapter six, Ganeshan Wignaraja has discussed the relations of Sri Lanka with the US and China in the post-civil conflict years through the lens of international political economy with a focus on domestic and international factors. The author highlights the geostrategic significance of Sri Lanka for the great powers and their support to the country, in terms of foreign trade, investment, development assistance, and security. This chapter also provides data-driven comparison of the engagement of US and China with

Sri Lanka between 2009-2020. He notes, “China has been a visible security partner and the US has upped its efforts to build Sri Lanka’s defense capacity in the Indian Ocean maritime domain.” The author also outlines important lessons for managing small-power and great-power relations amid rising geopolitical tensions in a post-Covid-19 world. These include building economic and social resilience, escaping middle income trap, decoupling economic and security ties, and non-alignment.

In chapter seven, Jagannath Panda reflects on India’s changing China policy, particularly after the Galwan valley standoff of June 2020. He argues that Indian security thinking regarding China is undergoing significant transformation, driving New Delhi to join the US-led frameworks such as Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, commonly known as Quad, to limit Beijing’s influence in the region. This chapter also explores various Indian bilateral and multilateral security arrangements against China such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), Acquisition and Cross-Serving Agreement (ACSA), and several joint military exercises. In conclusion, India is urged to deepen economic and defense ties with the US and other regional states to counter China. However, little account is provided on several important issues such as that of India’s economic opportunities linked with China; challenges faced by New Delhi, if any, due to its economic dependence on Beijing; and China’s role in global supply chains.

Chapter eight is contributed by Alice Ba who explores institutional strategies adopted by middle and small powers in Southeast Asia with reference to policies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as the foremost response to manage US-China competition. She writes, “For Southeast Asia’s small and medium powers, ASEAN, since its founding in 1967, has been especially central in their historical efforts to manage major powers, and major power competition.”

In chapter nine, Renato Cruz De Castro talks about Philip-

pinus-China relations in the context of conflicting claims of both states over the South China Sea. It is argued that President Rodrigo Duterte gradually steered the country from its policy of appeasement to soft balancing against China through strengthening ties with the US, Japan, and ASEAN.

In chapter ten, Hong Liu uses the constructivist approach to explain former PM Mahathir's China policy by analyzing complex domestic economic and political interests. The author contends that it is important to study the policies of countries like Malaysia, beyond traditional strategies of rebalancing or hedging.

In chapter eleven, Thi Thi Soe San discusses the dynamics of US-China competition in Myanmar. She writes that great power rivalry is nothing new to Myanmar. However, post-Covid-19 political and economic disruptions in the region have made a new Cold War inevitable. The author identifies that Myanmar's problems are of domestic origin and have little to do with foreign influences.

In the final chapter, Seo-Hyun Park illustrates the case of South Korea and explains that domestic socio-political factors and international influences determine the political choices of leaders. The author recommends that while making foreign policy choices, the politicians must consider "socially shared discourse" which is "embedded within a historical and cultural context."

In contrast to most of contemporary writings focusing on the behavior of great powers, this book bridges the gap by providing insights on responses of middle and small powers to the evolving great power competition. Considering the country's history of close strategic and economic relations with both US and China, a chapter on Pakistan would have made the book comprehensive and balanced.

Reviewed by Iraj Abid, Research Officer at Centre for International Strategic Studies Sindh (CISSS), Karachi.