

The Navigating Strategies of Middle Powers in an Era of Great Power Rivalry: Drawing Strategic Lessons from Japan, India and Indonesia

Darskedar Taye

Lead Researcher, Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA)

Article History

Received 28 March 2024

Accepted 24 July 2024

Published 14 Sept 2024

Keywords

Navigating strategy, middle power, global order, bandwagon strategy, issue-based engagement

Abstract

We are living in an era of heightened great power rivalry whereby every state of the world is being affected, including Ethiopia. The Sino-US rivalry is becoming more apparent in regions like the Asia-Pacific so that states in this region pursue different navigating strategies that best serve their national interests. Given the difference in relative power of states, be it great power, middle power and small power, all states in the Asia-Pacific region have diverse foreign policy orientations. Thus, this study is aimed at identifying the strategies of selected middle power states, Japan, India and Indonesia, and drawing some strategic lessons relevant to Ethiopia. The study utilized qualitative methods such as key informant interviews and document analysis to collect data. Through thematic analysis, the researcher identified the main strategies of the selected cases. In the mounting Sino-US rivalry, three navigating strategies are identified. These are the bandwagon strategy of Japan, the issue-based engagement of India, and the balancing strategy of Indonesia.

Introduction

When major powers engage in intense competition and the potential for global order change arises, middle powers become crucial. These states have the ability to either support the existing order or contribute to its transformation, making them essential actors according to both academics and policymakers.

Despite the absence of a standard measure that defines middle power, states in this category are known for their unique role in the international politics. Holbraad defined middle power as “a state occupying an intermediate position in a hierarchy based on power, a country much

stronger than small nations though considerably weaker than the principle members of the state system” (1971: 78). This perspective is primarily the continuation of his consideration of historical accounts of the nature of middle power states across time, and emphasizes on the material capability of the supposed state.

Accordingly, for a state to hold an intermediate position, it requires geographical advantage, military power, and economic strength, which provide them with the capabilities to have a middle power standing within the power

hierarchy. This hierarchy consists of great power, middle power, and small power states. Other scholars, on the other hand, argue that rather than assessing middle powers based on their capability endowment, it is more relevant to view them from a functional perspective. For instance, Cox (1987:1) contends, “unlike great powers, they were not suspected of harboring intentions of dominations and because they had resources sufficient to enable them to be functionally effective.”

Middle powers, instead, are characterized by their unique foreign policy orientation that basically entails refraining from direct involvement in the great power competition and being neutral in most of the conflicts around the world. Their neutrality in the great power competition, on the other hand, is blessed with the support coming from the prevailing global order as a result of maintaining good relations with the prevailing hegemonic state. Many of the academic literature post the Cold War have focused on identifying distinctive characteristics that set middle power states apart from others. Some discussions center on the roles played by these states, while others analyze the power resources they possess.

Among others, Cooper et al (1993) proposed using geographic, positional, behavioral, and normative power options as criteria to assess the power position of a state. After the end of the Cold War, the emergence of new middle power states across the world led writers to further classify the set of middle powers into ‘traditional’ and ‘emerging’ (Jordan, 2003; Oosterveld and Torossian, 2018-19). Looking further into the behavior and roles of states, some scholars (Hidayatullah, 2017) also

categorized middle powers as ‘enforcers’, ‘assemblers’ and ‘advocators’. (Hidayatullah, 2017).

The traditional and emerging dichotomy benchmark the role difference one plays vis-à-vis its relationship with the global hegemonic state. Such states accept the liberal world order or the ‘rule based international system’ as a legitimate order and shape their foreign policy without challenging the prevailing order. Without making any effort for assuming a dominant role in their respective regions, they focus on global responsibilities such as peace negotiation and peacekeeping. Emerging middle powers, on the other hand, play an active role within their regions and aim to reform the global power structure. Unlike the traditionalist, they are not entirely reliant on existing hegemonic powers but instead are prepared to adapt to changes in the global order.

States in the traditional middle power camp are now thinking of their fate in a situation where, the world is undergoing a phase transition in which power is shifting from West to East, the United States no longer holds the position of undisputed guardian of the global order” (Oosterveld and Torossian, 2018-19). As power is shifting, first, the Asia-Pacific region is the theatre of the superpower competition, due to China emerging as the primary rival challenging the hegemony of the United States.

Second, there are both traditional and emerging middle powers in the Region. Though further scrutiny is needed to map the states in the traditional and emerging camps, there are a number of middle power states in the Asia-Pacific region. These include, Australia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan,

South Korea and Singapore (Križ, Urbanovska and Brajercikova, 2019). In the post-Cold War era, Ethiopia has managed to have strong bilateral relations with both the USA and China.

The change of government in Ethiopia in 1991 coincided with the end of the Cold War at the global level, leading to the emergence of a unipolar world and US being at the apex. The smooth relations between US and Ethiopia further strengthened when Ethiopia gave unreserved support for US's "War on Terror" policy, declared in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attack in 2001.

The rise of China as an economic giant and Ethiopia's establishing strong economic relation with China in the 21st century did not affect the existing strong relations between Ethiopia and US. However, the rise of tensions between the US and China, heightened during Donald Trump's presidency since 2016, has impacted Ethiopia's ability to freely choose its strategic partnerships and alliances. The political reform in Ethiopia in 2018 took place under the shadow of growing debt owed to China and the broader context of great power rivalry between the US and China. This situation emphasizes the need for Ethiopia to navigate these complex geopolitical dynamics effectively.

The existence of rival great powers and numerous middle powers make Asia-Pacific Region vulnerable to geopolitical competition for the great powers and foreign policy dilemma for the middle powers. The middle powers in the Asia-Pacific region have to confront the geopolitical competition between China and United States. Their strategies and

foreign policy approaches might be a good strategic lesson for countries like Ethiopia since the wave of the rivalry is affecting every state around the world. As these middle power states are proximate to the theatre of the great power rivalry, the navigating strategies they follow to manage through can help Ethiopia to resolve its current foreign policy dilemma.

The main objective of this study, therefore, is to identify the navigating strategies of middle powers in the Asia-Pacific region, and thereby to draw lessons for Ethiopia. In order to meet the objective of the study, qualitative data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The three cases were selected in consultation with Ethiopian diplomats who have been living in many Asian countries. The selection of these cases considered the diverse nature of the states and their foreign policy orientation.

Japan, an island state with developed economy, is a good example of traditional middle power in the Asia-Pacific region. It needs to have a stable and safe Indo-Pacific region for its maritime trade. India is an emerging nation with a rising economy and huge population. It has also the potential to be a great power at the global scale in the future given the growth trajectory will not be interrupted. Indonesia is also a rising state with growing economy and huge population. The unique feature of Indonesia is related with its archipelagic nature of statehood.

From the three countries, while Japan is a traditional middle power, the rest two are emerging middle power states. After the three cases had been selected, the primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed thematically.

Japan: The Strategy of Following the Footstep of the US

Since the end of WWII, Japan is known for its friendly relation with the US. It has been an important partner to the US policy towards China and East Asia as well as follow a similar foreign policy pattern on major global issues. In 1949, the People's Liberation Army of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) gained control of Beijing and declared the establishment of the People's Republic of China, prompting the retreat of the Kuomintang Party to the island of Taiwan, which became known as the Republic of China (RoC). The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Beijing and the continuation of the Republic of China (RoC) in Taiwan were based on contrasting ideologies, leading to a division among the world states regarding international recognition.

The United States and its allies, like Japan, only recognized the Republic of China (RoC) and implemented a policy of diplomatic exclusion towards Beijing. The RoC not only received diplomatic recognition from the US, Japan, and other countries but also benefited significantly from development support from Western nations. At the same time, Japan experienced notable economic growth in the two decades following World War II, with some sectors of its private industry showing interest in collaborating with China. The breakdown of Sino-US diplomatic relations hindered Japanese private sector collaboration with China. Japan prioritized maintaining its robust economic and military ties with the US over engaging with China.

The pervasiveness of the Cold War politics pushed the United States government to review its policy towards China and Russia. The US believed that allowing these two communist nations to stand together could be threatening to its national security that ultimately changed its policy towards China in 1972. Instead of allowing two powerful enemies to unite forces, it is more effective to keep them separated and engage with one at a time to minimize potential damage. The US was aware of the minor territorial conflict between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. As a result, the US decided to engage with China in an effort to help end the relation between China and the Soviet Union.

Japan, despite not being informed of the US plan from the beginning, found itself in a position where it had no option but to accept and mirror the actions of the US. The 1972 engagement of the US with China and its recognition of the One China policy implied that Japan was similarly expected to follow suit (Sahashi, 2020). The improvement in Japan's relations with China can be primarily attributed to Japan actively participating in China's development efforts. Japan has played a significant role in supporting China's development by investing heavily and providing substantial financial assistance through Overseas Development Assistance. The close partnership between Japan and China has been maintained, particularly during the three decades of China's rapid economic growth starting from 1980. This partnership continued since the United States signaled approval of Japan's involvement.

Despite unresolved issues like boundary disputes and ideological differences, Japan's

regional perspective played a key role in shaping its bilateral ties with China. Japan, as a developed market economy, aimed for a stable and integrated regional order, fostering economic cooperation with China and Southeast Asian nations. Japan believed that stability in the region would lead to an overall stable environment, considering its position as an oceanic state with a developed economy that required trade with other nations.

The strategy of Japan related with maintaining both China and US since 1972 was centered on keeping a triangular balance by placing itself in the middle of the two nations. As mentioned before, Japan was an instrumental state to US's foreign policy towards Asia after WWII. The moment US improved its relations with China, Japan recognized the PRC and expected the continuation of a security guarantee from the US. This implies the strengthening of the military cooperation between the two nations and the active involvement of the US in the Indo-Pacific region. The triangular dimension of the US-Japan relations basically characterizes their security cooperation and partnership, while since 1972, there has been an improvement in economic relations between Japan and China to promote a stable regional order and encourage China to adhere to established international norms and rules.

During the period when Japan ranked as the second-largest economy after America, the economic opportunities it had with China were crucial. Japan pursued two strategic goals in its efforts to engage with China economically. First, by backing China, millions can escape poverty while paving the way for stronger economic integration. A thriving China also offers vast market opportunities for Japan. The

second goal was an expectation that when China grew and emerged as economic power house, it would easily conform to the established regional order in East Asia and Southeast Asia.

Japan was also expecting China to go along with the security architecture established by US decades ago. The economic growth was therefore expected to be instrumental in making China a status quo state both in the regional and global order. Japan was thinking that all the three nations have something in common and was possible to keep them together through a triangular balance (Nagy, 2023). Nevertheless, China's rising power did not align with Japan's expectations of being a status quo partner state, leading to a unique divergence in its interest and approaches to regional and global order. As China engaged in a boundary dispute with Japan post-2000, bilateral relations deteriorated.

Actually, both of them tried to negotiate to normalcy between 2006 and 2008 and achieved some progress. In those years, Japan was not desperate enough to China, so kept its foreign policy goal of improving the bilateral relations.

Japan made a strong commitment to maintaining a triangular balance, even amidst bilateral disputes, in response to China's increasing economic capabilities. Post-2009, Japan saw a shift in political dynamics with the Democratic Party of Japan winning the election and enabling Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to return to power for his second term. Abe placed Asia at the center of his foreign policy. However, as China overtook Japan as the world's second-largest economy after one year, the Asian policy direction did not align well

with the expectations of Japan, which considered China to be a subordinate player in regional politics. As China's capabilities surpassed Japan's, tensions arose due to conflicting interests and differing capabilities, leading to divisions and confrontations in various bilateral and regional arrangements.

Japan soon began expressing its concern on the future role of China on the regional and global politics. Abe was critical for the rise of China and respond quickly. He coined the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) to gather friendly states and to stand against the rising China. The first nominee for partnership was India as both share a similar threat due to the rise China. Of course, contrary to China, the political system in Japan and India is characterized by democracy. The FOIP strategy was first initiated during the first period of Shinzo Abe in 2007. He later strengthened Japan's relation with India, Australia and ASEAN member states in Southeast Asia. The FOIP strategy was later morphed into a military arrangement called a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) composed of states like Japan, India, Australia and USA.

Up until US realized the threat of China, Shinzo Abe opted for working with its neighbors and regional players and to deal with the rising influence of China. Abe tried to establish security partnership with Southeast Asian nations and Europe for FOIP and rule based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific. Abe was aggressive in utilizing bilateral and multilateral alternatives to deter China. He was also the first prime minister to think beyond the established Japan's commitment to pacifism. For the first time since WWII, he introduced budget increase for the defense sector, and

thereby to improve the deterrence capability of Japan though he failed to convince US to come to a similar term with Japan against China. When the Sino-US relation was dictated by cooperation than competition, the only thing Japan could do was lobbying the US. In the meantime, Japan was not totally desperate for China and never tried to exclude it from the bilateral relations and regional arrangements. But there was a clear interest to contain China from being a revisionist nation in the region. Japan tried to solve disputes in a peaceful manner and improve its defense capability to deter the looming threat coming from China. For example, when boundary dispute happened in 2012 over the Senkaku Islands, their diplomatic relations was not totally disrupted.

The coming of Trump into the US Presidency in 2016 had both opportunities and challenges for Japan (Hatoyama, 2021). The opportunity was that Trump came with a new perspective towards China. Trump considered China as the number one national security threat to the US which replaced the previous policies of friendly China. The new policy direction of the US was warmly welcomed by Japan as it was lobbying US to be critical of China long before the coming of Trump to the US presidency. This led to the renewal of the Japan-US relations against the emerging China. The policy change in the US had also its own challenge to Japan. Trump's approach to transform America into greatness was supposed to be realized by withdrawing from many of America's global engagements and by emphasizing on domestic governance. A good manifestation of this was the withdrawal of US from the Transpacific Partnership (TPP). The withdrawal of America from many of the global

political and security arrangements was an imminent danger for a state, like Japan that is dependent on America to its own security and to ensure maritime security over the Indo-Pacific. This does not mean that US totally left Japan and the Indo-Pacific region without any support.

When the Biden administration came to power in 2020, the policy towards China remained unchanged. US considered China as its national security threat so much so it should be challenged either through rivalry or competition. But, Biden differs from his predecessor in the management of US interests across the world. Consequently, instead of withdrawing from its global commitments, Biden promised to sustain US's leadership role in most global affairs in collaboration with its allies. The more the rivalry between China and US gets tense, the closer Japan is to the rivalry. But, Japan has an interest to secure its economic relations with China; it wants to protect the states of East Asia and Southeast Asian nations from entering into unnecessary division and competition as a result of Japan's involvement in the great power rivalry by being by the side of US, and it has also an interest to maintain Free and Open Indo-Pacific region for its international trade as an island state. To achieve these goals, Japan consistently followed the US approach and implemented these strategies: playing a committed role for the integration of Southeast Asia, supporting the US security involvement in the region through Quad and AUKUS, and strengthening its deterrence capability through military buildup (Basu, 2022).

India: The Strategy of Issue-based Engagement

Since gaining independence in 1947, India's foreign policy has been influenced by various external foreign policy orientations. Independent India faced economic challenges and opted for neutrality in the Cold War rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States. This neutrality was reflected in India's commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement. Despite the Cold War's impact on its interests, India remained unaligned.

India's foreign policy has been heavily influenced by the perceived threats from China and Pakistan. Following the 1962 Sino-Indian War and the 1960s conflicts with Pakistan, India adopted a cautious approach, avoiding close ties with either nation (Pant, 2021). The Asian politics and the regional alignments were fundamentally changing in early 1970s. First, in December 1970, the second India-Pakistan war erupted. Faced with a boundary dispute with Pakistan, India sought a response. Meanwhile, the US aimed to engage China and end their hostility since 1949. India, perceiving the new US-China alignment as a security threat, chose to align with the Soviet Union. While China's relations with the US improved, India remained pro-Soviet until the Cold War's end (Horimoto, 2017).

During those years, India adopted a more idealistic approach to foreign policy, prioritizing non-alignment and socialist principles. Despite its potential for regional leadership, India chose to join the non-aligned movement and embrace socialism. The selection of India's foreign policy alignment was not primarily driven by a comprehensive analysis of benefits and costs. Instead, it was largely a reaction to the positions of China and Pakistan (Dormandy, 2007). During the Cold

War, India found itself caught between the rivalry of the Soviet Union and the United States. As America sought to contain Soviet expansion in Asia, India initially aligned with the Soviet bloc. However, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1978 pushed India closer to the US, leading to improved relations and significant economic and military support. This shift in alliances threatened India's regional security, making it a victim of great power politics during the 1970s and 1980s (Javaid and Mushtaq, 2014).

Following the conclusion of the Cold War, India embarked on a series of significant domestic and foreign policy reforms, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. These included aggressive economic liberalization, privatization, and a pragmatic approach to foreign policy that aimed to position India as an emerging economic power. The new policy orientation emphasized on wealth creation, unlike the previous focus on distribution of limited resources. This shift towards a market-driven economy and increased integration with the global economic system laid the foundation for India's rise as an economic giant over the past three decades (Chikermanane, 2021).

Recognizing the emergence of the United States as the sole superpower after the Cold War, Rao actively pursued closer ties with Washington. This shift marked a departure from India's traditional non-alignment policy and was characterized by a move away from ideological rigidity and towards a more pragmatic approach that prioritized India's national interests. Beyond the US, India also sought to strengthen its relationships with other key players on the global stage. This included

establishing formal diplomatic relations with Israel and Iran, as well as implementing the "Look East" policy to foster closer ties with East Asian nations and the ASEAN bloc.

“the imprimatur of the early 1990s is everywhere in Indian foreign policy today: Moving away from non-alignment; Delhi’s subtle balancing act in the Middle East; trying to establish a stable balance with China; more robust defence diplomacy in key global geographies; the outreach to East and Southeast Asia as part of ‘Look East’ and ‘Act East’ policies ...” (Pant, 2021).

Despite India's growth since embracing reforms, China's rapid rise has outpaced it, posing bi-dimensional challenge. First, the two nations share a history of conflict and boundary disputes, notwithstanding attempts to improve relations since the Cold War. While annual trade exceeds \$100 billion, Chinese investment in India remains limited. The potential for a larger economic relationship is hampered by political tensions. China's strong economic ties with neighboring countries like Russia, Vietnam, South Korea, and Japan further highlight the potential India is missing. As China's economy strengthens, it poses an increasing threat to India. In the face of the challenges, the potential for a strong economic relationship between India and China remains significant. With a combined population of over 2.5 billion, the two countries represent a vast market, so improved political relations could unlock this potential, leading to increased trade and investment.

Second, China's growing capabilities have propelled it towards becoming not only a

regional leader but also a global competitor, challenging the US-led world order established since World War II. This rivalry has turned the Indo-Pacific region into a stage for competition. India seeks an open and free Indo-Pacific, aligning with the US and its allies against China's dominance in the region so much so India welcomes US security initiatives like Quad and AUKUS. However, India also desires fairer and more inclusive global institutions, aligning with China's efforts for institutional reform. This balancing act between the two powers becomes increasingly difficult as their rivalry intensifies.

Second, China's growing capabilities have propelled it towards becoming not only a regional leader but also a global competitor, challenging the US-led world order established since World War II. This rivalry has turned the Indo-Pacific region into a stage for competition. India seeks an open and free Indo-Pacific, aligning with the US and its allies against China's dominance in the region so much so India welcomes US security initiatives like Quad and AUKUS. However, India also desires fairer and more inclusive global institutions, aligning with China's efforts for institutional reform. This balancing act between the two powers becomes increasingly difficult as their rivalry intensifies.

India's foreign policy, however has evolved since the end of the Cold War, shifting away from a binary "friend or enemy" approach. Instead, India now views relationships with other countries based on specific interests, where a country can be a friend for one interest area and hostile for another. This flexible and nuanced approach allows India to engage with diverse countries like Russia, China, and the

West, depending on the particular policy goals. As a founding member of the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), India works with Russia, which is under Western sanctions, as well as with China, which is a strategic rival of the US. This demonstrates India's ability to collaborate with countries that have differing relationships with the West, based on the specific interests being pursued within the BRICS framework. In a nutshell, India's foreign policy since the end of the Cold War is characterized by a balanced approach, where it does not consider any country as an absolute friend or enemy. Instead, India engages with various nations based on its specific national interests, sometimes cooperating and at other times contesting, depending on the policy goals at hand. Though BRICS is not as such a strong institution, it represents a different worldview from the western dominated institutions:

“This includes support for reform of the UN Security Council to ensure greater representation from the global south. The association is not so much south-south, but represents a powerful East-South bloc to rival the hegemony of the North. The body brings together both developed and developing countries, and has, for example, a coordinated strategy in the World Trade Organization (WTO) to create a fairer order concerning agricultural policies” (Sakwa, 2019: 459).

BRICS is working on economic matters, aiming to establish independent financial

institutions. In 2015, it launched the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) for financial support during crises of member states. A year later, the New Development Bank (NDB) was created to finance infrastructure projects using non-dollar currencies. Despite the economic goals, progress is hindered by the strained relationship between China and India. While India remains involved, it collaborates more closely with Russia and China. Additionally, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, bypassed India, opting for Pakistan as a partner. This move is perceived as a political strategy to counter India, leading to resistance from the Indian side. The success of BRICS' economic initiatives depends on overcoming internal tensions and finding common ground. The NDB and CRA have the potential to offer financial stability and support infrastructure development, but their effectiveness will rely on member states' commitment and collaboration.

As far as security is concerned, India is closely working with the US, Australia and Japan through Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, commonly known as Quad. When it was initiated by Japan in 2007, Quad was not as such a strong military alliance. Recently, however, it is emerging as NATO-styled military alliance of the four nations and targeting the rise of China. India needs this military alliance as the threat of China is becoming more imminent. There is also a positive attitude towards AUKUS, a trilateral security arrangement between Australia, United Kingdom and US, across the policy circle in India (Mattoo, 2023; Mohan, 2021). When AUKUS proposed to transfer a nuclear powered submarine to Australia late in 2022,

China became furious and openly opposed the proposal but India supported the bid (Rajagopalan, 2022).

All in all, India is observed to be working with China and other like-minded countries towards reforming multinational institutions, while also maintaining strong relations with the US, Japan, and Australia, based on specific economic and security considerations, demonstrating a pragmatic and issue-based approach. This indicates a strategy of balancing relationships and interests, rather than aligning exclusively with any one side.

Indonesia: The Strategy of Balancing

To effectively analyze Indonesia's navigating strategy of the complex dynamics of great power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region, it's crucial to understand the key factors shaping its foreign policy. Indonesia is an archipelagic nation located in a strategic position between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, making it a key player in the Indo-Pacific region. Its location along major maritime trade routes, including the Strait of Malacca, gives it significant geopolitical importance. To navigate the great power rivalry between the US and China, Indonesia has adopted a "hedging plus" policy. This involves maintaining good relations with both superpowers while also strengthening its own regional influence and autonomy. Indonesia has sought to strengthen its partnerships with other regional players, such as India and Japan, to counterbalance the influence of the US and China in the Indo-Pacific. This includes cooperation on security, economic, and diplomatic initiatives.

The other determining factor emanates from its domestic condition and growth potentials.

Indonesia has a democratic governance, a growing economy and a population more than 267 million. It is now a member of G20 as a result of its growing economy, and has the possibility of becoming the fifth largest economy in a matter of ten years from now. The fact that Indonesia is an Islamic democratic nation makes it a unique country different from most Islamic nations across the world.

Indonesia has maintained a long-standing foreign policy of being neutral on major global political developments since the 1950s (Muzakki, 2017). During the Cold War, it was active in organizing the Non-Aligned Movement, but since the end of the Cold War, it has remained largely inactive in most global affairs, preferring to work primarily through the ASEAN framework. Its inactive role is basically the result of its acceptance of the regional order as managed by US and its allies like Japan. It also desires to play a "middle power diplomacy" using its leverages, such as its Islamic democracy, relatively good human rights records and its archipelagic state nature, and thereby ensuring the stability of its maritime environment.

Following President Jokowi's election in 2014, two policy directives were issued by the government. This came after a significant debate during the campaign and beforehand about whether Indonesia should actively participate in regional and global affairs, or remain inactive while focusing on its economic growth and democratic governance.

This is breaking the established approach of Indonesia that was previously aligned with the non-aligned movement during the Cold War, but has now shifted towards a more pragmatic

approach based on its national capabilities (Andika, 2016). The first policy directive identifies the state as 'World Maritime Axis' and provides four policy focus areas. These include, improving its economy and security in order to have national strength, establishing 'Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership' at the bilateral level with states that may add to its national interest, and establishing strong partnership with other middle power states.

Indonesia has introduced a 4+1 formula for its foreign policy priorities for the 2019-2024 period. The 4+1 refers to improving the implementation capacity of Indonesia's foreign relations. The 4 key priorities are: 1) Leveraging economic diplomacy to attract investment, remove trade barriers, and facilitate regional free trade arrangements; 2) Protecting Indonesian citizens living abroad; 3) Maintaining sovereignty and national integrity through political diplomacy, including settling boundary disputes through negotiation; 4) Playing a leading role in regional arrangements and global institutions like the UN and G20.

As Indonesia embarks on a new foreign policy path, the world finds itself amidst a burgeoning great power rivalry, with the Asia-Pacific region at the epicenter. This presents a delicate strategic challenge for Indonesia, which seeks to maintain amicable relations with both major powers.

As stated in Foreign Policy,

Washington views Indonesia—the world's fourth-most-populous nation, whose more than 17,000 islands straddle the Pacific and Indian Oceans—as an increasingly important economic and

security partner willing to stand up to Beijing. China likewise seeks to enhance engagement with Indonesia to have a friend in regional disputes, secure access to Indonesian resources, and perhaps leverage Indonesia as a strategic bulwark against Australia. (Grossman, 2021)

China wants to make Indonesia as an important development partner, for which it officially launched the Maritime Silk Road, one of the two aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in Indonesia in 2013 as it did the continental Silk Road in Kazakhstan. Indonesia is the first beneficiary of the BRI, with the construction of its first high-speed train project by China, though the project was delayed until 2022. Indonesia wants to use China as a source of development finance and foreign investment, as it aligns with the country's economic diplomacy goals. China also gives significant emphasis to engaging Indonesia both economically and diplomatically, leveraging the country's strategic location and growing economic importance.

Despite recent progress, Indonesia and China still face several unresolved issues in their bilateral relationship. The South China Sea is a major area of territorial dispute between China and several Southeast Asian nations, including Indonesia. China has made extensive claims over the sea, which have been contested by other countries in the region. This has led to diplomatic tensions and occasional confrontations. Indonesia has firmly rejected China's territorial claims in the South China Sea, asserting its own sovereignty over the Natuna Islands and the surrounding waters. This has led to diplomatic conflicts between the

two countries, as China continues to press its claims in the region. Indonesia has expressed concerns about its growing economic dependence on China, fearing a loss of strategic autonomy. This has created tensions in the bilateral relationship, with Indonesia seeking to balance its ties with China and maintain its position as a non-aligned nation.

Indonesia has strong commitment to maintain the status quo in the Indo-Pacific region. That is why it wants to see an active presence and involvement of US to help maintain the regional order and stable maritime environment. Indonesia has a strong commitment to maintaining the status quo in the Indo-Pacific region. It wants to see an active presence and involvement of the US to help maintain the regional order and stable maritime environment. Since it does not want to see the withdrawal of US from the region, it gave a 'tacit consent' (Syailendra and Sebastian, 2021) for the military arrangement called AUKUS that is established by Australia, United Kingdom and United States of America. This is a balancing act against the strong security threat coming from China. The following quote gives clear picture of the strategy of Indonesia:

'Western presence: (1) should not constitute a Cold War era type containment of China but should instead be for the preservation of US preponderance; and (2) should not constitute an exclusive bloc but should have an inclusive framework for order, with ASEAN as its central building bloc' (Syailendra and Sebastian, 2021)

Indonesia has adopted a middle way strategy in navigating the great power rivalry between the United States and China (Shekhar, 2022). This involves maintaining good political diplomacy

with both nations, avoiding confrontation, and balancing its economic and security relations with China and the US, respectively, to avoid being caught in the middle.

Conclusion and Strategic lessons

The strategic lessons that Ethiopia can learn are not suggested with specific details, indicating which strategy for what type of diplomatic engagement. Instead, the author preferred to be generic in this regard. I believe, this to be the weakest side of this paper. Japan, India, and Indonesia have different national capabilities and foreign policy orientations, but they are all facing strategic challenges due to the rising great power rivalry in the Asia-Pacific region. Based on the results of the present study, it is concluded that each country is pursuing its own strategic choices based on its assessment of the regional strategic environment. These strategies are summarized as follows:

The Bandwagon Strategy of Japan:

As the US prevailed over the region since the end of WWII, there is no surprise to observe for some states to follow the actions of US. Japan is a good example in this case. This is a strategy of aligning with the US and following its policy direction towards the Asia-Pacific region and the rules based international order. In the mounting rivalry between China and USA, being on the side of the later and following its policy prescription is widely entertained. It also involves a step-by-step withdrawal of Japan from its economic relation with China.

The Balancing Strategy of Indonesia:

This is the strategy of working with both competing nations in different policy areas. In the strategy of balancing, Indonesia maintains strong economic relations with China. Whether Indonesia works with US or not, China does not want to lose the former because of its strategic location in the Indo-Pacific region. US, on the other hand, wants to use it for its security presence in the region. By balancing, therefore, it implies to establish strong diplomatic with both rival nations and exploit every bit of potential that the rivalry can provide.

Issue-Based Engagement Strategy of India:

Despite potential hostility between rival states, issue-based engagement allows for cooperation on specific areas of mutual interest. This strategy prioritizes the relevance of the issue at hand over the overall diplomatic relationship. While issue-based engagement may share similarities with balancing, it does not require positive diplomatic relations to initiate cooperation on specific issues. This enables rival nations, like China and India, to collaborate on certain areas despite ongoing disputes in others.

The Sino-US rivalry is impacting Ethiopia's foreign relations, though not to the same degree as it is affecting states in the Asia-Pacific region. This study identifies three strategies that Ethiopia can adopt to navigate this complex geopolitical landscape, helping the country design a navigation strategy amidst the intensifying rivalry between global superpowers. To that end, Ethiopia's unique position and interests within the global context have to be taken into account.

About the Author

Darskedar Taye (PhD)

Dr. Darskedar is a Lead Researcher at the Institute of Foreign Affairs. He received his PhD, MA and BA in Political Science and International Relations from Addis Ababa University. Dr. Darskedar has served as an assistant Professor at Wollo University, Africa Leadership Academy as an Intelligence analyst at Information Network and Security Agency (INSA). His research focus includes foreign policy, diplomacy and great power politics

References

- Andika M. . (2016). An Analysis of Indonesia Foreign Policy under Jokowi's Pro-People Diplomacy, Indonesia Perspective, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Juli-Desember 2016), pp. 1-13.
- Basu, Titli.(2022). Japan and US-China Strategic Competition: Alliances and Alignments. Accessed at <https://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/japan-and-us-china-strategic-competition-tbasu-080222>
- Chikerman, Gautam (2021) Constraints to Convictions: PV Narasimha Rao to Narendra Modi. Accessed at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/constraints-to-convictions-pv-narasimha-rao-to-narendra-modi>
- Cooper, A. F., R. A. Higgott and K. R. Nossal (1993), Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World Order (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press).
- Cox, Robert W. (1987) Middlepowermanship, Japan and the Future World Order. International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis, December 1989, Vol.44, p.823-862.
- Dormandy, Xenia (2007) India's Foreign Policy. Accessed at <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/indias-foreign-policy>
- Grossman, Derek (2021) Indonesia is Quietly Warming Up to China. Accessed at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2021/06/indonesia-is-quietly-warming-up-to-china.html>
- Hatoyama, Yukio (2021) US-China Rivalry and Japan's Strategic Role. Accessed at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.1932093>
- Hidayatullah, Nur Luthfi (2017) Classifying Middle Powers based on their Regional and Multilateral Roles Differentiating Middle Power Enforcers, Assemblers and Advocators. Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, (ASSEHR), volume 143. Accessed at
- Holbraad, Carsten (1971) 'The Role of Middle Powers.' Cooperation and Conflict 6, 1: 77-90.
- Horimtho, Takenori (2017) Explaining India's Foreign Policy: From Dream to Realization of Major Power. International Relations of the Asia-Pacific, Vol. 17, Issue 3, Sep. 2017, pp. 463-496.
- Javaid, Umbreen and Imrana Mushtaq (2014) Historical Perspective of Pakistan USA Relations: Lessons for Pakistan. South Asian Studies, Vol. 29, No. 1, January-July 2014, pp. 291-304.

- Jordan, Eduard (2003) The concept of a middle power in international relations: distinguishing between emerging and traditional middle powers. *Politikon*, 2003, Volume 30, Issue 1, 165-181. Accessed at [The concept of a middle power in international relations: distinguishing between emerging and traditional middle powers: Politikon: Vol 30, No 1 \(tandfonline.com\)](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00223320308839165)
- Kříž, Zdenek., Jana Urbanovska and Stanislav Brajercikova, (2019) The Middle Power Concept: Presenting a Complex Approach. Accessed at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340066717>
- Mattoo, Shashank (2023) India, AUKUS explore tech cooperation possibilities. Accessed at [India, AUKUS explore tech cooperation possibilities | Today News \(livemint.com\)](https://www.livemint.com/News-Analysis/India-AUKUS-explore-tech-cooperation-possibilities-2023-07-11-1172469696.html)
- Mohan, C. Raja (2021) India Welcomes AUKUS Pact as China Deterrent, Foreign Policy, September 16, 2021. Accessed at [AUKUS Pact Welcomed by India as China Deterrent \(foreignpolicy.com\)](https://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/india-welcomes-aucus-pact-as-china-deterrent)
- Muzakki, Fadlan (2017) Theory, Practice and Analysis of Indonesia's Foreign Policy. *JURNAL TRANSLITERA, EDSISI*, 5/2017, pp. 14-24.
- Nagy, Stephen (2023) Accommodation versus Alliances: Japan's Grand Strategy in the Sino-US Competition. Accessed at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3867248
- Oosterveld, Willem and Bianca Torossian, (2018-19) A Balancing Act: The role of middle powers in contemporary diplomacy. *Strategic Monitor*, 2018-2019. Accessed at [A Balancing Act | Strategic Monitor 2018-2019 \(clingendael.org\)](https://www.clingendael.org/publications/2018-2019-a-balancing-act)
- Pant, Harsh V. (2021) How Economic Reforms Influences India's Foreign Policy Considerations. Accessed at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/how-economic-reforms-influenced-india-foreign-policy-conversations>
- Rajagopalan, Rajeswari Pillai (2022) At IAEA, India Supports AUKUS, *The Diplomat*, October 03. Accessed at [At IAEA, India Supports AUKUS - The Diplomat](https://www.diplomatmag.com/india-supports-aucus-at-iaea/)
- Roberts, Cynthia (2019) The BRICS in the Era of Renewed Great Power Competition. *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 43, No. 6, pp. 469-486.
- Sahashi, Ryo (2020) Japan's Strategy amid US-China Confrontation. *China International Strategy Review*, Vol. 2, pp. 232-245.
- Sakwa, Richard (2019) BRICS and Sovereign Internationalism. *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 43, No. 6, pp. 456-468.
- Syailendra, Emirza Adi and Leonardo C. Sebastian (2021) Indonesia Navigates Great Power Rivalry. Accessed at <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/ip21007-the-unspoken-indonesia-navigates-great-power-rivalry/>