



# Margalla Papers

Volume: 26, Number: 2 (2022)

Journal Homepage: <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site>

e-ISSN: 2789-7028

ISSN-L: 1999-2297

---

## RESEARCH PAPER

### China's Foreign Policy Shift from Belt and Road Initiative to Global Development Initiative: Impacts on Maritime Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean Region

**AUTHOR(S):** Maliha Zeba Khan and Zohaib Altaf

Dr. Maliha Zeba Khan is an Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. Mr. Zohaib Altaf is Research Officer at the Centre for International Strategic Studies, Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Author(s) can be reached at malihazkhan@gmail.com.

**KEYWORDS:** Foreign Policy, Belt and Road Initiative, Global Development Initiative, Indian Ocean Region, Maritime Geopolitics.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.54690/margallapapers.26.2.119>

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY ENTRY

Khan, Maliha Zeba, and Zohaib Altaf. 2022. "China's Foreign Policy Shift from Belt and Road Initiative to Global Development Initiative: Impacts on Maritime Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean Region." *Margalla Papers* 26 (2): 14-27.

#### ARTICLE HISTORY

- **Received:** July 20, 2022
- **Peer Reviewed:** September 10, 2022
- **Revised:** October 20, 2022
- **Accepted:** November 15, 2022

**COPYRIGHT:** (c) 2023 Maliha Zeba Khan; Zohaib Altaf. For detailed information, please visit our webpage <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site/copyright>.

**LICENSING:** This is an open-access research paper published under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and citation provided the original author(s) and source are credited.



**COMPETING INTEREST:** The author(s) have declared that no competing interest exists.

**DATA AVAILABILITY:** All relevant data are within the paper and its supporting information files.

# CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY SHIFT FROM BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE TO GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE: IMPACTS ON MARITIME GEOPOLITICS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

*Maliha Zeba Khan and Zohaib Altaf\**

## **Abstract**

*China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the foreign policy strategy that has changed world politics. It has compelled states to revisit their foreign policies either in favour of BRI or countering it. BRI has created a difficult situation for international power structure and status quo states due to transitioning power from west to east and emerging geopolitical reconfiguration. However, in September 2021, President Xi Jinping announced China's Global Development Initiative (GDI) at the opening session of the UN General Assembly, which renewed debate about the impacts of China's strategy. As China has a strong foothold in the Indian Ocean region through BRI, the undertaken research is an endeavour to study the effect of shifting China's foreign policy from BRI to GDI over the maritime geopolitics of the region. This research aims at determining GDI's role in supporting UN Agenda 2030 through focused efforts on sustainable development goals in the maritime domain. It is an exploratory and qualitative research conducted through deductive reasoning to seek an explanation of the core proposition. This research has used secondary sources for determining these upshots with potential changes in the maritime geopolitics of the Indian Ocean region.*

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Belt and Road Initiative, Global Development Initiative, Indian Ocean Region, Maritime Geopolitics.

## **Introduction**

China's inception of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 as a massive strategy to connect the country with the world in multiple ways changed the discourse of international relations and gave new meanings to power-based relations. The idea of BRI was spelled out as the country's visionary foreign policy with colossal strategic opportunities to be extended to the world with clear goals of "promoting policy coordination, connectivity of infrastructure and facilities, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds, adhering to the principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration in propelling the Belt and Road construction."<sup>1</sup> This initiative is not limited to economic ventures, as it has been envisioned and worked upon regional and cultural connectivity to Europe, Asia, and

---

\*Dr. Maliha Zeba Khan is an Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. Mr. Zohaib Altaf is Research Officer at Centre for International Strategic Studies, Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Authors can be reached at malihazkhan@gmail.com.

Africa. It has brought significant changes in states' foreign relations and regional and international geopolitics, spreading out a complex political chessboard in which US supremacy has been challenged, and its allies and strategic partners have their own insecurities linked with BRI and China's policies. Nonetheless, BRI has set up an environment with extensive opportunities for socioeconomic growth and development and cultural connectivity between China and party states, giving it an indirect political ingress to these states.

In an environment marred with the complex geopolitical interplay among states, there was an outbreak of COVID-19 as the worst catastrophic event, yet highlighting non-traditional security in the last hundred years. This pandemic brought about several challenges to humanity: economic regression, the backwardness of health and social services systems, and states' unpreparedness for least-precedented challenges were the worst affecting human development and sustainability of resources, eventually distressing global socioeconomic growth and development. Keeping in view the challenges of COVID-19 for states and societies, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a Global Development Initiative (GDI) to address issues and delays in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) during the opening session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) held virtually in September 2021. The goal was to boost economic and social development globally. President Xi stated that GDI would be a new initiative to help the UN 2030-Agenda for Sustainable Development and "steer global development toward a new stage of balanced, coordinated and inclusive growth."<sup>2</sup> That proposal reflects China's approach to expanding foreign policy at the global level and its willingness to play an effective global role in developing sustainable economies and productive societies. Therefore, the core argument of this research is the following: Amidst mistrust, ambiguities and opposing narratives regarding BRI, China's GDI is an enabler to substantiate its role as a global leader, reflecting that structural factors stay at the core of policymaking, which will have intense consequential geopolitics within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) involving a plethora of regional and extra-regional actors.

This research has been organized into five sections: a) Neoclassical realism as the theoretical underpinning of China's foreign policy shift from BRI to GDI; b) China's foreign policy in IOR under BRI; c) GDI as a smart strategy under China's foreign policy; d) China's foreign policy shift: impacts on maritime geopolitics of IOR; and e) conclusion.

## **Neoclassical Realism as Theoretical Underpinning of China's Foreign Policy Shift from BRI to GDI**

Neoclassical realism considers a country's relative power in the international system as the most consequential factor in shaping broader patterns of a country's foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> Instead of just focusing on security, neo-classical realism assumes that countries respond to anarchical international system by controlling and shaping the external environment. This policy of influencing and shaping the external environment

depends on the relative amount of material resources a country possesses.<sup>4</sup> According to neoclassical realists, a theory of foreign policy that solely focuses on system factors is insufficient to explain a country's foreign interests. It emphasizes the interaction of systematic pressures with unit-level variables and establishes a firm ground for analysis through theory application.

Neoclassical realism assumes that foreign policy depends on structural signalling and how those signals are translated through domestic variables. The perception of states' policymakers is significant in this regard. According to neoclassical realism, leaders and political parties make foreign policy decisions; therefore, sometimes, material power does not translate into an objective change in foreign policy. It can only happen with medium and short-term objectives. It focuses on the context in which foreign policies are formulated.<sup>5</sup> The institution responsible for foreign policymaking in China is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, it does not do foreign policymaking related to countries like the US and Russia. The role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remains limited to making policies related to smaller countries. When it comes to powerful countries, the ministry's role is to interpret and support the country's leadership decisions. Apart from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, many organizations play roles that can influence China's policymaking process. It includes the Communist Party of China, the military, and other societal actors; however, the final decision-making power rests with President Xi Jinping in the contemporary era.<sup>6</sup>

If neoclassical realism is applied to the context and its policy response, BRI has surfaced as a riposte to China's four-pronged crises, i.e., skilled and semi-skilled human capital seeking sustainable employability in and outside the country, market for surplus production, particularly infrastructure/ construction material, utilizing indigenous technological advancement and capability of China for alternative energy production like solar energy, tidal energy, windmills infrastructure besides coal and other fossil fuel-based power plants, and last but not least by any means, services' provision and consultancy based on the economic model of China are substantive grounds on which BRI has been structured. On the contrary, this strategy has offered the world more than ever under alliances, strategic partnerships, and bi or multilateral agreements. It is based on an inclusive approach and openness to all as per their requirements giving BRI a conducive outlook.

### **China's Foreign Policy in IOR under BRI**

China's extension of its foreign policy toward IOR has largely been through economic and commercial diplomacy through BRI. China is pursuing a multi-dimensional foreign policy in the region as BRI's central part is going through the IOR.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, since 2009, China's People Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN) has been upgrading itself to conduct operations beyond its immediate waters.<sup>8</sup> China has had an active presence in the Indian Ocean for anti-piracy operations around the Gulf of Aden, besides frequent visits of its warships and submarines in the IOR.<sup>9</sup> In 2015, China's military strategy shifted from defending offshore water to protecting both offshore and

overseas water. China considers safeguarding its interests, organizations and people in overseas waters as one of the goals of the PLA.<sup>10</sup> It signifies that with the increase in China's economic power, it has been considering enhancing its role beyond its territorial water.

China is building interconnectedness with IOR countries on multiple levels, mainly to achieve and enhance regional connectivity and establish a community of common interest.<sup>11</sup> It is no longer pursuing policy reform in which the main objective was to hide strength and get more time. Instead, China's policy has become more proactive and overt. China's foreign policy in IOR results from systematic opportunities due to increased power and domestic requirements. In the IOR, China has established a strong relationship with Middle Eastern, South Asian, Southeast Asian and East African countries of IOR.

#### a) **Middle Eastern Countries**

China has become the largest investor in the Middle East since BRI by investing US \$123 billion in diversified projects not only limited to trade. China is building many ports and infrastructure projects in Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, and Egypt. China has also signed a 5G agreement with the Gulf countries.<sup>12</sup> In January 2022, Arab foreign ministers visited China. After their visit, the Iranian foreign minister also visited China to discuss a security and economic deal of US \$400 billion to reduce the impact of sanctions.<sup>13</sup> China's foreign policy in the Middle East remains focused on increasing influence without getting entangled in the region's domestic affairs.<sup>14</sup>

China has institutionalized its foreign relations with Arabs countries by establishing the Chinese Arab State Cooperation Forum (CASCF). All Arab League states have become members of this forum.<sup>15</sup> In 2014, in the ministerial meeting of CASCF, they decided 1+2+3 pattern of cooperation between China and other Gulf countries. In this equation, 1 represents the energy, 2 is related to infrastructure and investment, and 3 illustrates collaboration in renewable energy, space, and satellites. President Xi stated during the opening session of CASCF regarding developing BRI that states "need to be humble and far-sighted."<sup>16</sup>

#### b) **South Asia**

Under the banner of BRI, China commenced China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) when Pakistan was facing challenges of terrorism and energy crises.<sup>17</sup> China is also building a deep-water seaport in Gwadar. China's bilateral relations with Sri Lanka have strengthened over the years, and both countries have a comprehensive economic relationship.<sup>18</sup> China is developing Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, which will help China overcome Malacca Dilemma.<sup>19</sup> After the visit of Bangladesh by President Xi in 2016, both countries signed 27 deals worth US \$24 billion.<sup>20</sup> China is also developing a port of Chittagong in Bangladesh.<sup>21</sup> China has helped the Maldives through loans and investment in different areas, such as infrastructure and electricity production.<sup>22</sup>

### c) ASEAN Countries

China's BRI helps several ASEAN countries to fulfil their infrastructure deficit. Some major agreements like Jakarta–Bandung High-Speed Rail (HSR) in Indonesia and Kyaukpyu–Kunming Oil and Gas Pipeline between Myanmar and China highlight their recognition of the need for better connectivity in attracting commerce and investment.<sup>23</sup> Despite the ongoing damage that COVID-19 is doing to global commerce and investment, China's economic connections with ASEAN member states have remained stable. China's trade surplus grew by 27% in 2020, and ASEAN has surpassed the EU as China's most important commercial partner.<sup>24</sup> Investments in BRI in Southeast Asia have increased from US \$16.8 billion in 2014 to US \$29.3 billion in 2019, representing 27.6 percent of all BRI investments globally. Over those six years, 46.2% of BRI investments in Southeast Asia were allocated to building projects.<sup>25</sup> The transportation industry makes up 31.7% of total investments under BRI, with energy and resources coming in at 42.9%. While overall BRI investments dropped significantly in 2020, Southeast Asia (US \$16.9 billion) surpassed all other regions as BRI's top investment destination, receiving 36% of all BRI investments.<sup>26</sup>

### d) Africa

China has invested in 52 out of 54 African countries under BRI. China has offered US \$60 billion in investment in Africa until 2021 at the China-Africa Cooperation Forum. There are five ways China invests in African countries, i.e., coast and port infrastructures, railway networks, road connectivity, mineral processing and energy projects. Out of 49 countries that have signed MoU with China, there are 37 coastal states which need the development of port infrastructure. China is building ports in Djibouti, a port in Sudan, two ports in Egypt, a port in Tunisia, and a port in Algeria.<sup>27</sup> Among the remaining vital areas of China's investments in Africa, 10 percent of projects are related to rail and road connectivity, 10 percent are mineral processing projects, and 15 percent are energy projects.<sup>28</sup>

China is also promoting Digital Silk Road (DSR) in African countries as part of BRI. In this DSR, all elements of technology, such as the development of services sector in the digital domain, e-commerce, building smart cities, medicine through technology and financing through the internet, are involved. China is developing DSR as an essential component of BRI, and it focuses on cooperation in areas such as AI, cloud computing and big data to achieve innovation-driven growth.<sup>29</sup>

## GDI as Smart Strategy under China's Foreign Policy

Since September 2021, when GDI was announced, there have been 100 countries that have shown support for it. Sixty countries have joined the 'Group of Friends of GDI' till September 2022.<sup>30</sup> This initiative has been proposed to overcome the delay in achieving SDGs due to COVID-19 and inject significant momentum for implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. President Xi and leaders of several

other states came together to re-establish socioeconomic development based on equality and inclusiveness as the main focus of international development.

The proposal of GDI has been pivoted on a broader spectrum of areas of collaboration, circumfering several goals, including alleviating poverty, managing food security, aiding COVID-19 support, financial development, green development, and more.<sup>31</sup> There are two premises, i.e., the establishment of Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund and increased participation in the China-UN Peace and Development Trust Fund to support GDI.<sup>32</sup> China is collaborating with other relevant parties to build cooperation networks in agriculture, education, response to COVID-19 and climate action.<sup>33</sup> There are now 150 institutions from about 40 nations and regions working together to create a World TVET (Technical, Vocational and Educational Training) League.<sup>34</sup>

Since environmental security has been a concern for sustainability and socioeconomic growth as the attainment of SDGs is delayed due to pandemic challenges, the China-Pacific Island Countries Climate Change Cooperation Centre has been opened to facilitate cooperation on climate action. Health is another critical sector for collaboration under the World TVET League; therefore, co-production of COVID-19 vaccines has begun in China with 13 nations involved, including nine from the Group of Friends of GDI. Over a thousand different capacity development programs have been offered to the Group of Friends of GDI nations, providing over forty thousand individuals with training opportunities.<sup>35</sup> China has increased the size of the team working on GDI implementation. Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund has supported projects involving GDI collaboration. China has done its bit to increase international development resources by taking part in the replenishment of the International Development Association and Global Environment Facility and by launching the third phase of the China-FAO South-South Cooperation Trust Fund.<sup>36</sup>

A significant focus of SDGs has been on alleviating poverty and hunger since its initiation, whereas COVID-19 has put people in massive hunger and poverty. Over 150 million people have been forced to go hungry due to the pandemic, wiping off years of progress against poverty. GDI suggests working intensely to deal with increased poverty and hunger, and most cooperative efforts have focused on helping people to improve their food, health and other means of subsistence. The International NGOs Network for Poverty Reduction Cooperation's founding members were from 17 nations and regions. Due to the current food shortage, the Group of Friends has presented a unified proposal and addressed the issue of food security in UNGA (2021). China has already sent three shipments of emergency food aid to impoverished nations and has recently committed to providing much more.

China is the world's biggest developing nation, and under GDI's inspiration, it is ready to increase the synergy of strategies with UN development agencies. China, along with the Group of Friends, has adopted the following seven steps to execute the UN 2030 Agenda: Firstly, the GDI project pool's first list was made public with 1,000 new capacity development programmers and 50 practical cooperation projects aimed at

alleviating poverty, ensuring food security and promoting industrialization. China is committed to collaborating with all relevant stakeholders to ensure the completion of these projects. All involved are encouraged to provide fresh suggestions based on their specific requirements, which will help the pool grow over time.

Secondly, Food Production Enhancement Action is another significant area of cooperation under GDI. It has been announced that FAO will sign agreements with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences and International Research Centre of Big Data for Sustainable Development to collaborate on digital and innovative agricultural financing, animal and plant disease prevention and control, and sustainable soil and water resource management. The third is advancing the Global Clean Energy Collaboration Partnership and strengthening practical cooperation with International Renewable Energy Agency and other nations to accelerate the transition to clean energy and achieve sustainable energy security.<sup>37</sup> Fourth is boosting collaboration on smart customs, smart borders and smart connectivity, and cooperating with international organizations like the World Customs Organization and other nations to build smart customs networks and increase supply chain connection in the digital age. The fifth collaboration and cooperation area at the international level is the World Digital Education Alliance to boost digital education, use technology to foster growth in the field of education, and lower the cost and increase the availability of relevant educational materials for everyone. The sixth area is addressing issues of plastic pollution to ensure clean earth for future generations, for which the International Bamboo and Rattan Organization and the Bamboo as a Substitute for Plastics Global Action Plan have been launched in tandem.<sup>38</sup> Seventh is declaring that information gathered by China's SDGSAT-1 satellite, launched in November 2021, is now available to the public to aid nations in their pursuit of sustainable development via informed policymaking and research.<sup>39</sup>

### **China's Foreign Policy Shift: Impacts on Maritime Geopolitics of IOR**

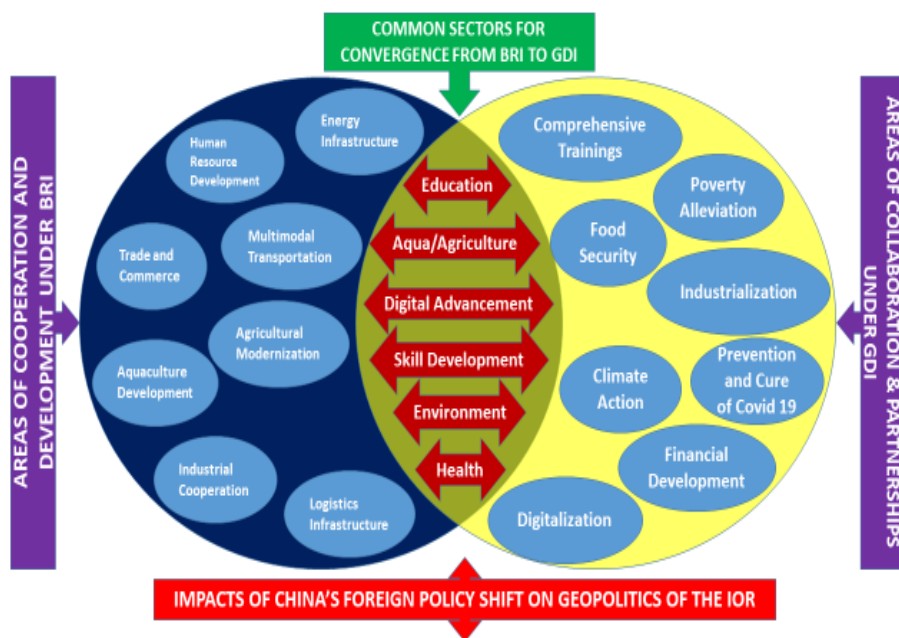
BRI connectivity has been based on integrating economic activities with multimodal trade worldwide and boosting it further through effective connectivity from sea to ports and port terminals to hinterland terminals by laying well-designed value chains. This extensive connectivity project is more than an economic strategy; a true reflection of China's foreign policy focused on mutual growth and development for party states. GDI juxtaposes with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by opening up different avenues of cooperation and collaboration worldwide for shared goals of socioeconomic development. The converging grounds between GDI and SDGs under the UN 2030 Agenda have the potential to work on inclusive policies by focusing on countries already behind on the development index and struck by COVID-19 to worsen the situation. Therefore, GDI is another gesture of China's foreign policy goals believing in collaborative efforts for shared benefits.

Here the question arises, how will the shift in China's foreign policy from BRI to GDI impact the IOR environment? There are already many regional actors like India,



Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Australia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Sudan, Egypt, Israel, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania and many others, extra-regional actors like the US, Russia, EU, and resident actors, i.e., French and British. Since BRI has already caused ripples in the world environment, and India, the US and its allies are perceiving China's grand connectivity strategy as a threat and challenge to their interests, initiating GDI amplifies geopolitics in IOR to the level where the interplay of actors become more intense. To study the impacts of a policy shift on maritime geopolitics, an infographic (Figure 1.1 below) has been structured to reflect the integrated prospects of BRI and GDI. Both initiatives have their spheres of work which, on convergence, will nonetheless manifest reality with massive potential to intensify the maritime geopolitics of IOR. There is a partial structural shift being envisioned through this research while shifting from BRI to GDI with a visible change of strategic approach from cooperation and development to collaboration and partnerships through the manifested reality, which has been identified as common sectors on which BRI and GDI can converge and bring changes to structural factors. The following infographic depicts the dimensions of states' interplay and the emerging structure of the IOR environment.

**Figure 1.1:** Integrated Prospects of China's Foreign Policy Shift



(Source: Authors' Compilation)

BRI is hosting diversified areas for cooperation and development, including transport and logistics infrastructure, energy, trade and commerce, new businesses and investment opportunities, industrial cooperation, agricultural modernization, human resource development and improvement in socioeconomic indicators, besides enhancement of security and stability of the region as a spillover effect through its projects with potential impact on other land masses.<sup>40</sup> Since value chains under BRI

could be various, there would be colossal employment opportunities with multiple choices of fields and entrepreneurship mainly related to commercial activities at ports, multimodal trade and transportation, industry, agriculture and aquaculture. On the contrary, GDI involves a broader agenda with collaborations and partnerships aimed at global level upgradation. Based on that shift, it can be suggested as an upshot that GDI has potential areas of cooperation that can enable China to emerge as a global leader through vertical and horizontal ingress and enhance its image. It can be described comprehensively as a smart strategy of China which can cause complex consequential politics in IOR.

The great power competition has marked IOR with altered trends in this regard, particularly after the inception of GDI following BRI, in which multilateralism is an overwhelming approach with serious concerns of further bloc structuring, the possibility of newer Cold War, and power transition besides loosening of the US control over oceanic spaces. China's augmented influence across maritime geographies has created uncertainties for global and regional actors. The US sees China as a challenger to its established world order and rule-based order in IOR. That weakening control and command of the US over this region can be a precursor to the transition of maritime power to China, causing grim shaking of the Blue Order in other oceanic spaces as well. Russia, the EU, and individual European countries like Germany, France and Greece have their interests linked with IOR. Their presence and meddling with regional affairs have emerged as complex competition within the region's political environment. At the regional level, competitive geopolitics in IOR has caused different kinds of political pressures. China's increasing role through BRI in the first place and then GDI and political ingress as an indirect pay out of both strategies is a matter of concern for the status quo.

Witnessing China's unprecedented economic growth and international systemic factors on the verge of being revised, the US and its formal and informal allies and partners have shifted their foreign policy direction towards Asia to counter China.<sup>41</sup> This shift is shaping the contours of geopolitical environment of IOR in terms of political, strategic and economic competition. India cannot balance against China individually at all the above levels in which China has a visible edge over India, e.g., China has 141 vessels and India has just 43 vessels, besides other parameters of strategic competition.<sup>42</sup> This disparity has provided grounds for converging India's interests with the US as China's increasing role in IOR is not only creating an uneasy impression of India's encirclement but also for the US as a challenger. Thus, IOR faces tri-polar competition between the US, India and China.<sup>43</sup>

India's role in IOR is not limited to defensive consideration, and it wants to play the role of net security provider in the Indian Ocean. On the contrary, China's presence in the Indian Ocean has become a long-term strategic concern for India. Furthermore, India sees a possibility of a clash between India and China in the Indian Ocean.<sup>44</sup> India considers different Chinese projects a threat to its regional ambitions. China's projects of port infrastructure in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and

East African countries are seen with suspicion by India. India is also expanding its defence capabilities to counter China's role in the IOR. In recent years, India has engaged the navies of friendly countries in naval exercises with many IOR countries.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, India has inducted eight marine surveillance and strike crafts.<sup>46</sup>

IOR is witnessing approaches to balancing acts by different states, eventually giving space to multilateralism. Sri Lanka has signed many agreements with India besides its engagement with BRI. Similarly, in 2020, Maldives signed a framework of defence cooperation with the US. India is also trying to improve relations with Nepal and Bangladesh.<sup>47</sup> According to some scholars, India is actively engaging in collation diplomacy with Middle Eastern states, behind which the point is to pressurize Pakistan and China.<sup>48</sup>

India's strategic partnership with the US is also pursuing cooperation to counter China under a series of agreements.<sup>49</sup> Besides that, in April 2022, the US launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework that did not include China.<sup>50</sup> The US is also promoting democracy as an instrument against China. It means that the US wants to divide the world into ideological lines and make contest against authoritarianism. The US wants to bring democracy and liberal values to the forefront as part of its grand strategy to contain China. Therefore, this approach is already visible in IOR as narratives are being built along those lines, where countries might have to choose between liberal values and authoritarianism. The US is wrapping power politics in normative rhetoric to use sanctions and other means against China and its projects.<sup>51</sup> The US establishes that democracies can serve their interests better. Due to competitive narratives and international shaming, states are more likely to comply with the US.<sup>52</sup>

The US and G-7 countries also announced the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative, focusing on fields like health, health security, climate and technology. This project is aimed at middle-income countries to provide economic support in developing multiple sectors, such as health and technology. It will provide US \$40 trillion to support the comprehensive development in middle-income countries.<sup>53</sup> This program is focused on democracy, which means it competes with China-led projects. The main point of this project is that it will be value-driven, and the focus on value is on democracy, in opposition to China's authoritarian model.<sup>54</sup>

The US is also widening its geographic area of QUAD (the US, Japan, India and Australia as fundamental partners) and focusing on the Indian Ocean as a geopolitical arena in which economic means will be used in accordance. Furthermore, in May 2022, QUAD leaders discussed expanding cooperation on vaccines and cybersecurity and collaboration in maritime security, such as illegal fishing. QUAD is also focused on managing natural disasters and establishing a resource-sharing centre in the Indian Ocean.<sup>55</sup> These programs compete with China's strategies, such as BRI and GDI, covering the same areas and domains. It intensifies hybrid balancing and countering efforts by the US and its allies against China.

In the case of China, it has a top-down system in which the Chinese President is most important in decision-making processes.<sup>56</sup> China's foreign policy is based on President Xi's vision, strategic command and wisdom. He is taking a direct interest in major foreign policy decisions; these initiatives are his flagship projects, and he won't let them fail. On the other hand, the US perceives China as a challenger to the system, and GDI would increase its weightage towards global leadership. Therefore, a trend of hybrid balancing has taken place in IOR in which balancing acts are becoming complex involving political, economic and other ways, not limited to one area or domain.<sup>57</sup> Countering and balancing both approaches can potentially change the contours of IOR geopolitics with broader impacts on regional and extra-regional actors.

Another security dimension and possible coercion, yet a very significant one which can require a comprehensive response, is the hybrid threat which uses conventional and non-conventional means of warfare. It involves propaganda, print or electronic media, use of cyber techniques, use of social media as instruments of war, and propagation or hate speech aimed at certain goals like promoting or negating specific ethnicities and religions/ beliefs. It is called generation warfare which employs comprehensive strategies. Countries with weak social contracts can become prey to these techniques, and in the context of countering, states can face massive challenges in terms of nationalism.

BRI integrating with GDI projects is a broader manifested reality that will further engage countries with the Chinese model, giving an edge to its governance approaches. Besides other common sectors as part of manifestation, advancement in technological fields and extension of technology through collaboration and partnerships have provided an opportunity for China to become a global leader.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the US is countering China in these areas too. It is visible in US-enforced sanctions on many firms providing new technologies.<sup>59</sup> In particular, new technologies and digitalization are key in competing with the world in the maritime domain;<sup>60</sup> therefore, the US can hinder economic growth in IOR. Nonetheless, the US-China rivalry is a full-on, all-encompassing strategic conflict regarding wealth, power, and influence in IOR and the world. There are opposing governments and economic growth theories, contrasting interpretations of international law, and rival priorities. Both camps are striving to improve their standing and freedom of action in the world at the expense of others.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

Since BRI's initiation, IOR has emerged as the hub of international geopolitics, which intensified after President Xi proposed GDI in September 2021. Emerging geopolitics has different contours, including economy, politics, strategy, technological modernization and its exchange or extension to others. These are the result of integrated prospects as manifested reality of both initiatives. The undertaken research infers that China is actively pursuing its foreign policy not just because of economic interests but because structural factors are staying at the core of its approach. China's foreign policy is based on growth and sustainable development. However, neoclassical realism

assumes that state power decides its foreign policy in the long term. The decisive role of China's President in foreign policy decision-making and taking a personal interest in introducing unique initiatives has given China's foreign policy a robust approach with the potential to alter structural factors like the world order and status quo. Therefore, the success of BRI and GDI will not only ensure sustainable economic rise but will enable China to emerge as a global leader and influencer with the capability.

The second inference is that China is working on coherent strategies to aggrandize its role and power, and manifested reality in the form of common sectors on which cooperation, collaboration and partnerships are structured as part of the smart strategy is going to bring enhanced status in the international system. However, in the short term, China does not want confrontation with India or the US. In contrast, it is not in the interest of the US and India to allow the success of Chinese projects if they remain unresponsive. Since these projects are President Xi's brainchild, China will not let these projects fail. Therefore, China will act with aggrandized strength to counter India and the US though without implying overt power or confrontation in the first place.

The third inference is the inclusion of hybrid countering and balancing strategies in foreign policies being adopted by all stakeholders to deal with the hybrid nature of threats, including technology, digitalization, information and strategic posturing. China's enhanced role and improvement of its image, which will upscale its role from an economic giant to a global leader, is not acceptable for regional and extra-regional actors in IOR, which will complicate the power quotient of the region by and large.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> For details see official site of Xinhua, "Full text: Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative," China.org.cn, June 20, 2017, accessed on December 12, 2021. Available at [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2017-06/20/content\\_41063286.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2017-06/20/content_41063286.htm) (Accessed October 2022). Full text: Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative - China.org.cn.
- <sup>2</sup> "Unpacking China's Global Development Initiative | Lowy Institute," accessed October 8, 2022. Available at <https://www.loyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/unpacking-china-s-global-development-initiative> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>3</sup> Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (October 1998): 144–72, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100007814>.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 152
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 147
- <sup>6</sup> Marc Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction*, Fourth edition (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020).
- <sup>7</sup> Marc Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction*, Fourth edition (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020).
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 7
- <sup>9</sup> Susanne Kamerling and Frans-Paul Van Der Putten, "An Overseas Naval Presence without Overseas Bases: China's Counter-Piracy Operation in the Gulf of Aden," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 40, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 119–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261104000405>.
- <sup>10</sup> Paul Odhiambo, "China's Geostategic Interests in the Indian Ocean Region: Implications for Kenya," *The African Review*, October 1, 2020, 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1821889X-12340024>.
- <sup>11</sup> Naren Chitty et al., "The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and the Indian Ocean Region: Sentiment towards Economic Prosperity and Security Implications," *The Indian Journal of Politics* 20, no. 1–2 (2018): 1–20.
- <sup>12</sup> Charles W Dunne, "China's Belt and Road Initiative and US Middle East Policy," Think Tank Website, Arab Center Washington DC, January 21, 2022. Available at <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-and-us-middle-east-policy/> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>13</sup> Farnaz Fassihi and Steven Lee Myers, "China, with \$400 Billion Iran Deal, Could Deepen Influence in Mideast," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2021, sec. World. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/27/world/middleeast/china-iran-deal.html> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>14</sup> Anchal Vohra, "Xi Jinping Has Transformed China's Middle East Policy." *Foreign Policy*, February 1, 2022. Available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/01/xi-jinping-has-transformed-chinas-middle-east-policy/> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>15</sup> Jonathan Fulton, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of China - Middle East Relations* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2022).
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 5
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 153
- <sup>18</sup> Saman Kelegama, "China–Sri Lanka Economic Relations: An Overview," *China Report* 50, no. 2 (May 2014): 131–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445514523646>.
- <sup>19</sup> Shantanu Roy-Chaudhury, "China, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Hambantota Port Project," *St Antony's International Review* 15, no. 1 (2019): 153–64.
- <sup>20</sup> Delwar Hossain and Md. Shariful Islam, "Understanding Bangladesh's Relations with India and China: Dilemmas and Responses," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 17, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 42–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2021.1878582>.
- <sup>21</sup> Mike Chia-Yu Huang, "A New Game Started? China's 'Overseas Strategic Pivots' in the Indian Ocean Region," *China Report* 54, no. 3 (August 2018): 267–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445518779164>.
- <sup>22</sup> Kathrin Hille and Simon Mundy, "The Maldives Counts the Cost of Its Debts to China," *Financial Times*, February 11, 2019. Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/c8da1c8a-2a19-11e9-88a4-c32129756dd8> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>23</sup> Hong Liu, Kong Yam Tan, and Guan Lim, "Introduction — Southeast Asia and the Belt and Road Initiative: The Political Economy of Regionalism, Trade, and Infrastructure," *The Singapore Economic Review* 66, no. 01 (March 2021): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1142/S021759082102001X>.
- <sup>24</sup> Kaho Yu, "The Belt and Road Initiative in Southeast Asia after COVID-19: China's Energy and Infrastructure Investments in Myanmar," ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute, April 6, 2021. Available at <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-39-the-belt-and-road-initiative-in-southeast-asia-after-covid-19-chinas-energy-and-infrastructure-investments-in-myanmar-by-kaho-yu/> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> L. Venkateswaran, "China's Belt and Road Initiative: Implications in Africa," ORF. Available at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-implications-in-africa/> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>28</sup> Toyo Amegnonna Marcel Dossou, "The Impact of China's One Belt One Road Initiative in Africa: The Evidence from Kenya," 2018. Available at <https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/90460/> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>29</sup> Motolani Agbebi, "China's Digital Silk Road and Africa's Technological Future," Think Tank Website, Council on Foreign Relations, 22AD. Available at <https://www.cfr.org/blog/chinas-digital-silk-road-and-africas-technological-future> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>30</sup> Zhang Hui and Zhao Juecheng, "UN Reps Hail China's Global Development Initiative as Accelerator to Achieving 2030 Agenda-Global Times," *News and Analysis*, Global Times, 2022. Available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202206/1268588.shtml> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>31</sup> Michelanie Allcock, "China's Global Development Initiative," *The Borgen Project*, accessed on October 5, 2022. Available at <https://borgenproject.org/chinas-global-development-initiative/>. (Accessed October 2022). China's Global Development Initiative - The Borgen Project.

- <sup>32</sup> "China and Africa: Strengthening Friendship, Solidarity and Cooperation for a New Era of Common Development," accessed October 9, 2022. Available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx\\_662805/202208/t20220819\\_10745617.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202208/t20220819_10745617.html) (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>33</sup> "China Unveils Seven Practical Measures to Implement UN 2030 Agenda," *Pakistan Today* (blog), September 21, 2022. Available at <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/09/21/china-unveils-seven-practical-measures-to-implement-un-2030-agenda/>.
- <sup>34</sup> "Global Support for Vocational Education Urged - Chinadaily.Com.Cn," accessed October 9, 2022. Available at <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202208/22/WS6302de71a310fd2b29e737c6.html> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>35</sup> "China Unveils Seven Practical Measures to Implement UN 2030 Agenda."
- <sup>36</sup> "What Is China's GDI? Five Take-Aways from China's First Global Development Report," Donor Tracker, accessed October 9, 2022. Available at <https://donortracker.org/insights/what-chinas-gdi-five-take-aways-chinas-first-global-development-report> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 1
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 1
- <sup>39</sup> "Jointly Advancing the Global Development Initiative and Writing a New Chapter for Common Development," accessed October 8, 2022. Available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx\\_662805/202209/t20220922\\_10769721.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202209/t20220922_10769721.html) (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>40</sup> For detail, see "CPEC: China Pakistan Economic Corridor," official website, accessed on July 22, 2021, <http://cpec.gov.pk/>.
- <sup>41</sup> Charles L. Glaser, "A U.S.-China Grand Bargain? The Hard Choice between Military Competition and Accommodation," *International Security* 39, no. 4 (April 2015): 49–90, [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00199](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00199).
- <sup>42</sup> Muhammad Abbas Hassan, "Growing China-India Competition in the Indian Ocean," *Strategic Studies* 39, no. 1 (2019): 77–89.
- <sup>43</sup> Renu Rana, "Book Review: *United States-China-India Strategic Triangle in the Indian Ocean Region*, Edited by Sithara Fernando," *China Report* 52, no. 1 (February 2016): 58–62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445515613876>.
- <sup>44</sup> David Brewster, ed., *India and China at Sea: Competition for Naval Dominance in the Indian Ocean*, First edition (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- <sup>45</sup> Anjeev Miglani, "U.S. Holds Naval Exercises with Allies in Asia amid China Tension," News, Reuters, July 21, 2020. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-usa-idUSKCN24MoRB> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>46</sup> David Brewster, ed., "India's Evolving Maritime Domain Awareness Strategy in the Indian Ocean," in *India and China at Sea: Competition for Naval Dominance in the Indian Ocean*, First edition (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- <sup>47</sup> C. Raja Mohan, "Across South Asia, U.S. and India Push Back Against China," News Analysis, Foreign Policy, accessed April 11, 2022. Available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/06/us-india-china-sri-lanka-south-asia-geopolitics/> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>48</sup> Kanti Bajpai, "Narendra Modi's Pakistan and China Policy: Assertive Bilateral Diplomacy, Active Coalition Diplomacy," *International Affairs* 93, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 69–91, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iw003>.
- <sup>49</sup> Amy Kazmin, "US and India Sign Defence Agreement to Counter China," News and Analysis, Financial Times, October 27, 2020.
- <sup>50</sup> Ben Blanchard, "U.S. Has 'no Intention' to Engage with China on Indo Pacific Economic Framework," Reuters, February 17, 2022. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-has-no-intention-engage-with-china-indo-pacific-economic-frame-work-2022-02-17/> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>51</sup> Tarun Chhabra, "The China Challenge, Democracy, and U.S. Grand Strategy," Policy Brief (Washington: Foreign Policy and Brookings, 2019).
- <sup>52</sup> Gideon Rose, "Democracy Promotion and American Foreign Policy: A Review Essay," *International Security* 25, no. 3 (January 2001): 186–203, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228800560561>.
- <sup>53</sup> The White House, "FACT SHEET: President Biden and G7 Leaders Launch Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership," The White House, June 12, 2021. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/12/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-launch-build-back-better-world-b3w-partnership/> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>55</sup> Michael Kugelman, "The Quad Looks West," News and Analysis, *Foreign Policy* (blog), May 26, 2022. Available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/26/quad-tokyo-south-asia-indian-ocean-region/> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>56</sup> Linda Jakobson and Ryan Manuel, "How Are Foreign Policy Decisions Made in China?: Foreign Policy Decisions Made in China," *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 3, no. 1 (January 2016): 101–10, <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.121>.
- <sup>57</sup> Ryuta Ito, "Hybrid Balancing as Classical Realist Statecraft: China's Balancing Behaviour in the Indo-Pacific," *International Affairs*, October 10, 2022, iiac214, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiac214>.
- <sup>58</sup> Dpeleschuk, "There's More to China's New Global Development Initiative than Meets the Eye," *Atlantic Council* (blog), August 18, 2022. Available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/theres-more-to-chinas-new-global-development-initiative-than-meets-the-eye/> (Accessed October 2022).
- <sup>59</sup> "U.S. Considers Unprecedented Sanctions on China Tech Giant Hikvision," *Bloomberg.Com*, May 5, 2022. Available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-05/u-s-mulls-unprecedented-sanctions-on-china-tech-giant-hikvision>.
- <sup>60</sup> Nikki Funke et al., "The Importance of Technology for the Marine and Maritime Sectors," in *Marine and Maritime Sectors*, 2014, 10.
- <sup>61</sup> Mordechai Chaziza, "The 'Build Back Better World': An Alternative to China's BRI for the Middle East?" Think Tank Website, Middle East Institute, 2021. Available at <https://www.mei.edu/publications/build-back-better-world-alternative-chinas-bri-middle-east> (Accessed October 2022).