

T.R.
MARMARA UNIVERSITY
SOCIAL SCIENCES INSTITUTE
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY PROGRAM

**CHINA-US RIVALRY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON MAJOR PORTS
AND OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN SOUTH ASIA: A
POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH**

Master's Thesis

Yasir RASHID

Istanbul, 2021

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Thesis Supervisor:
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ABSTRACT

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With significant economic growth, China has challenged the US in various economic, political, military, and technological fields. However, since the introduction of BRI in 2013, the geoeconomic area has become one of the main areas of competition between the US and China in recent years. Geoeconomics emerged from the interconnection of geography, economics, and power and provides a new structure for power relations. Therefore, rivalry over the construction and development of infrastructures, including strategic ports, has been one of the most important parts of the geoeconomic competition between Washington and Beijing.

South Asian region can be an example of where one can observe the aforementioned intense power relations. This region provides the shortest land route between China and the Indian Ocean, supply the ability to bypass the Strait of Malacca, and gain the shortest access to energy-rich Central Asia. By investing in infrastructure projects in South Asia, such as ports of Chabahar and Gwadar, global and regional powers are competing with each other. Due to the diversity of actors and competition, the implications of rivalry between the United States and China over infrastructure projects in South Asia are very complex and varied.

This study, using a political economy approach, will analyze and examine China-US rivalry and its implications on major ports and other infrastructure projects in South Asia. Particularly, implications for strategic projects of ports of Gwadar and Chabahar, as a case study, and the implications for countries in the region including Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asian countries will also be examined.

Keywords: US-China Relations, US-China Rivalry, Geoeconomics, South Asia, Gwadar Port, Chabahar Port

ÖZET

ÇİN-ABD REKABETİNİN GÜNEY ASYA'DAKİ BÜYÜK LIMANLAR VE DİĞER ALTYAPI PROJELERİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİLERİ: BİR POLİTİK EKONOMİ YAKLAŞIMI

Kaydettiği güçlü ekonomik büyüme ile birlikte Çin, ekonomik, politik, askeri ve teknolojik alanlarda ABD'ye meydan okumaktadır. Bununla birlikte, 2013 yılında Bir Kuşak, Bir Yol projesinin tanıtılmasından bu yana, jeoekonomik alan, son yıllarda ABD ve Çin arasındaki ana rekabet alanlarından biri haline gelmiştir. Jeoekonomi, coğrafya, ekonomi ve güç arasındaki ilişki ağına işaret eden bir olgu olarak yeni bir perspektif sunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, stratejik limanlar da dahil olmak üzere altyapı inşası ve gelişimi konusundaki rekabet, Washington ve Pekin arasındaki jeoekonomik rekabetin en önemli parçalarından biri olmuştur.

Güney Asya bölgesi, söz konusu büyük güç ilişkilerinin gözlemlenebileceği bir örnek alan niteliğindedir. Bu bölge, Çin ile Hint Okyanusu arasındaki en kısa kara yolunu sağlamakta, Malakka Boğazı'nı baypas etme olanağını ortaya çıkarmakta ve enerji zengini Orta Asya'ya en kısa erişim imkanını sağlamaktadır. Güney Asya'daki Çabahar ve Gwadar limanları gibi altyapı projelerine yatırım yaparak farklı küresel ve bölgesel güçler bu alandaki rekabetlerini ortaya koymaktadırlar. Aktörlerin ve rekabet alanlarının çeşitliliği nedeniyle, ABD ve Çin arasındaki rekabetin Güney Asya'daki altyapı projeleri üzerindeki sonuçları karmaşık ve çeşitlidir.

Bu çalışma, bir politik ekonomi yaklaşımı kullanarak, Çin-ABD rekabetini ve bunun Güney Asya'daki büyük limanlar ve diğer altyapı projeleri üzerindeki etkilerini analiz etmekte ve incelemektedir. Bu bağlamda özellikle Çin-ABD rekabetinin Gwadar ve Çabahar limanları projeleri üzerindeki sonuçları ile Pakistan, İran, Afganistan ve Orta Asya ülkeleri dahil olmak üzere bölge ülkeleri üzerindeki etkileri de incelenecektir.

Anahtar kelimeleri: ABD-Çin İlişkileri, ABD-Çin Rekabeti, Jeoekonomi, Güney Asya, Gwadar Limanı, Çabahar Limanı

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I worked with Mr. Aslan, my co-supervisor in this thesis, on a joint report titled “The Increasing Role of Geoeconomics: Competition between the Chabahar and the Gwadar Ports” for IRAM (Center for Iranian Studies). Our joint work, and Mr. Aslan’s vision and experience inspired me to learn more about this topic.

It is always an honor to work under the guidance of Doç. Dr. Halil Kürşad Aslan and Prof. Dr. Alaeddin Yalçinkaya.

Yasir RASHID

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAGC	Asia-Africa Growth Corridor
AI	Artificial intelligence
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
APTTA	Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BCIM	Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar Economic Corridor
BLA	Baluchistan Liberation Army
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
C5+1	Five Central Asian Countries + United States
CAPPC	China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Plus Cooperation
CCAWECC	China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor
CCCC	China Communications Construction Company
CCCG	China Communications Construction Group
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CHEC	China Harbor Engineering Company
CIA	US Central Intelligence Agency
CIC	China Investment Corporation
CICPEC	China-Indochina Peninsula economic corridor
CITIC	China International Trust Investment Corporation
CMG	China Media Group
CMH	China Merchants Holding
CMREC	China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Corporation
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
COPHC	China Overseas Port Holding Company
COS	China Ocean Shipping
COSCO	China Ocean Shipping Company
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CSCT	South Colombo Container Terminal
ECC	Economic Coordination Committee

ERGI	Energy Resource Governance Initiative
ETIM	East Turkistan Islamic Movement
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FTA	Free Trade Agreements
G7	Group of Seven
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Greater Neighborhood Policy
GPS	Global Positioning System
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INSTC	International North-South Transport Corridor
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IORA	Indian Ocean Association
IOR-ARC	Indian Ocean Regional Cooperation Association
IPGL	India Ports Global Limited
ISIS	the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
IT	Intellectual Technology
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KORUS	South Korea-United States
LEMoa	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
MNC	Multinational Corporation
MND	Ministry of National Defense
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOGE	Myanmar State Oil and Gas Corporation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of parliament
MSR	21st century Maritime Silk Road
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDB	New Development Bank
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
NDS	National Defense Strategy

NHTRDP	National High-Tech Research and Development Plan (China)
NPO	New Policy Opinion
NSR	New Silk Road
NSS	National Security Strategy
OBOR	One Belt One Road
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RMSI	Regional Maritime Safety Initiative
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SCS	South China Sea
SEZ	Special Economic Zones
SLOC	Sea lines of communications
SOEs	State-owned enterprises
SREB	Silk Road Economic Belt
TAPI	Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline
TEDA	Tianjin Economic-Technological Development Area
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia
TTP	Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
US	United States
USACTI	US-ASEAN Connectivity Through Trade and Investment Initiative
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WB	World Bank
WMDs	Weapons of Mass Destructions
WTO	World Trade Organizations
ZTE	Zhong Xing Telecommunications Equipment

INTRODUCTION

In International Political Economy studies the production and trade structure is crucial to understand global power equations. The future of the global hegemonic power struggle between the US and China would revolve around technological advancements (patents, 5G, artificial intelligence) manufacturing, and its transportation to world markets (Aslan, 2017). That is why the US wants to create an advantageous position on these matters. Another crucial dimension of the International Political Economy studies takes financial matters into account. BRI and AIIB are twin sisters of China's global march towards a hegemonic position.

China's growing power has challenged the US-led international liberal order, its fundamental values, and interests around the world. Beijing's economic growth caused an increased rivalry between that country and the United States, known as the "Great Power Competition." In the context of great power rivalry, the competition between the Washington and Beijing is very wide and extensive. Both countries compete in various areas: political, military, technological, geopolitical and geoeconomic, using different strategies. However, the most important area of competition between the two countries in recent years has been geoeconomics. In this area, contest over infrastructure development, including constructing strategic ports, building highways, railways, and pipelines, has been the most important competition between the two countries.

China as the second-largest economic power in the world is investing in the infrastructure of many major ports in many developing countries. Those investments have intensified the geoeconomic rivalry between the US and China. In other words, if two economic giants were fighting over trade surpluses and exports and imports until a few years ago, now their main rivalry has become the issue of uniqueness in the global economy and the conquest of developing and developed markets.

Ports are one of the most critical areas where the US-China rivalry is embodied. The United States seeks to cut off China's access to the world market and prevent China's economic development by preventing China from access to important and strategic ports. However, despite United States opposition, China, within the framework of the BRI project, has been able to lease several strategic ports for the long term and turn them into its geoeconomic bases in various countries. Pakistan's Gwadar Port in South Asia is one of these ports. China is investing approximately \$ 46 billion in this port as part of the CPEC project, which is supposed to be China's land route to the open waters of the Indian Ocean, the Middle East region, as well as to European markets.

In contrast, the Iranian port of Chabahar, which is also located in the Oman Sea in the Indian Ocean, is located on the route of two major transit corridors in the world. Located in the route of the INSTC, the port is connecting South Asia with Central Asia and Russia, as well as Europe with South Asia without using the Suez Canal. India's investment in the port of Chabahar and the exemption of the port from US sanctions have made the port of Chabahar and the port of Gwadar a hub of strategic rivalry between India (a strategic partner of the US) and China.

The importance of the Indian Ocean in US strategies (such as the FOIP Strategy), as well as the ocean's position in China's long-term geoeconomic projects (such as BRI), has left the region unaffected by US-China rivalries. In this regard, China must use the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, and the coast of Taiwan to transfer energy to its country. In all these straits, except for the Strait of Hormuz, the Americans have direct control. This is why China wants to shift its dependence from sea to land, which requires cooperation with countries in the region, such as Pakistan. In other words, the Pakistani port of Gwadar helps Beijing to bypass the Strait of Malacca and the coast of Taiwan to gain access to the strategic waters of the Indian Ocean through the land. Therefore, it is not unlikely that investment in ports, such as Gwadar, will be separate from China's long-term strategies. On the other hand, the US has sought to counter China and its influence in the region in collaboration with India, Japan, and Australia. Thus, there is no doubt that China's efforts to gain access to important and strategic ports in the waters of the Indian Ocean will not be in the please of the US and its allies.

US-China competition over infrastructure development, including the strategic ports of Gwadar and Chabahar, will have multiple implications for the two ports. These implications include political and security implications, cyber threats, as well as economic implications such as imposing sanctions on involved companies in the development process of these projects. Undoubtedly, there will be other implications as well. Those implications are at the same time the research hypothesizes of this thesis. In this regard, among the two ports of Gwadar and Chabahar, which are the case study of this thesis, the port of Gwadar has a high potential in terms of depth and logistics to replace other major ports in the Oman Sea and the Persian Gulf. Therefore, it is likely that the development of this port would increase competition between other ports in the region.

It is also possible that the simultaneous development of the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar could upset the balance of international trade in the region. With increased competition between Washington and Beijing, there is also a possibility of increased trade-transit competition between the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar. The more a port is developed, the importance of the second port will be diminished and it may lead to growing political and economic tensions.

These implications are not limited only to these two ports. Several countries in the region, particularly, Central Asian countries and Afghanistan will also be affected. The rivalry between the United States and China in the region may turn the countries of the region into friends and enemies (friend or enemy of the US/China). The division of the countries of the region into an enemy and a friend in the form of support from the United States and China could cause many crises and unrest in the region. In long term, it may have a significant impact on the security order of the region.

Research Objectives: This research is conducted for a master's thesis focused on Political Sciences and International Relations. To understand the subject better, three main objectives are studied in this thesis: firstly, the thesis is aimed at analyzing in what fields do the United States and China compete in the context of great power rivalry. In this regard, it has addressed the economic, political, military-security, technological, and geoeconomic rivalries between the two countries, with particular attention to the role of China's BRI in the escalating tensions between Washington and Beijing. The second objective is to study the overall importance of geoeconomics and particularly the rising importance of seaports while Iran's Chabahar project and Pakistan's Gwadar project remain at the center of analysis. Finally, the thesis is aimed at analyzing the implications of US-China rivalry on the infrastructure development of mid-size regional powers; Iran and Pakistan, as well as other countries in the region such as Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. In line with the objectives, three main questions are attempted to be answered in the thesis:

- What is the importance of South Asia in international politics and what is the strategic significance of infrastructure development in the region for the United States and China?
- What will be the implications of US-China geoeconomic rivalry on the development of infrastructure projects in the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar?
- What will be the implications of the US-China rivalry on economic growth, foreign trade, and economic relationships of the countries in the region, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asian countries?

The Importance and Salience of Research: In both the Turkish and English literature, the number of studies on the geopolitical competition between China and the US with political economy, geography, infrastructure investments, and similar relations is limited. More importantly, these research subjects are generally taken by China or Western-centric (the United States) Middle powers like Turkey or Pakistan are dependent on those perspectives. Thus, it is necessary to elaborate on global politics, its

major dynamics with a theoretical and conceptual framework designed by specifically Turkey, Pakistan, or any other regional countries. Therefore, it is thought that this study will contribute to the international literature with a different perspective.

As of January 2021, there are only three theses with the keyword in Turkish "Çin ABD rekabeti"; 113 theses with the single keyword in Turkish "jeopolitik"; 147 theses with the single keyword in Turkish "hegemonya" among the graduate and doctoral theses registered at Council of Higher Education (YÖK) Thesis Center. However, there is no specific research on strategic ports, great power rivalry, and geoeconomics. Thus, this thesis is valuable and original research in this regard.

In Turkey, Asian studies is a newly emerging research area. In International Relations Departments, there are predominantly European Studies and Eurasian Studies courses; this thesis might support the literature gap in Asian studies. More importantly, this thesis is in line with Turkey's new foreign policy orientation. Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu made a famous speech at the 11th Ambassadors Conference on August 5, 2019, in Ankara, and he publicized a new foreign policy initiative called the "New and Re-Opening Asia." Turkey established a new policy approach towards Asia in a diverse set of areas from trade and defense industry to technology and culture. Accordingly, this thesis might contribute to Turkey's new foreign policy initiative with fresh knowledge accumulation.

In addition, this thesis could be an effective source for studies on China-US relations (including US-China rivalry, US-China cooperation, and coexistence), South Asian studies, the strategic importance of ports in South Asia, and the interaction of politics and economics in the international political economy.

Research Methodology: The qualitative research method has been adopted as the most appropriate method in research design. The primary methodology employed in this thesis is document analysis. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) material (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis requires the data to be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. Documents are used for systematic evaluation with a variety of forms: books, reports, academic articles, advertisements; agendas, attendance registers, and minutes of meetings; manuals; background papers, newspapers, etc. In particular, to analyze the topic better, special attention was paid to the

strategies, bilateral and multilateral treaties, and agreements between respective countries. For example, strategies such as US 2017 NSS, FOIP, TPP, Pivot to Asia, as well as China's BRI, White Papers, Two Oceans, and String of Pearls strategies are studied with high priority.

Scope and Limitations: Since the rivalry between the United States and China is very extensive and has long-term historical roots, the boundaries of this thesis are limited. The time frame for this thesis is between 2000 and 2020, because China became a member of the World Trade Organization in 2001. This can be considered a key point in the transformation of the global liberal order. In other words, the policies and strategies of the United States and China have been reviewed in the last two decades. Also, there are several projects in the region in which China and the United States or India, as a strategic partner of the United States, have invested. However, the case study of this thesis is Pakistan's port of Gwadar and Iran's port of Chabahar.

In this thesis, Joe Biden's policies toward China have not been studied. Because Biden's presidency has just begun, and he hasn't yet announced a specific strategy toward China. However, since Biden was Barack Obama's vice-president, he is expected to follow Obama's policies toward China.

There is no clear definition of the South Asian region and which countries it includes. However, in this thesis, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Maldives, and Myanmar are considered as South Asian countries. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar are in the focus of this thesis. These countries have a blue border with the Indian Ocean and are directly involved in the BRI. Also, they play a more important role in both China and the US strategies.

It is worth noting that Iran is not a South Asian country. But since India's investment in Chabahar port has caused the increased competition between India and China directly and the United States and China indirectly, Iran's Chabahar was studied in this thesis.

CHAPTER I

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Neorealism: Maintaining Global Hegemony

In this section, the main components of neorealism, the importance of power and interests for states, the issue of survival and the maintenance of global hegemony have been examined. Also, the US-China rivalry is studied from the perspective of neoliberalism.

Neorealism, or structural realism, first proposed by Kenneth Waltz in 1979, in his “*Theory of International Politics*” book. Neorealism emphasizes on assumptions such as the anarchy of the international system, the mistrust of states toward each other, the pursuit of security, and the strengthening of power (Mearsheimer, 2001). Neorealism adheres to the central principles and assumptions of classical realism, such as state-centeredness, power centralization, power balance, anarchy, as well as the unity and rationality of nations.

Security and the issue of survival are the most important concerns of states in neorealism. Neorealists believe that anarchy forces states to think about relative power, security, and survival in a competitive international system. Neorealism views the motive for survival in anarchy as an incentive for states to increase power, because the international system is an anarchic structure. Anarchy means that the international system lacks a legitimate central authority when faced with potential dangers (Mearsheimer, 2001: 6).

Neorealists emphasize more the capabilities (power) of states than the desires and interests of states. Because power is critical to achieve security and independence. They believe that states' lack of confidence in the intentions of other states forces them to focus on the capabilities of others. For example, the rise of China over the past two decades has heightened US concerns about this country. With the rise of China, the international system has evolved from a unipolar system (liberal international order) to a multipolar system (Mearsheimer, 2019: 42–43).

Neorealism also argues states always feel insecure and the only way to ensure security is to strive for more power. States can never truly understand the behavior of other states. For example, innocuous maneuvers or political decisions by the United States pose a serious threat to China, as its behavior is

difficult to understand and interpret. For instance, the Obama administration has continued saying that the United States is the most important country in the world and more important than others in maintaining international peace (Mearsheimer, 2014). Such statements by American leaders are interpreted by the Chinese only negatively.

According to neorealism, as China grows economically, Washington and Beijing are likely to enter intense security competition. China may try to use its growing influence to change the rules, regulations, and institutions of the international system to advance its own interests. This will lead the United States to view China as a serious security threat.

Hegemony, according to neorealists, is essentially dominance gained by the use of coercive military force in the hands of powerful states. (Barnett & Duvall, 2004). Maintaining the hegemony of powers is one of the main areas of neorealist theory. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt have proposed the “*offshore balancing*” strategy to protect US interests and hegemony, and to balance other powers, such as China. The *offshore balancing* strategy is based on the principle that a direct US presence in many countries and regions of the world is not necessary. It is necessary to maintain US dominance in the Western Hemisphere. Since the West and Europe are not considered a threat to American hegemony, with the emergence of a potential new hegemony (such as China), more attention should be paid to Asia-Pacific. Given China's growth and influence in Asia-Pacific, it could become a hegemonic power in Asia and then in the world, challenging American hegemony. Therefore, it is necessary to focus more on Asia-Pacific, particularly on East Asia (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016).

Offshore balancing strategy was implemented in US foreign policy during the presidency of Barack Obama. Obama replaced the “*offshore balancing*” with military intervention and George W. Bush's preventive war. Obama believed that the George W. Bush's regime change doctrine, in addition to the defeats in Iraq and Afghanistan, has led to significant financial costs for the United States. In the framework of *offshore balancing* strategy, the Obama administration has proposed the “Pivot to Asia” and “TPP” strategies to strengthen its allies in Asia against China. In the Middle East, it can also be said that the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in 2011 was part of this strategy.

With the rise of China, American neorealists believe that the United States should remain committed to *offshore balancing* strategy and control China through its allied forces in the Asia-Pacific region (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016). It is unquestionably preferable for the US if China concentrates its attention and effort closer to home (in Southeast Asia) than in the world (Walt, 2020: 84). To achieve this goal (keep China busy at home/region), Washington must rely on its Asian allies as part of its *offshore*

balancing strategy. In order to prevent China from becoming a global hegemon, US leaders must devote more attention to managing relations with Beijing and strengthening America's allies in Asia (Walt, 2020: 83–84).

Neorealists believe that economic growth increases political and military power. Countries with high economic growth could strive for a new order in international politics to maintain their sphere of influence. For example, China's economic growth has expanded its sphere of political influence. As a result, it has challenged the United States in various political, economic, and military spheres. In this regard, many believed that the US-led liberal world order, which is the guarantor of American hegemony, will be replaced by a *New Realist Order* in the future (Mearsheimer, 2019).

The new world order will include three different realistic orders: *a thin international order and two thick bounded orders*. The United States and China will lead two *thick-bound orders*. But the *emerging thin international order* will be mainly concerned with international agreements, including arms control, the effective functioning of the global economy, and climate change. In other words, the third order would be led by international organizations. The organizations that will form the *thin international order* will focus on facilitating cooperation between states. In contrast, the *two thick bounded orders* will be largely focused on creating security rivalries against each other, as during the Cold War. There will be considerable economic and military rivalry between the two US-led and China-led orders. However, despite the competition between the two leading powers in the new world order, international economic interaction between the United States and China will continue, and Beijing will strive to increase its economic power. In this regard, China will try to rewrite the rules of existing economic institutions and create new ones that will reflect China's growing growth (Mearsheimer, 2019: 44-45).

In short, the competition between the *two thick bounded orders*, led by China and the United States, will involve full economic and military competition, as was the case with the bipolar system during the Cold War. The difference this time is that the international order will play a profound role in managing aspects of cooperation in the global economy, which was not the case during the Cold War.

1.2. Neoliberalism: Global Liberal Order

In this section, it is tried to examine issues such as cooperation in the anarchic international system, liberal internationalism, and liberal institutionalism, as well as the liberal world order. The rivalry between the United States and China is also being studied from the perspective of neoliberalism.

The rise of neoliberalism as a theory of international relations dates back to the 1970s. Neoliberalism focuses on political economy and issues such as human rights and the environment. For neoliberals, the main issue is how to strengthen and maintain cooperation in an anarchic international system. Neoliberals believe that all states have common interests and benefit from cooperation. Neoliberals view institutions as important forces in international relations and claim that regimes and institutions facilitate cooperation (Grieco, 2000: 805-807).

Neoliberalism is divided into different categories: liberal internationalism and liberal institutionalism. Liberal internationalism is a set of concepts related to the organization of international relations between states and non-state actors. It emphasizes the belief in international progress, interdependence, cooperation, diplomacy, multilateralism, as well as the support of international political structures and organizations. Liberal internationalists see the American national interest in establishing a peaceful world order based on strong international institutions and US-led expansion of democracy (Mead, 2021: 126; Skidmore, 2015). American Liberal internationalists pursue a multilateral foreign policy. Such policies include efforts to establish and maintain international institutions that facilitate the coordination of US relations with other countries and that comply with the laws, norms, and principles established by the institutions and organizations (Skidmore, 2015: 208-220).

Liberal internationalism explains how to organize and reform the international system, view violence as a last resort, and use diplomacy and multilateralism as the most appropriate strategies for political units. Liberal institutionalists advocate participatory policies such as multilateral aid, economic cooperation agreements, and international regimes, rather than policies of coercion, sanctions and other coercive measures to overcome belligerent and non-aligned countries.

After World War II, the United States became the main sponsor of the establishment of a large number of international institutions and organizations, such as the UN, IMF, World Bank, NATO, GATT (then WTO), etc., which are considered the basis of the "liberal world order". Liberal World Order is essentially the term that John Ikenberry used to describe the post-World War II world order. The US-led order is distinct in that it has been more liberal than colonial – and thus uniquely open, legal, and durable (Ikenberry, 2008). Ikenberry continues to refer to the world liberal order as an "open, rules-based international order" that is embedded in institutions such as the UN and norms such as multilateralism (Ikenberry, 2011). The US-led liberal world order focuses on issues such as self-determination, the rule of law, liberal economics, and the protection of human rights (Mead, 2021).

The liberal international order is in the nature of a set of regulations, norms, and institutions that oversee international relations, which formed in three separate developments: (1) The *Atlantic Charter*, or Joint Statement, was signed by President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill in August 1941; (2) the establishment of the UN, GATT and IMF in 1945; and (3) the establishment of unipolar world order after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s (Kundnani, 2017: 3-4).

Since the rise of China, there are alternative views of the post-Cold War liberal order. At the 2016 Munich Security Conference, Fu Ying, chairwoman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress, distinguished three aspects of the world order led by the US (the American value system, the US military alignment system, and international institutions, including the UN). She said that when Chinese officials speak of promoting international order they mean the third aspect, which is international institutions. In certain ways, they are defending liberalism, not an order founded on West-American ideals like democracy (Kundnani, 2017: 6). But in the United States, the concept of a liberal international order is related to norms such as international security, free trade, financial stability, and maritime freedom. In this regard, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken¹ placed the liberal world order as follows after Trump's election: The liberal order led by the US favored a free movement of individuals, goods, ideas and resources, a world founded on self-determination and the concept of national sovereignty and fundamental rights for its citizens, which is linked to an open world (The New York Times, 2016, cited in Kundnani, 2017: 7).

The US-led liberal World order after the Cold War was defended as the best alternative. However, since the 2008 financial crisis, the United States has run into complex challenges, and signs of a decline in its global power. The United States certainly does not currently has the power it did after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And at best, the United States can be described as a great power alongside other powers. As American power is eroding, the world is witnessing the emergence of new powers, and global power shifts from the West (US) to the East (China). China is at the center of these changes, as it will become the world's largest economy in the future. Thus, the world is somehow in a state of transformation of global power from a centralized power system into a multipolar system (Ikenberry, 2015).

Many scholars believe that with the decline of US hegemony, the liberal world order will not fall. Because, using the same ruling order, China has established new institutions and initiatives such as BRI, AIIB and Silk Road Fund. With the advantages that the liberal world order has brought to China, Beijing does not want to change or even destroy this order. Rather, it wants to achieve the real position that it

¹ Anthony Blinken was U.S. Deputy Secretary of State till January 2017.

deserves in the world order (Avci, 2018: 53). China seeks to cooperate with other international organizations in the current order, creating new institutions such as NDB, RCEP and AIIB. China's main goal is to actively participate in multilateral international institutions operating within the framework of the existing order (Ikenberry, 2017).

One of the reasons China has not decided to reconsider the revision in the liberal world order is its membership in institutions established under the rules of the liberal order. Beijing is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, as well as a member of the WTO, IMF and WB, which were created under the liberal world order. These institutions have made China a world power. However, China has challenged existing (mostly US-led) institutions by creating new ones. China's performances as "external innovation." The China-centered AIIB is a major competitor to the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank in a liberal global order (Avci, 2018: 54).

Although the US-led liberal order has been significantly weakened under Donald Trump, it looks like maintaining a liberal world order would have been a US foreign policy priority under Biden. US Secretary of State A. Blinken's remarks at the G7 summit in London, on May 04, 2021, are a sign of the US strive in maintaining liberal world order. Blinken at the summit said that the main purpose of the group's meeting was to work together to maintain global order, laws and regulations existing in the world.

1.3. Geoeconomic Approach

This thesis argues that the geoeconomic approach better explains current China-US rivalry. Because unlike the Soviet Union, which devoted all its energy to military power, China has preferred geoeconomics as an arena for competing with the United States (Campbell and Sullivan, 2019: 104). The US also has preferred economic power over military power to achieve long-term strategic goals, which can be seen in the US 2017 NSS.

In 1990, Edward N. Luttwak wrote an article in *The National Interest* entitled "*From Geopolitics to Geoeconomics: A Logic of Conflict, a Grammar of Commerce,*" in which the concept of geoeconomics has since received much attention. Luttwak (1990) argued that the end of the Cold War was in fact a reflection of the shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics in international politics. People now believe that trade methods are being replaced by military methods in the world of politics. Therefore, in order to achieve the strategic goals, it is necessary to try not to use military tools and power but adopting a strategy with a political orientation may provide a better way to achieve these goals. International Relations scholars use the term "geoeconomics" to describe the use of economic power to achieve

strategic goals. Geoeconomics assumes that power and security are not simply linked to physical control of land, as in traditional geopolitical analysis, but also to dominating and exploiting the economic relations that bring states together. By leveraging the asymmetric weaknesses implicit in these economic interconnectivities (Scholvin & Wigell, 2018: 4).

In fact, geoeconomics, like geopolitics, is an interpretation of the relationship between people and environmental factors on a global scale. This is the art of balancing power and adversary at the regional and global levels - ensuring security to maintain and expand national interests. In the new world order that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union, state policy began to shift from a geopolitical structure to a geoeconomic one (Yıldırım, 2018: 35). In other words, in essence, in the post-Cold War world order, geoeconomics is a step towards globalization, centered on the United States as an alternative to geopolitics (Cowen & Smith, 2009: 39).

The main difference between geopolitics and geoeconomics is in the logic of power. The geopolitical logic of power is related to the management and preservation of territorial integrity. While the geoeconomic logic of power is a set of economic actions and strategies that are performed in different regions inside and outside the country (Lee et al., 2018: 419). Geopolitics essentially studies the impact of a country's elements of hard power, including military, political, and human resources, on a country's foreign policy. But geoeconomics focuses more on economic aspects and studies such elements as transport, trade, investment and other financial and economic activities, strong economic performance, and sustainable economic competition of the country (Yu, 2017: 354).

Geoeconomics emerged from the interconnection of geography, economics and power and provides a new structure for power relations. To some extent, it replaced the geopolitical mechanisms of the Cold War. Geoeconomics is based on the assertion of impossibility and non-territorialization. It reminds the importance of territoriality and geographic spatial phenomena. Geoeconomics is a seal of approval for geography and the importance of location and space. (Veicy, 2018: 107-108).

The term "geoeconomics", does not yet have a precise definition. Some view geoeconomics as the use of geopolitical or military power to achieve economic goals (Martiningui & Youngs, 2011: 14). Some have a broad definition of the entanglement of international economics, geopolitics, and strategy (Thirlwell, 2010). Others emphasize trade and protection of domestic industries without regard to geopolitical considerations (Lorot, 2001). Some also limit the use of the term to traditional studies of international trade and sanctions (Bremmer, 2010). Some use the term of geoeconomics for almost all domestic and foreign economic activities and associate a country's planning ability with its domestic

economic strength or weakness (Blackwill and Harris, 2016: 20). It can be summarized that geoeconomics is the use of economic instruments to generate useful geopolitical results.

Geoeconomics is the study of the technological advancements and production and strategic aspects of resources in order to gain sustainable competitive advantage. Competitive advantage means what we can produce that no one specializes in as much as we do, and its quality is neither better than ours nor its price lower than ours (Mokhtari Hashi, 2018: 97).

Today, geoeconomic competition is at the forefront of global competition. Countries instead of using traditional methods; use economic sanctions, trading systems, competition, and price manipulation. The focus of countries on economic measures to strengthen their geopolitical power has influenced the expansion of world trade and political cooperation in order to facilitate economic relations. Hereof, the current global competition could better be understood by taking geography, technology, strategy, and other power dimensions of the International Political Economy framework all together. Infrastructure is the tool of regional geopolitics—by building roads, railways, pipelines, and ports, states seek to break out of their prescribed geography to protect and advance their national interests (Daniels, 2013).

Competition for energy resources and mines, transit routes for goods and energy, exploiting an advantageous geographic location to better access target markets, and leveraging economic geographic value to compete with rival powers are all geoeconomic issues that are very common in today's world (Veicy, 2018: 108).

The BRI, first introduced by the President of China Xi Jinping in 2013, is a prime example of geoeconomics. As part of this initiative, China has invested in several infrastructure projects, one of which is the construction and reconstruction of strategic ports. The construction of a commercial port along the BRI, although geoeconomic in nature, is one of the most effective tools to support the growth of China's economic power in the long term (Sun & Zoubir, 2017: 37). As a result, it can be said that the concept of geoeconomics is a strategic assessment of the geography and economy of a region or country in international economic and political relations and is used to explain national, international, and global economic relations. The importance of geoeconomics stems from the fact that the application of strategy in international war is of great importance (Yıldırım, 2018: 31).

Consequently, if during the Cold War soil was the main element and land of the spirit of geopolitical and strategic studies, today geoeconomics promises the fact that military strategies must also move towards economic goals, and in this respect, certain geographic regions of the world will play a

more important role than other places. In this regard, the geoeconomic goal is to intervene in economic strategies using the geopolitical context to achieve global strategic goals in various aspects. It can also be said that according to geoeconomic approach, the main competition between governments is economic rather than military.

US-China economic competition revolves around three major dimensions: 1) geographic connections between Asia, Middle East countries and Europe, 2) high tech production and 3) investment in foreign countries. International relations scholars also believe that the rivalry between the United States and China will be more economic than military. And it is on this basis that since 2018 the trade war between the two countries has escalated, and the imposition of economic sanctions between the two countries (against each other) has become more than before. In this respect, this study uses geoeconomic approach as a theoretical tool to analyze the implications of US-China rivalry over the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar in South Asia. These ports with geoeconomic and geostrategic features, are one of the disputed areas in the economic war between the two countries. Therefore, using geoeconomic approach to study and analyze the consequences of these competitions will help us better understand the nature and main directions of the policies of these two countries in the region.

CHAPTER II

US-CHINA RELATIONS; GREAT POWERS COMPETITION

This chapter attempts to examine the strategic confrontation between the United States and China from a historical perspective, as well as various economic, military-security, political, technological, and geopolitical dimensions of the strategic rivalry between the two countries.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, also known as the collapse of the bipolar system, several international relations scholars described the United States as the undisputed power and leading state of the world. But just a decade later first signals of balancing behaviors were seen, and the unipolar world order started to erode, and the liberal world order founded is crumbling. Based on the available evidence and facts, the United States certainly does not have the power it maintained after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At its best, the United States can be described as a great power alongside other powers.

The decline of American power has caught the attention of many scholars in recent years, and they argue that the world order based on American power is collapsing and we are witnessing the rise of new emerging powers and the formation of new world order. In this regard, John Ikenberry (2015), argues that the change of world power, the decline of American power and the change in the unipolar system are already taking place. As American power weakens, we witness the emergence of new powers. The world system is changing because power is shifting from the West to the East. China is at the center of these changes, and it is already acknowledged that it will soon become the world's largest economy (i.e., China is overtaking the United States). Therefore, the world is in a state of transformation of world power from a centralized power system into a multipolar system, which can be called a system of distribution of power. There are several factors behind the failure of the United States' global leadership. But the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in 2016 hastened the decline in the US global influence. Particularly, Donald Trump's statement that "*with the fake song of globalism, we will no longer surrender this country*" seriously undermined the 75-year-old global leadership of the United States (Ikenberry, 2020: 13). As the United States' influence declined in the international system, the People's Republic of China (hereinafter China), one of the rising powers, with growing influence in various areas in recent decades, has raised concerns for the United States as a leading government. This issue has started a new phase of relations between the two countries, which has been called the "Great Powers Competition."

China competes with the United States as a strategic competitor with two characteristics: high economic growth and an authoritarian political system (a system that opposes American liberal values). With such characteristics, China has been seen as a new model in many regimes where the US has traditionally been influential. It is also seeking to propose a new model of both “development” and “independence from the West”, particularly from the United States. In a speech in 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping claimed that Beijing is "blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization" and offers a new option for other countries that want to accelerate their development while maintaining their independence (cited in Westad, 2019: 87; Allison, 2020: 30). As a result of these evolutions, the United States has shifted its national security strategy to counter the potential threat posed by China. In this regard, it can be said that East Asia is as important in the new Cold War between the United States and China as Europe was strategically important during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union (Westad, 2019: 90; Mahbubani, 2020: 10).

A new era began during Donald Trump’s term, the United States has defined its grand strategy based on hegemonic struggles, competition for security, spheres of influence, and reactionary nationalism (Ikenberry, 2020: 133). China, as we will see in the next chapter, has adopted various strategies to increase its political, economic, and military power and influence, which has led to increased competition between that country and the United States.

2.1. US-China Relations: A Historical Look

This section attempts to examine US-China relations since the CCP came to power in 1949 to the end of Trump's presidency in January 2021. The relationship between the United States and China has been studied at different periods. These include 1949-1970, 1970-1990, 1990-2001, and presidencies of G.W. Bush, B. Obama, and D. Trump.

The relationship between the United States and China today is perhaps one of the most complicated and yet the most influential one among other global powers in the world. These relationships have been influenced by various variables, with many changes and fluctuations. The United States and China, as two great powers, seek to maximize their power. Accordingly, China as a rising power and the United States as a ruling power are the symbols of two rival and conflicting processes in world politics in the 21st century. Historically, since the victory of the Communist Revolution in China relations between the United States and China have experienced many ups and downs.

During the period 1949-1970, since the victory of the Communist Revolution in China, the views of the two countries at each other, influenced by ideological problems and strategic rivalry, have been hostile and hateful. The first confrontation between the United States and China during this period was during the Korean War (1950-1953), in which both countries supported two opposing Korean factions. The United States supported the Republic of Korea (known as South Korea) and China supported the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (known as North Korea). During this period, China also continued to conduct extensive military and nuclear testing, until finally, in 1964, it tested its first atomic bomb with a capacity of 20 kilotons of enriched uranium (Atomic Heritage Foundation, 2018). China also tested its first guided missile in 1966 and the first hydrogen bomb in 1967 (Fravel, 2019), and in 1970 it launched the first Dong Fang Hong 1 as a satellite using China's own rocket (Gunter's Space Page, n.d.). Therefore, this period can be called distrust, ideological conflict, and strategic competition between the two countries.

The period 1970-1990 is the period of the first official political relations between the two countries. Richard Nixon became the first US President to visit China on February 21, 1972 and met with Mao Zedong and both presidents signed the "Shanghai Declaration". The meeting, which many have called a major development in the foreign relations between Washington and Beijing. Diplomatic contacts between the two countries resumed because of geopolitical necessities (Kissinger, 2002: 220). During this period both countries realized a common Soviet danger. Chinese leaders have witnessed tremendous increases in Soviet military power, including nuclear missiles and forty modern combat divisions of millions of soldiers along their borders. The United States, on the other hand, had strong geopolitical reasons for being close to China, to counterbalance the Soviet Union, isolate it, and ultimately seek to end the Vietnam War. Therefore, realizing such a situation, the two countries, trying to resolve differences within the framework of common goals, finally agreed to establish political relations on January 1, 1979 (Chinese Embassy in Washington, 2012), which led to the expansion of trade and economic cooperation between the two sides. Eventually, with the opening of the economic gates of the two countries for each other, the economic relations have gradually strengthened.

The period 1990-2001 can be called the period of expanding economic and trade relations between the United States and China. During this period, both the Democratic and Republican presidents of the United States reached a consensus, expanding relations with China. However, two important events the fall of the USSR and the repression of students in Tiananmen Square during this period destroyed the consensus of the US parties on China. In other words, the collapse of the Soviet Union shattered common fears, while at the same time, an internal uprising in China weakened US domestic support for shared

goals, which ultimately led to a weakening of relations between the two countries. During this period, especially during the Clinton presidency, human rights issues, and their impact on trade relations with China became a hot topic in the United States. But in the end, the Clinton administration strengthened economic ties with China, supporting Beijing's bid for WTO membership and establishing normal trade relations with that country (Kissinger, 2002: 230-231). During this period, there were sporadic tensions between the United States and China over Taiwan. In 1996, on the eve of the presidential elections in Taiwan, China tested missiles off the coast of Taiwan (Richburg, 1996). This was a kind of premeditated threat to the possibility of Lee Teng-hui election, a separatist politician in Taiwan. In response, the United States sent two military brigades to the region to support Taiwan (Whiting, 2001: 127).

In 1999, China accepted to reduce trade barriers and tariffs significantly; in return, the US would support China's entry into WTO. The bill was sent to Congress and Clinton finally signed the bill in October 2000 granting Beijing permanent relations and thereby paved the way for China's accession into WTO the next year, 2001. This in turn surprised many observers and politicians due to the existing political tensions between the two countries at the time (Lai, 2001: 237). China's accession to the WTO in December 2001 was an event of decisive economic importance both to China and the global economy (Jain, 2016: 57). In other words, accession to WTO means a major shift in the political and economic policy of China and integration with the world economy. The US's role in allowing China to join the WTO in 2001 is critical because accession requires a majority vote of all members—which means that China could not join the organization less the US approves it. On the other hand, the WTO is the world's dominant trade organization, and being a member facilitates international integration, tariff reductions, and a fair system of trade dispute resolution that does not enable member states to resort to aggression or war.

US-China relations were severely affected by the 9/11 attacks, in 2001. The incident was a turning point that, in addition to affecting US foreign policy toward the Middle East, also marked the beginning of a new chapter in international politics. After this incident, US policy towards China also changed, and the strategic needs of the fight against terrorism required cooperation and coordination among the great powers. The cooperation between the two countries following this incident also shows a change in China's perception of the international order. For the Chinese government, peace and development remain global, and cooperation is the best practice in the international system. It is on this basis that significant progress has been made in China-US relations since September 11, and the two countries began to build a partnership based on cooperation. In 2002, former US President George W. Bush visited China. In the same year, the two countries agreed to cooperate on the North Korean nuclear issue. In 2003, China

hosted six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear activities, including the United States (Lida, 2009: 87-97; Tellis, 2020: 9-10).

Since 2001, there are many signs of attempts to build constructive trust between the countries. An example of this is George W. Bush's statement during his visit to China in 2002, who addressed the Chinese people with "respect and friendship between the two countries and nations" stating that "China's economic progress could enrich the world" (cited in Tellis, 2020: 5). Obama has also tried to reassure US goodwill towards China by taking a "strategic reassurances" policy. Obama also called for constructive engagement with China (Tellis, 2020: 5). That is, under Obama's "strategic reassurances" policy, the United States wanted to show other countries that China's growth would not be to the detriment of the security and welfare of others. In principle, this strategy was to build mutual trust, and it was an attempt by the United States to reassure China's peaceful growth with transparency and respect for the law. In other words, the goal of the "strategic reassurances" policy was to accept China as an emerging power that respects international law and standards and provides greater stability and growth for its people (Tsai, 2013: 7-8). But in essence, the Obama administration has tried a different approach to relations with China, announcing the "end" of superpower rivalry, trying to reassure China of its engagement with the world (Tellis, 2020: 10).

In the first term of Obama, the two countries agreed to collaborate on issues such as the global economic crisis, climate change, energy, and a variety of regional hotspots in Asia, including North Korea, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East (Glaser, 2009). In the second term of Obama, despite the sharp differences over the Syrian crisis, the two countries cooperated in reaching a Paris agreement on combating climate change, as well as cooperation in resolving the Iranian nuclear crisis in 2015, are two major areas of cooperation between the two countries on international issues.

Despite the fact that Obama came to power during a time of domestic and international crises, the US maintained a cordial relationship with China. In this period, the global financial crisis of 2008 was a turning point for the US global leadership. The 2008-2009 economic crisis severely harmed the US economy, prompting the US government to pursue alternate means of dealing with it. With this purpose in mind, the US government has initiated alliances with the world's largest economies. However, the 2008-2009 crisis can be seen not only as a moment of US hegemony collapsing but also as a golden opportunity for China to become a great power (Lee et al., 2018: 425).

Regardless of all the rapprochement and cooperation, since the 2001-period has also seen competition between the United States and China, especially in Asia-Pacific. Following the 9/11 attacks

involving US officials and diplomats in events and missions in the Middle East (Afghanistan and Iraq), the Asia-Pacific region was officially forgotten, and the United States was officially absent from the region (Shambaugh, 2013: 13; Tsai, 2013: 4). This absence of the United States created a large foothold in the region, and China became the only power in the region. However, despite its absence from the region, the Bush administration has held many important foreign talks with its Asian partners. A bilateral FTA with Australia and Singapore were signed during Bush's presidency. The Bush Administration also launched negotiations for the South Korea-US FTA and the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (then called TPP), both of which gave the Obama Administration a good footing and prospects for continued talks. Bush Administration officials also led initiatives to strengthen relations with existing allies and forge new partnerships with India, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Since then, the Obama Administration has completed the KORUS-FTA, a significant accomplishment for political leaders in both Washington and Seoul (Tsai, 2013: 4-5).

Obama's policy of "strategic reassurances" also turned into a strategic rivalry between the two countries during his second term. In its 2010 NSS, the United States made Asia-centric a priority, and containment of China was on the agenda of the US strategy to prevent it from becoming a regional hegemon. Also, this period, affected by the 2008 financial crisis, entered into a strategic competition with the US "Pivot to Asia" strategy, which later officially entered the "Great Power Competition" with the US NSS in 2017. During this period, as China rose and its steps to lead the global political economy and present its expansionist military and economic strategy, the US constructive cooperation policy towards China, which was designed based on "constructive trust", completely changed.

In 2011, then-President Barack Obama unveiled the "Pivot to Asia" strategy, with four dimensions: geographical, security, diplomatic, and economic, as an attempt to shift the focus of US foreign policy from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region (Demir, 2018: 55). Within the "Pivot to Asia", the United States shifted its foreign policy priorities from Europe to Asia-Pacific (Shambaugh, 2013: 10). In his speech to the Australian Parliament on November 17, 2011, Obama said that as the United States itself is a Pacific nation, it will play a larger and more lasting role in shaping the Pacific region and its future (cited in Shambaugh, 2013: 13-14). US former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also wrote in the Foreign Policy that the United States needs to be careful about where and what to invest regarding time and energy, and one of the most important issues is to pay more attention to the Asia-Pacific region. The United States needs to expand its economic investment, diplomatic relations, economic and strategic ties in Asia-Pacific in the next decade (Clinton, 2011).

Tensions between the United States and China during the second term of Obama's presidency are considered by Shambaugh (2018: 95) as the beginning of strategic rivalries between the two countries as two great powers.

In addition to military issues, Obama had established the TPP as an economic solution to China's ambitious economic plans. The importance of this treaty in the fight against China is examined in the second Chapter.

With Trump coming to power in January 2017, the US attitude towards Beijing significantly changed. In the 2017 US NSS, the Trump administration has portrayed China as a revisionist rival that tends to form a world of antagonism towards US values and interests (White House, 2017). During his four years in office, Trump has sought to achieve a global consensus among its traditional allies (Europe, South Korea, Japan, Australia, and India) against China to limit Beijing's rise. The Trump administration continued to oppose China, imposing tariffs on Chinese goods, applying pressure to enforce intellectual property rights, sending a warship to the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait, opposing the BRI, selling weapons to Taiwan, supporting popular protests in Hong Kong, pressuring China in the international community and in the media, especially the situation of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, and bringing cyberspace allegations against Chinese companies ZTE and Huawei (Zhang & Pu, 2019).

2.2. US-China Strategic Competitions: Different Dimensions

Since the beginning of the strategic rivalry after Obama's second term, the United States and China have adopted several strategies to confront each other, which will be further explored in the second chapter of this thesis. Notably, in the context of the Great Powers Competition, the United States and China are competing with each other in various economic, military, political, technological, and geoeconomic fields, which are briefly studied in the following sections.

Studies show that China, as a rising power, has challenged the United States, as a ruling power, in economic, military, political, technological, and geoeconomic areas. The United States in response has also pursued different policies and strategies in all these areas to prevent China from becoming a global hegemon.

Given this complexity, it must be said that all areas where China and the United States compete, are interconnected and it is not easy to separate them from each other. In other words, all conflicts on both sides have political, economic, etc. factors that have fueled tensions between the two countries.

2.2.1. US-China Economic Competitions

In this section, the economic competition between the two countries is discussed by examining indicators such as China's economic growth, China's share in world GDP and its share in world trade, as well as trade deficit between the two countries.

Given the impact of economic growth on political influence in the international arena, China has based its long-term strategies on focusing on economic development and the production of wealth and power. Economic development as a power generation channel is the backbone of China's long-term strategy. The economic impact on the international behavior of states is obvious. Only countries can be the institutional and long-term determinants of international transactions that become, in the first place, an economic power (Buzan, 2010: 25-30). In this regard, China has used economic components of power to counter US hegemony and advance its own interests, which has led to an Economic War between the two countries.

The impact of economic growth has exacerbated the economic rivalry between the United States and China. The Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds report, published by the US National Intelligence Council in 2012, stated that China will overtake the United States as the world's largest economy in two decades (National Intelligence Council, 2012). Many scholars also that in a decade or two, China's economy will be larger than that of the United States, arguing that the US economy was eight times that of China in 2000, but in 2018 its economy was only 1.5 times that of China (Mahbubani, 2020: 155). Mahbubani attributes the collapse of the US economy to high military spending and unnecessary conflict. In other words, while the United States was intervening militarily in Afghanistan and Iraq, China progressed rapidly economically (Mahbubani, 2020: 115). This is one of the successes of China's economic policies, comparing with the US. Even during the coronavirus crisis, when almost all countries experienced negative economic growth, China experienced positive economic growth (2.3% in 2020), reflecting the upward trend of China's economic growth, which is on a path from a developing economy to a developed economy.

China's emergence as an economic power will have dire consequences for the United States. Because the world's largest economy means someone who can determine the fate and economic future of the world and rule the global market. It can seriously affect the economic fate of other countries as well as Americans are doing now. This means that since the United States has the most powerful economy in the world, it can impose unilateral economic sanctions, because it is known as the mother economy all over the world, and other countries should pay attention to the rules of the American market. Because of

China's economic growth, many international economic intellectuals are now talking about the birth of the Beijing Consensus versus the Washington Consensus (Hasmath, 2014).

The start of China's rapid economic growth can be linked to the implementation of Deng Xiaoping's reforms in 1978. Starting from 1979 to 2018, these economic reforms have been able to achieve an average economic growth rate of 9.5 percent for China. In other words, these reforms have been able to double China's GDP once every 8 years. This economic growth has had a significant impact on various areas in China, for example, in employment, it was able to create 800 million jobs in China in 40 years (Morrison, 2019: 2). Also, China's economic growth has led it to declare victory in the fight against poverty. President Xi announced in February 2021 that poverty in that country had been eradicated (BBC, 2021). In addition, China is currently the largest consumer of energy with a share of nearly 12% of global demand. This high level of energy demand indicates the rapid growth of economic production in this country.

The indicators of economic power are different. But the share of GDP in the total world share is the most important indicator of international economic power. Surveys show that the United States' share of global GDP has declined from 1/4 in 1991 to 1/7 in 2020. In contrast, China's share in world GDP increased from 1.29% in 1991 to 18.34% in 2020. China's GDP growth has also boosted purchasing power parity in the country. For example, from the 1990s to 2019, China's economy grew from \$ 4.8 trillion in purchasing power parity to \$ 23.16 trillion, an almost fivefold increase (Mastro, 2019: 26). GDP is important because it forms the basis of power in relations between Washington and Beijing. As the relative power of the United States diminished, the list of practical options for policymakers has also declined. For example, while China was able to invest \$ 1.3 trillion in infrastructure projects under the BRI in whole Eurasia, the United States was able to invest only \$ 113 million only in the Indo-Pacific (Allison, 2020: 30-34).

Economic growth has made China an important source of FDI, almost on par with the United States. UNCTAD rated China as the most promising source of FDI in 2016. However, the United States remains the top destination for FDI, followed by China (Mastro, 2019: 32). But the US fears that as China grows economically, it will increase its sphere of political and economic influence by investing more in other countries.

In foreign trade, China has overtaken the United States to become the largest trading partner of many countries. China currently trades more with the world than the United States, and Chinese products are circulating more than American products around the world (Mahbubani, 2020: 102). As the world's

largest exporter and second-largest importer, China is a leading trading partner for other major East Asian countries, including US allies, such as Japan, Australia, South Korea, etc. (Allison, 2020: 30). China has succeeded in shifting the economic balance in Asia in its favor, and now it is the largest trading partner for most of the Pacific countries, which exerted a significant influence on China's regional influence (IMF, 2019). In 2020, China became the largest trading partner of the European Union, surpassing the United States. In South America and Africa, China has also challenged the United States in trade, and it is the largest trading partner of many countries in both continents. In a relatively short time, for example, China has become the top trading partner of Brazil and South Africa.

Bilateral trade between the United States and China is also a sensitive issue in economic competition between the two countries. Since the Clinton presidency, the United States has allowed China access to the US market. At the same time, American companies have used their capital and technology to build a manufacturing base in China (Tellis, 2020: 6). China and the United States have significant economic interdependence despite political and economic ups and downs. China is the largest trading partner for American goods, and the flow of FDI has increased in recent years. In 2016, US exports to China reached \$ 115.6 billion and imports reached \$ 462.6 billion (Mastro, 2019: 32). This amount in 2020 reached \$ 134.91 billion in imports and \$ 451.81 billion in exports (Global Times, 2021). As can be seen, there is a large trade deficit between Washington and Beijing in exports and imports of bilateral trade.

The United States has raised several problems in trade with China, the most important of which is the trade deficit, which has widened with an upward trend in recent years. Of the \$ 796 billion in the US trade deficit in 2017, China accounted for \$ 376 billion, or about 47 percent (Kashyap & Bothra, 2019). Trade imbalances with China have led to a national debt crisis as well as public discontent in the United States (Kapustina et al., 2020). For this reason, one of the main priorities of Donald Trump's economic policies was to reduce the country's trade deficit with China. In addition to the budget deficit, in early 2018, the Trump administration released a report on China's trade and performance with US companies, which documented a number of concerns about Beijing's trade practices. According to the report, some American companies operating in China were confiscated and some of their technical information was stolen by Chinese spies (Bown & Irwin, 2019: 132). That is why the EU and the US complain about two things China is doing: 1) Intellectual property theft 2) China's unreliable state practices.

Due to China's trade deficit and unconventional dealings with US companies, the Trump administration imposed tariffs on Chinese property with an unprecedented figure. The tariff and trade war that Trump started in the summer of 2018 against China by imposing a 25 percent tariff on Chinese

imports worth \$ 50 billion (Reuters, 2019) can be considered Trump's strategy of balancing China in the economic field.

Starting a trade war with China received significant support from within the United States. Senator Chuck Schumer claimed that the United States lost trillions of dollars and millions of jobs as a result of China's unfair play, so he called on Trump to “hang tough on China.” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi also said in March 2018, insisting that “*the United States must take strong, smart and strategic action against China’s brazenly unfair trade policies*” (cited in Mahbubani, 2020: 50). The common stances of American politicians from both parties reflect the consensus in the United States.

The Trump administration, in the framework of the Great Powers Competition, has challenged China's economic approach to power struggles by imposing tariffs. The reason for the US opposition to the BRI is also a kind of confrontation with China's long-term economic plans. The United States has also taken actions against China's efforts to create alternative financial institutions that may compete with the main financial infrastructure of the Bretton Woods system (IMF and WB). In this regard, Trump has proposed bilateral trade agreements as viable and superior options instead of agreements such as TPP (Tellis, 2020: 27-28).

Many experts believe that despite the tariffs, China has nothing to lose. China's economy is very different, as about a third of its GDP growth can be traced to exports. Some also argue that even if foreign tariffs on Chinese goods remain high, China has enough intact domestic market to fuel the country's economic growth for years to come (Westad, 2019: 89). According to Westad, in the short term, tariffs may create more gaming conditions, but in the long term, they can bring more confidence to China, and say nothing about the damage done to US credit. Thus, competition with China needs to be managed in the context of continued economic dependence (Westad, 2019: 93).

While Americans have the most advanced technology, the Chinese are trying to conquer the world market by mass-producing cheap goods. Foreign companies entering China are interested in gaining access to the country's large security and governance budget. But the Chinese have provided much less access to foreign companies in this area than to insurance and banking, according to the treaty they signed with the WTO (Mahbubani, 2020: 31-33; Yueh, 2010: 220). The importance of this issue promoted the United States to call for a change in China's economic system from a state-dominated to a market-based system. But since the loss of control over all aspects of the economy jeopardizes the control of political power, the CCP opposes it (Bown & Irwin, 2019: 133).

It can be seen that the economic competition between the United States and China has bilateral dimension and multilateral dimensions. In the multilateral dimension, economic growth, China's share in world GDP, and its share in world trade are some of the most important factors in increasing this competition. In the bilateral dimension, the trade deficit between the two countries, as well as China's unusual relationship with US companies in the country, has intensified trade competition. In addition, as said by Graham Allison (2020: 30), part of the reason why the relationship between Washington and Beijing becomes highly important in the global power competition is because of their sphere of influence regionally and globally. It can be said that China's economic growth has deeply aroused US concerns about China's expanding influence. Trade partnerships have increased China's sphere of influence in areas that have traditionally been US spheres of influence, such as Latin America.

2.2.2. US-China Military-Security Competitions

In this section, military-security competition between the two countries is examined by studying the increase in China's military budget, PLA modernization, China's military spending and capabilities, cybersecurity competition. Also, the formation of formal and informal US alliances with Asian countries to counter China's growing influence is also studied.

China's economic growth has significantly increased China's military budget from about \$ 30 billion in 2000 to over \$209.16 billion in 2021 (Funairole, Chan & Hart, 2021). Thus, it can be said that China's economic growth has been able to strengthen the desire of the Chinese government to become a major military power, and this is seen in the goals, missions, strategy, weapons, and technology of its armed forces.

The United States has tremendous military and defense advantages over China. It has 20 times more nuclear warheads than China, its air force is far superior to China's, and its defense budgets are at least three times that of China. It also has neighbors (Japan and South Korea) and potential allies (India) in China's neighborhood that have significant military capabilities. China has no such allies in the Western Hemisphere. With all these advantages, the balance of power in Asia has shifted significantly in China's favor. Today, the country has enough land-based ballistic missiles, aircrafts and ships to claim military supremacy in its backyard. China's missile forces pose such a challenge to US air bases and aircraft carriers in the Asia-Pacific that Washington can no longer claim supremacy in the region. China's military power even could be better, as its naval capabilities grew exponentially over the past few years, and its military technologies (especially lasers, drones, and cyber operations) are rapidly approaching US military capabilities (Westad, 2019: 89).

China is currently Asia's largest army with 2,300,000 active-duty troops. The PLA Navy is the largest fleet in the region in 2020, with 360 force ships, submarines, and amphibious assault ships, while the US has only 297 war ships. The PLA Navy is expected to field 400 war-vessels by 2025, while the US expects to field just 355 (Mainardi, 2021). Also, it is increasingly becoming more modern and flexible. The PLA Navy is rapidly replacing old systems, usually integrated with advanced and large multilateral systems that have modern anti-ship, anti-aircraft, and anti-submarine weapons. It also continued structural reforms begun at the end of 2015 (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2019). The Chinese still have intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of hitting US soil. Chinese cruise missiles have a range three times that of their American counterparts. In addition, the Chinese have missiles that can hit satellites (Lin & Singer, 2015).

China's military spending and capabilities have risen sharply in the last three decades. Twenty-five years ago, its military-defense budget was 1/25 of the US defense budget. But in 2020, the defense budget of this country was 1/3 of the US defense budget, that with each passing year, it is on track to achieve equality with the United States (Allison, 2020: 30). In other words, as economic wealth has grown, China has increased its military budget since 2000s, which includes scientific, military, and technological research. China's military spending in 2020 was 252 billion dollars, a 1.9 percent rise over 2019, and a 76 percent increase over the ten-year period from 2011 to 2020. However, in 2020, US military expenditure reached \$ 778 billion, an increase of 4.4 percent compared to 2019 (Lopes da Silva, Tian & Marksteiner, 2021).

China has also begun modernizing its army with five main goals, which started in the 1990s for the first time. These objectives include (1) protecting China's territorial claims in the South and East China Seas; (2) recognizing the right to engage in military activities within a 200-mile radius of the coastline; (3) protecting the SLOCs of the China Sea; (4) protecting Chinese citizens in other countries; and (5) replacing US military influence in the Asia-Pacific region (Metz, 2013: 2). In 1996, China spent only 1% of its GDP on modernizing its army, but in 2015, its military spending increased by 620% (Mastro, 2019: 26). Given this upward trend in its military budget, China intends to complete its military modernization by 2035 and transform the PLA into a world-class army by 2049 (in the centenary of the victory of the communist revolution) through modernization and structural changes.

In addition to increasing military budgets and China's military modernization, the United States is concerned about China's clandestine military plans. There are indications that modern aircraft carriers and the fifth generation of military aircraft were built by Beijing. Even the Pentagon has acknowledged the

process of modernizing China's missile forces, building new submarines, and increasing its nuclear weapons capabilities (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2015).

The modernization of the armed forces is closely related to the military strategies of China, which are discussed in the second chapter.

The increase in military budgets and the rise in military capabilities are also indirectly related to the understanding of China's territorial sovereignty. China's understanding of territorial sovereignty differs from common definitions in the West. For Beijing, territorial integrity includes territories such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, the South China Sea, and the East China Sea. While the United States and its allies have different views of China on all these issues. Emphasizing its understanding of territorial sovereignty, China has routinely patrolled maritime areas beyond 12 nautical miles from the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, 36 times in 2016 and 28 times in 2017 (Mastro, 2019: 32).

In the context of military-security competition, cybersecurity competition has also become one of the areas of the contest between the two countries. The cyber domain consists of two physical and virtual parts, the physical part of which includes satellites, cables, computers, rotors, processors, and so on. And the virtual part is the result of electronic communication in which data is transmitted, processed, and stored by the physical part (Jones, 1994: 1-4).

China's cybersecurity strategy dates back to the 1980s and the NHTRDP, which was later developed within the Ninth Five-Year Plan 1996-2000. Later in 2003, the country issued *Document 27*, which aims to protect critical infrastructure, develop encryption and on-premises solutions, and implement an “active defense” policy to better coordinate cybersecurity. In addition, in 2005, China announced the *National Strategy for Information Development 2006-2020*, which is considered the backbone of China's cyber strategy. Through this program, China seeks to expand its information and communications infrastructure in healthcare, education, and government operations (including cyber operations) and to achieve superiority over global competitors, including the United States. In 2012, China also adopted the NPO, the main purpose of which is to pay special attention to critical information systems and infrastructures, especially in information networks. China's cybersecurity strategy includes military and civilian units, the military part of which is being implemented as part of the modernization of the PLA, as a result of which China has increased its cybersecurity capabilities. China's cybersecurity is also reflected in the country's *White Paper* documents, which are considered China's main military strategies. For example, the 2015 Defense White Paper, with its emphasis on the concept of

"informationized military", the further development of national cyber power and breakthrough, focuses heavily on cyberspace in the context of intelligence operations (Çahmutoğlu, 2020: 52-57).

It can be seen that China has also increased its cyber power within the PLA modernization, challenged the United States in cyberspace, and has been able to gain a special place in this field. Cyberattacks are very critical for the United States as they could harm its banks, communications, economy, and transportation, like a military attack, or even more. The heavy reliance of the US military and government on communications and cyber technology has also been cited as the Achilles heel of the US in asymmetric wars (Spade, 2012). Meanwhile, 40 percent of China's Internet network, which mainly connects the country's vital infrastructure, is national and cannot be attacked from abroad. In the event of cyber threats, the country's infrastructure will be protected from possible attacks. In terms of cyberattacks, there are also concerns that China will intensify its activities in cyberspace in response to the dangerous developments of the US military (Çahmutoğlu, 2020: 55).

In the US-China military-security rivalry, the South China Sea, East China Sea, Taiwan Strait, and the Korean Peninsula are four points that could potentially become a battleground for military conflict between the two countries. Although neither side is willing to participate in a military conflict, despite growing tensions. The reason is that both sides are investing in offensive capabilities and increased military presence in the region. Washington fears that China is trying to oust US troops from the western Pacific. On the other hand, Beijing fears that the United States wants to increase its military presence in the region (Campbell & Sullivan, 2019: 101). If war breaks out between China and the United States one day, the battlefield will be the South China Sea and the nature of the war will be "a competition for free shipping on the high seas" (Mahbubani, 2020: 102).

In response to China's growing military power, the United States has sought to expand and strengthen formal and informal alliances with Asian countries in addition to significant military and non-military forces in the Asia-Pacific. By maintaining and expanding formal alliances and relationships with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, India and Australia, the United States is also strategically working with other governments in the region to reduce the security costs associated with maintaining order in the region. Between 2009 and 2014, a wide range of informal partnerships in the form of strategic partnerships were established between the United States and India, Singapore, Indonesia, New Zealand, and Vietnam (Parameswaran, 2014: 262-266).

China's military moves and US reactions in this regard have been considered as the beginning of the strategic rivalry between the two countries (Shambaugh, 2018: 95). The US Defense Strategy Report,

released by the US Department of Defense in 2012 on “*How to Maintain Global Leadership and 21st Century Priorities*”, explores how the United States is responding to China's future threats. The report linked the economic and security interests of the United States to its growing presence in the Asia-Pacific region. Sensitive to regional issues and developments, the report highlights the importance of US relations with its Asian allies in restoring balance in Asia-Pacific. The report was aimed at strengthening China's militaristic power, emphasizing the need to expand cooperation with new partners in the Asia-Pacific region. On the one hand, to maintain peace and stability and the free flow of trade and Washington's influence in the region with a military balance (US Department of Defense, 2012).

The United States has increased military cooperation with India, as its strategic ally. The new relationships between the United States and India were established in the context of the 2005 "strategic partnership" agreement, which was renewed in 2015. The most critical aspect of this agreement is security cooperation, which now involves large-scale joint military drills and defense trade. In 2016, President Barack Obama designated India as a key security partner (Kronstadt & Akhtar, 2017: 15).

Military cooperation between the United States and Japan was also strengthened. Both countries are united on defense issues, dealing with North Korea and China in terms of security threats and economic security, cooperating with India under the FOIP Strategy (Chanlett-Avery et al., 2019).

Moreover, following China's military moves in the Asia-Pacific region, Obama told a news conference after the APEC summit that China's moves have damaged the United States and its trading partners in the region, so this process must be stopped. In fact, US officials have stated their position on Beijing's significant military spending increases and its territorial claims in the east and south of the China Sea. On security issues, Obama even promised that any cut in the future Washington defense budget would not affect the US military budget for Asia (Kelly, 2014: 491).

In addition to Obama, the Trump administration has also sought to challenge China militarily as trade and economic tensions between the United States and China escalate (Tellis, 2020: 29-30). Trump has always believed that the Obama administration, by cutting the military budget, on the one hand, reduced America's hard power, and on the other, made US rivals bolder. Obama's multifaceted approach to US allies, in Trump's view, has left their spending, especially on security, on Washington, and they could easily be on the path to economic growth and development, but the United States is facing economic crises. Therefore, one of Trump's first moves after his election victory was to order the rebuilding and strengthening of US military bases, which included conventional, nuclear, and cyber weapons. Trump, in a Twitter post, about increasing US nuclear power said that “*the United States must*

greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes” (Trump, 2016).

Although the US-China military confrontation has deep historical roots (the Korean War and the Taiwan issue), it has intensified in recent years, coinciding with the re-start of the strategic rivalry between the two countries in 2012. The United States views the increase in China's military capabilities as a direct threat and sees China's moves to modernize its armed forces, increase its military budget, and its external military moves as a threat to US interests around the world. In addition, Beijing's establishment of the first overseas military base in Djibouti caused, the United States to regard China's presence and military influence in other continents as a clear signal of its global ambition.

2.2.3. US-China Political Competitions

In this section, China's efforts to expand its political influence around the world, as well as US strategies to counter China's political influence have been examined. In particular, the role of China in the establishment of international organizations, such as SCO and RCEP, is discussed.

A.J.P. Taylor, a British historian, argues that "*any contest for global power is ultimately a contest for allies*" (cited in Meijer & Simón, 2021: 263). Membership in international organizations or playing a constructive role in the establishment of a multinational organization are examples of the efforts of the great powers to increase political influence and attract more allies in the world. In recent years, China has also sought to attract more international allies, increasing its political influence.

In the 1990s, China began to join international organizations. In 2000, China joined 52 regional and global organizations. China is currently a member of 75 international organizations. China voted for UN peacekeeping operations for the first time in 1999 but it is currently the largest peacekeeping force donor among the permanent members of the UN Security Council and the third-largest donor among all UN members (Mastro, 2019: 2). The role of emerging powers such as China in the UN peacekeeping operations has also been interpreted as the beginning of the foundations for global change. Many called the role of China and India in UN peacekeeping operations a new development in the world order, which in the future could play a constructive role for the two countries in ensuring and governing peace and security throughout the world (De Coning, 2019). Governance can lead to major changes in the world order and, ultimately, to the formation of a new multipolar order.

Membership in international organizations or a constructive role in the creation of an international economic-political group has been key components of China's efforts to expand its political influence and power. One of the organizations that has been able to be a source of political power for China is the SCO. China is trying to use it as a lever of power by further strengthening the SCO. China, along with Russia, plays a key role in the SCO, including policymaking, transforming the Shanghai Agreement into an institutional organization, and direct support for its projects and programs (Guang, 2008: 249). In China's view, the organization could expand China's political and economic influence in the Central Asian region and increase Beijing's strategic depth in the fight against possible unrest in Xinjiang province in the future. On the other hand, this organization could become a good tool for China in countering US policy in Central Asia. China has always sought to prevent the expansion of the US presence and influence in the region, arguing that the countries of the region can solve their regional problems in the form of regional convergence.

Another organization that has the potential to become a pyramid of political power for China is the BRICS Group. The term BRICS, with economic and political nature, has entered the literature on international relations and world politics, simultaneously with the holding of the first BRICS summit in Russia in 2009. BRICS accounts for about 25%, 40%, 5.14%, 8.12% of the world's territory, population, GDP and trade, respectively, and is projected to become a major economic player by 2050. The BRICS countries are new emerging powers that will play a major role in the post-liberal-hegemonic order. Of the Group's five members, China, because of its upward economic growth, is viewed as high-potential power that may become an economic and political power in the future (Acharya, 2017). It can also be said that the BRICS has become a platform for multilateral cooperation among emerging south powers. All the BRICS powers are southern countries and have significant dissatisfaction with the US-led liberal world order. The US is concerned that China will gain strength in the Group is that it, using the economic and political potential of the BRICS group, may challenge the Western Bretton Woods system as it becomes the leading world power. With the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, American leadership in the world will no longer make sense, because there will no longer be a US-led order.

BRI and AIIB are another clear example of China's growing global economic political influence. The participation of more than 60 countries in the BRI project, as well as the membership of more than 100 countries in the AIIB, demonstrates China's ability to play a central role in the creation of new international organizations. BRI is studied in detail in the next section. The establishment of the AIIB as an alternative organization to the IMF has increased China's economic and political influence more than expected (Strand, Flores & Trevathan, 2016). AIIB, as a financial institution providing loans for

infrastructure projects in various countries, is a prime example of China's responsible role in international environments and the independent functioning of this country as an international power. Founded in 2016, AIIB has a significant stake in financing projects under the BRI. Even AIIB can be described as a complementary entity to BRI. China's role in the AIIB and its role as an alternative organization to the World Bank, IMF and Asian Development Bank has raised concerns in the United States and its allies over the international political economy. The non-participation of the United States in the AIIB is itself a clear approach of the country in opposing the establishment of this bank. However, the desire of many European countries to join the AIIB reflects the weakness of the United States in the international political economy in the world. Even the United Kingdom became the first G7 state to join the AIIB, ignoring US opposition. Germany, France, and Italy have also joined the bank despite the US warning (Strand, Flores & Trevathan, 2016: 63).

In the Asia-Pacific region, China leads the RCEP, which aims to expand and intensify member countries' participation in the region's economic development. RCEP consists of 15 members, including 10 ASEAN member countries, China, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Australia, is the largest trade agreement in the region in terms of population and GDP, with a purely economic-political approach. RCEP accounts for about 30% of world GDP and population. The total population covered by RCEP is almost five times that of other trading blocks, the USMCA and the EU (Table 1) (Ghosh, 2021). This trade agreement will definitely lead to closer economic integration among Asian countries (Mahbubani, 2020: 212-213). The signing of this treaty and China's membership as the most powerful country in it, testifies to the expansion of China's political and economic influence among the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. China is indebted to the establishing of the RCEP to Trump's pullback from the TPP, which resulted in a decrease in Asian states' confidence in the United States. The creation of the RCEP demonstrates China's endeavors to broaden its area of influence in the region. The establishment of this group has steered china to have an advantage in the power balance in the region. RCEP has widespread implications. RCEP with China's leadership will establish rules for investment, competition, E-commerce, intellectual property, and telecommunications in the region (Ghosh, 2021).

Table 1: Comparison of Biggest Trading Blocs

Trading Blocs	Nominal GDP, 2020	Population, 2020
EU	\$15.2 trillion	445 million
USMCA (NAFTA)	\$23.7 trillion	496 million
RCEP	\$26.1 trillion	2.27 billion
World	\$84.5 trillion	7.64 billion

Source: (Ghosh, 2021)

It can be seen that all the organizations that were able to become a source of political power for China, all have almost the nature of the political economy. These organizations have become a means to show the power of countries, such as China. Newly established organizations and groups have sought to challenge the US-led liberal international order, which has ultimately led to the weakening of the existing order.

China's growing political and economic power has undermined the world order established by US policymakers in the early 1990s. Today, great powers such as China and Russia, and smaller powers such as Iran, for example, see the ideals of the liberal order as a deadly threat to their internal order. From the beginning of the post-Cold War period to the Obama era, China and Russia have been less active in opposing the pro-western-democratic consensus. However, from Obama's second term to Trump's term, they made their opposition more public. Beijing and Moscow, which see the liberal order as a cover for American ambitions, have done more to challenge the ideas and initiatives of the liberal order in international organizations and in various fields such as the Syrian crisis and the South China Sea (Mead, 2021: 128-129).

China's policies toward the Syrian crisis are another example of China's demonstration of its power and independence in the international arena. The logic behind China's response to the Syrian crisis points to a major shift in the tradition of silent diplomacy. A tradition that had previously was based on non-interference in international crises to advance development programs. China's frequent veto use of the Syrian crisis in the UN Security Council reflects its different performance in the Syrian crisis and its efforts to develop a different solution to the crisis than the West. China has used its veto rights a total of 16 times since its joining to the UN Security Council. Of these 16 times, it used 10 times in the Syrian crisis since 2011 (UN Documentation Research Guide, n.d.). In this crisis, Beijing not only expressed its opposition but also tried to play a positive role in the process of resolving this crisis. In this regard, from the beginning, the country's Special Envoy on the Middle East Issue Wu Sike entered into consultations with the parties involved in the Syrian crisis, as well as the countries affected by the crisis, and explained China's approach to them. Expressing China's proposals and solutions to resolve this crisis was in line with China's different path to resolving this crisis.

As the strategic rivalry between the United States and China intensified in 2012, China's efforts to replace US-led international institutions dashed Western hopes that China would eventually embrace liberalism (Weiss, 2019: 93). As concerns about China's expanding model of domestic and international order have grown, in Washington, too, the consensus in support of engagement with China has turned into a call for competition (or even containment in a new Cold War). In October 2018, former US Vice

President Mike Pence announced that China is seeking to influence US domestic policy in a "whole-of-government" effort. In the same year, in February, FBI Director Christopher Wray declared China *not just a whole-of-government threat but a whole-of-society threat* (Weiss, 2019: 92).

However, many intellectuals in the field of international relations consider that, on the one hand, China is dissatisfied with its position in the international system, but on the other hand, since 2012, it has been promoting the idea of a new kind of great power relationship in which the United States and China can avoid conflict and succeed by continuing to work together. This non-zero-sum or win-win view is also reflected in the country's BRI. Under the BRI, China claims it is building a new kind of international relations with an emphasis on win-win cooperation and through dialogue, partnership, and unity, rather than confrontation. In this regard, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi categorically stated at the UN on 28 September 2018 that *"China will not become, will not challenge, will not take the place of the United States."* (Mastro, 2019: 32).

Despite China's efforts to establish dialogue rather than confrontation, the United States is concerned about Beijing's influence in international organizations and institutions. Many American scholars are proposing to create new groups to confront China in the international arena. Ikenberry, for instance, in response to the growing role of China in international politics and economics, proposes that the United States, to win the competition with China, should establish a new club of liberal democracies to oppose China. In this regard, the United States and its allies in the G7 can form a new group called the D10 by accepting new members (Australia, South Korea, etc.). Ikenberry believes the new group could work together to change a set of common rules and regulations to create a new restructured trading system. This group can also work together in various areas such as climate change and virus epidemics (Ikenberry, 2020: 140).

In short, the United States is concerned about China's growing influence in the world (Allison, 2020). Because during this time, China has been able to increase its sphere of influence in areas that have traditionally been the sphere of influence of the United States, such as Latin America and the Arctic. In other words, the spheres that have traditionally been the sphere of the United States are becoming China's sphere of economic, political, and geopolitical influence with the rising of Beijing.

In political competition, Kishore Mahbubani (2020) also believes that if the United States continues Trump's policies in the future, the country will lose in competition with emerging powers, such as China. The failure or weakening of America's political role in world affairs can be divided into two categories: political and economic. A striking example of America's political defeat in world affairs is the Syrian

crisis. The Syrian crisis, despite all the efforts of the United States and other allied powers, has not ended in favor of the United States because of the independent policies of China and Russia and China's consistent veto of UN Security Council resolutions on the crisis.

In the economic category, the example of the failure of the United States and the weakening of its role in the main political and economic issues can be clearly seen in the TPP agreement. Despite the US withdrawal from the agreement, the TPP survived with the efforts of other member countries, led by Japan. This means that great deals such as TPP can be survived and implemented even without the participation of the US. Another example is RCEP, which once again demonstrates the success of US rivals in making important political and economic transregional decisions. The RCEP is by far the largest transregional agreement signed without the US presence. China's pivotal role in the RCEP reflects its greater influence in regional affairs in the Asia-Pacific than the United States.

2.2.4. US-China Technological Competitions

In this section, China's investment in technological projects, including China's "Made in China 2025", to become a leading power in the technology sector is examined. In addition, by studying China's 5G technology, an attempt is being made to examine US strategies to counter this Beijing program.

China has invested heavily in strategic industries with emerging technologies, including AI, robotics, advanced manufacturing, and biotechnology. Issues such as climate change, epidemics, financial crises, bankrupt countries, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the consequences of automation and AI all complicate the struggle for power in this era. However, most significantly, problems of modernity include changes brought about by the forces of science, technology, and industrialism, are the challenges that Washington and its allies face. It has become one of the most competitive areas between the US and China, which became known as the "Technology War".

China's rapid technological growth has also worried the United States. Today, nine of the 20 largest IT companies are Chinese. In 2016, Chinese companies were next to European companies when Google, the global leader in AI, assessed its competition. But the situation is changing rapidly, and Chinese companies (such as Huawei and ZTE) are at the forefront of various technologies, including surveillance, face and voice recognition, and financial technology (Allison, 2020: 30). China has also made great strides in space technology in recent years and continues to pursue ambitious plans. The "Beidou-2" positioning project with 35 satellites has become a key project since 2012. This system will eliminate China's need for a US GPS system and can be seen as a replacement for GPS in the field of international

positioning (BBC, 2020). China also has a plan to manage space debris as in 2014 alone it lost 30 satellites due to space debris. In addition to 130 satellites that will dominate China's space dominance in the not-too-distant future, the country has other plans on its agenda, such as sending probes to Mars and Jupiter, building a space station, 130-ton missiles, electric spaceships, and a reusable launch system (Lin & Singer, 2015).

China has launched a strategy called "Made in China 2025", also known as the "Digital Silk Road", to overcome US leadership in high-tech technology. As part of this strategy, China intends to become a major manufacture power and begin what has been called a resurgence of Chinese production. The main goal of this strategy is for China to design and manufacture its products, rather than being an assembly plant for foreign giants like Apple (Kwan, 2020). In other words, based on the Made in China 2025 strategy, Beijing has identified 10 technologies to rank first in technology in the world. These technologies include *agricultural machinery, aerospace and aviation equipment, biomedicine and associated devices, electrical equipment and new energy vehicles, advanced materials, numerical control machinery and robotics, and information and communications technology* (Tellis, 2020: 29).

China's efforts to dominate new technologies, such as the Made in China 2025 program, have raised concerns about replacing Chinese technology with American technology in particular and Western technology in general. There are also concerns that the Made in China 2025 program could undermine US national security research (Weiss, 2019: 101). In addition, Americans believe that China-backed companies can deprive the United States of the crown of science and technology (Sachs, 2018).

In addition to China's great economic and political plans, the Made in China 2025 strategic plan is believed to strengthen China's position in the global value chain and enhance China's role in international governance, and on the other hand, it will strengthen China's image as a threat to US global dominance (Yu, 2019). Due to these concerns, the US Department of Commerce criticized China's "Made in China 2025" plan in a report released in March 2017. In this regard, Peter Navarro, one of Trump's trade advisers, also acknowledged that Article 301 tariffs are in fact targeting the industries mentioned in Made in China 2025 project (Sugeno, 2018). The announcement of China as strategic rivals in the 2017 US National Security Strategy also indicates US concerns that China will overtake the US in technology. Action against the Digital Silk Road includes US action against China's plans to build new electronic infrastructure networks (Tellis, 2020: 28-29).

The 5G (the fifth generation of mobile technology), which is set to bring about major changes in the five areas of television and media, medicine, telecommunications, transportation, and infrastructure

industries, is another area of technological competition between the United States and China. Huawei's 5G equipment is far more advanced than its competitors in this field, namely Swedish Ericsson and Finnish Nokia. Even there is not a single American telecommunications company that can be considered a serious competitor to Huawei in the field of 5G. To prevent China from developing in technology, such as 5G, the United States imposed restrictions on the transfer of technology to China and the commercial activities of some advanced Chinese companies, particularly Huawei (Kwan, 2020).

In May 2019, the US Department of Commerce declared Huawei, the world's largest telecommunications provider and the second leading manufacturer of 5G smartphones, as a threat to US national security and acknowledged that the Chinese government was using it as a spy platform. The US government even has warned that connecting the 5G Internet to Huawei would mean transferring control of the Internet to the CCP. But Huawei's founder Ren Zhengfei said the US action against Huawei has more to do with trade competition than national security. However, the US Department of Commerce imposed sanctions against this company and ZTE, the second-largest manufacturer of telecommunications equipment in China (Stafford Powell, Schoorl & Hamilton, 2018; Allison, 2020: 36). The US government even pressured its allies to boycott these companies, which received support from Japan, Australia, and New Zealand (Kihara & Kajimoto, 2019); likewise, the trade war between China and the United States turned into a war of technology.

Despite US sanctions against Huawei, the company has become more attractive for its low-cost 5G infrastructure. The United States is aware that no American company currently can compete with China's Huawei, so under various pretexts, it aims to create hair in the path of Huawei's progress. But in essence, the US goal is to prevent China from overtaking the US in the manufacturing and distribution of this technology. While the competition over 5G continues with China, the United States and Japan have agreed to invest in the next generation of 6G, and both countries intend to invest \$ 4.5 billion in this technology, competing with Beijing (Nikkei Asia, 2021). The European Union has also said it does not want to lag behind China in developing 6G technology. In other words, the United States and Western countries have come to the conclusion that China is currently first in 5G, so they should not lag behind China in the new generation of 6G.

The US accused China of using the 5G wireless infrastructure for espionage purposes. An example of the use of Chinese technology for espionage was seen in Venezuela. China's ZTE technology has been used to develop Venezuela's new national identification system. But after visiting Shenzhen in 2008, Venezuelan officials realized that the Chinese technology used in their country allowed the Chinese to control the behavior of Venezuelan citizens (Weiss, 2019: 98). The United States is worried about losing

customers to its technology industry. The country worries that it will make it harder to buy American hardware and software technologies as Chinese technology becomes more widespread (Allison, 2020: 36). This is because research shows that small governments prefer Chinese technology to the United States in the purchase of technology. The reason is obvious, because the conditions for investing and buying modern technology from China are easier than in the United States (Campbell & Sullivan, 2019: 100).

In the technology field, on the one hand, Washington is concerned about the loss of the market for technologies produced in the United States, and on the other hand, it is concerned about the influence of Beijing in other countries using Chinese technologies. The United States, which is now at the forefront of technology, except for 5G, will face serious repercussions such as job losses and even large factory closures, as it loses its global technology market. There are also political reasons for US opposition to Chinese technology. The United States is concerned about China's political and economic influence, which grows as it strengthens. Since technology will play a significant role in international politics in the future, the United States is trying to maintain its primacy in this area by opposing and campaigning against Chinese technologies. The US opposition to China's 5G project approves this claim. Also, it can be said that, generally, in technology competition, the United States is also concerned about the standards and safety of Chinese technology. Opposing China's efforts to create technical standards that would replace current Western standards was another US move to compete with China.

2.2.5. US-China Geoeconomic Competitions: BRI

BRI is China's largest strategic project, which plays a key role in the growing geoeconomic competition between Washington and Beijing. Therefore, in this section, by examining the role of BRI in intensifying the competition between the United States and China, the US geoeconomic policies to deal with this project are discussed.

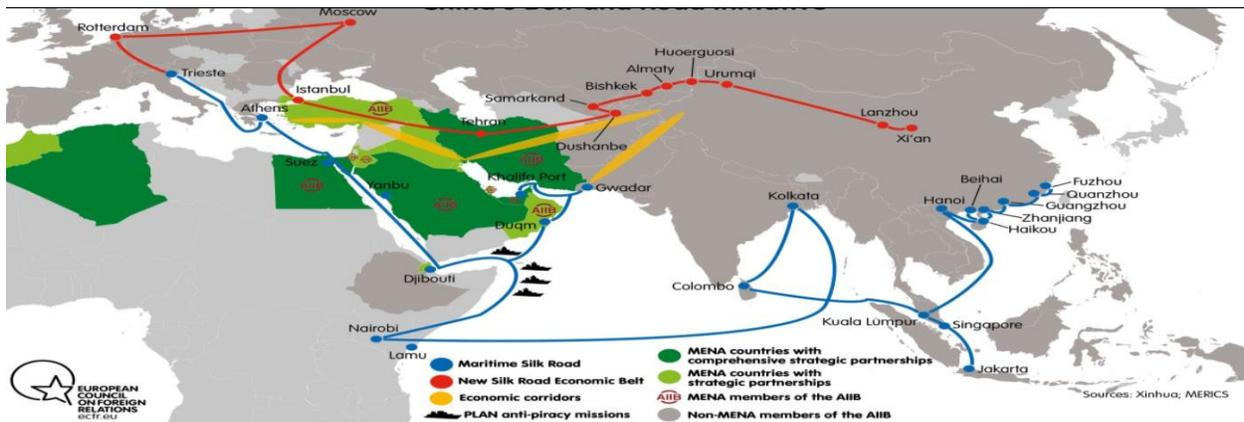
In recent years, geopolitical and geoeconomic conflicts in Asia have become more complex as US-China rivalries intensify. The 2008 global financial crisis is an important turning point which is seen not only as a moment of decline of US hegemony, but also as an excellent opportunity for China to become a great power candidate (Lee et al., 2018: 425). Influenced by the 2008 financial crisis, the geoeconomic rivalry has also become one of the main areas of rivalry between the two countries.

BRI, was first introduced in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping in Kazakhstan and Indonesia. It is also known as OBOR Initiative. In order to achieve his foreign policy goals, known as rejuvenation, the

President of China introduced the BRI as the forerunner of China's foreign policy, which is based on the idea of the China Dream in the country's domestic policy (Medeiros, 2009: XV-XVI). In other words, the BRI and the "China Dream" complement each other, which are parallel to China's domestic and foreign policy. The "Chinese Dream" implies economic prosperity, national reconstruction, people's happiness, and social cohesion. And the BRI provides a regional basis for realizing the "China Dream" (Xing & Wan, 2015), which brings China and Europe together under China's Greater Neighborhood Policy (GNP) is the primary goal of the initiative (Fallon, 2014: 175-182; Amighini, 2017).

BRI is a comprehensive government-developed strategy that as a geoeconomic program has the potential to shape the future of Eurasia (Map 1). The initiative is expected to attract about \$ 4 trillion in investment over the next three decades in countries that hold 70 percent of the world's energy reserves (Luft, 2016: 69; Amighini, 2017: 7). China claims that more than 60 countries are involved in BRI's \$ 1 trillion multi-year plan (Shambaugh, 2018: 97). The project accounts for about three-quarters of the world's population and 40% of world GDP (Amighini, 2017: 24). BRI is also referred to as China's economic diplomacy and Beijing's attempt to get out of the geoeconomic dilemma and try to create a new world era with economic incentives (Smith, 2018: 3-4). Some describe the BRI as the main security and military strategy and, comparing it to the Marshall Plan, present it as a threat to American hegemony (Amighini, 2017: 17). The Marshall Plan was a project through which US loans and investments helped rebuild Europe after World War II and ultimately led the United States to become the world's leading country (Yu, 2017: 357-358). Therefore, it can be said that, inspired by the Marshall Plan, China, with its BRI program, has strategic goals that will change the international world order.

Map 1: China's Belt and Road Initiative



Source: (Lons, C. et al., 2019)

BRI is the most ambitious geostrategic initiative in modern history (Smith, 2018: 3), launched with different motives. *Infrastructure* development is one of the main motives for launching BRI. Its main goal is to develop a connecting infrastructure (highways, railways, and ports) outside of China and thus connect the economies of neighboring countries with China. It is estimated that Asian countries will need \$ 1.5 trillion over the next 12 years to develop their infrastructure. While no government or institution has the capacity to provide this amount of investment, the BRI seems to represent an effort to meet these needs (Smith, 2018: 4; Yu, 2017: 357-358).

Investing abroad is another motivation for the BRI. China's FDI outflows grew at an average annual rate of 30 percent between 2005 and 2015, amounted \$ 183 billion in 2016. This trend was driven by increased incentives for corporate diversification in the face of slowing domestic growth, financial stress, and devaluation pressures from the Chinese currency (Smith, 2018: 5). In other words, China seeks to diversify its economy through investment abroad, which provides new markets and a source of wealth for the Chinese economy.

Increasing export volumes is another BRI motivation. China's surplus steel production capacity exceeds the combined steel production capacity in Japan, Germany, and the United States. Excessive capacity will lead to corporate profits, rising debt levels, and a more vulnerable financial system, which China seeks to reduce within the BRI. In other words, under the BRI, China intends to increase the production and export of advanced Chinese goods in an effort to expand its value chain. By strengthening the economic well-being of its immediate neighbors, Beijing hopes to create new export markets (Smith, 2018: 5).

Developing the western China region is another important goal of the BRI. China's 12 western provinces cover more than 60 percent of its territory, but the share of these provinces are only 21 percent of China's total GDP. As part of the "Go West" strategy, to balance all of China, between 2000 and 2016 Beijing invested nearly \$ 1 trillion in the western part of the country, in 300 major energy and infrastructure projects (Smith, 2018: 6; Yu, 2017: 357-358).

Countering terrorism through economic progress is another BRI's goal and motivation. The Chinese believe that poverty and lack of economic development are the root causes of terrorism, so by expanding economic growth in its western regions, Beijing hopes to reduce the risk of terrorism from its unstable, poor, and war-torn neighbors (Smith, 2018: 7).

The internationalization of the Renminbi/yuan is another incentive for China to launch the BRI megaproject. The yuan was the 13th most widely used international currency in 2012, but climbed to fourth place in 2015, a testament to the success of China's efforts to popularize the yuan in trade (Smith, 2018: 7; Nouwens, 2019: 18; Demir, 2018: 53); In this regard, China has signed bilateral agreements with almost 40 countries to use local currencies instead of dollars (Broz & Zhang, 2018: 36-37).

Energy security has also played an important role in the launch of BRI. As will be discussed in the following chapters, China faces the "Malacca dilemma" in its energy transfer route. The Strait of Malacca, through which 80% of China's oil imports pass, is one of the most vulnerable points in China's energy security. Therefore, in the framework of BRI, China has given priority to diversifying China's energy import sources and creating land and sea transportation corridors (Smith, 2018: 7).

Confronting US policies in the region is another of China's main motivations for launching the BRI. The US "Pivot to Asia" and "TPP" strategies, which were designed to contain China, have essentially prompted China to strike a "balance" with US policies and advance a China-centric vision for the region. The BRI project is an example. The *Digital Silk Road*, one of China's strategic plans until 2025, gives the Chinese hope that the BRI can facilitate the collection and use of big data in the participating countries, as well as the export of Chinese-made technology (Smith, 2018: 7).

In addition to the above, China pursues three major strategic goals within the BRI: (1) securing the long-term interests of China by expanding regional communications and economic integration, increasing transport infrastructure and trade networks in the interests of regional players; (2) ensuring "comprehensive national security" or "comprehensive national power" using non-traditional elements such as energy, food and economic security; and (3) increasing China's political and economic influence through the tools and agents of economic diplomacy such as trade, investment, credit, and infrastructure (Garlick & Havlová, 2020: 87). The BRI also aims to create prosperity for many Asian developing countries that lack the capacity to implement large infrastructure projects (such as airports, ports, fiber-optic networks, highways, railways, and oil and gas pipelines) on their own (Luft, 2016: 68). The NDRC defined BRI as a systematic project aimed at improving connectivity between the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa and their adjacent seas. It also argued that BRI launches all-dimensional, multi-tiered and composite interconnection networks and ensures diverse, independent, balanced, and sustainable development in participating states (NDRC, 2015).

China has established various financial institutions to implement BRI projects, including the AIIB, the Silk Road Fund, a BRI-focused Chinese government fund, and the NDB. The AIIB is reported to be

provided loans of about \$ 200 billion for BRI-related infrastructure projects over the next decade (Luft, 2016: 69).

The BRI, as one of China's most important geoeconomic strategies, consists of two belt and road sections: SREB and MSR. The Belt portion, known as SREB, is a strategic land route, which links northeastern and northwestern China to Mongolia, Siberia, and energy-rich Central Asia through a modernized rail network. The Road portion, known as MSR, consists of sea routes and intends to use and extend ports and harbors in order to service and optimize the SLOCs that are already in place (Sun & Payette, 2017: 14). The BRI's SREB and MSR have six major corridors, connecting China to Eurasia, Middle East, East Europe, and the Asia Pacific: CPEC, BCIM, CICPEC, the Eurasian Land-Bridge, CMREC, CCAWEC (NDRC, 2015).

The CEPC will link China's Xinjiang to the Pakistani port of Gwadar on the Arabian Sea. BCIM, in which Beijing invests in rail, highways, ports, pipelines, and canals, will connect China's southwestern provinces to the Indian Ocean. CICPEC will link Southeast Asia with 600 million people to China's economy through investments in ports and high-speed rail. The Eurasian Land Bridge, CMREC, and CCAWEC, as rail projects, will connect China to Europe through Mongolia, Russia, Central Asia, Iran, and Turkey. Also, Beijing is planning to create a corridor connecting ports in Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique to the Red Sea, the eastern Mediterranean, and central and southeastern Europe (Luft, 2016: 69).

Through these corridors, the BRI is likely to replace major international trade routes, mainly sea routes, with overland routes. In other words, with the introduction of the BRI, land-based corridors will play a key role in international trade, and the importance of sea routes will diminish due to their shortcomings (Like the Suez Canal blockage). The change in the network of international trade routes will have serious consequences for geopolitical relations between China and Europe, between China, Central Asia, and Russia, and throughout the Pacific region (Amighini, 2017: 11). Also, the importance of these corridors is crucial for China's economic and development programs. On the one hand, these corridors diversify China's transit and export routes, and on the other hand, these corridors provide China with alternative ways to enter world markets. The corridors also reduce China's vulnerability in the Indian Ocean, especially in the Strait of Malacca.

BRI would have a variety of consequences, which are summarized in three narratives: The first narrative portrays the BRI as a geoeconomic or commercial project aimed at facilitating a cross-continental flow of capital, goods, labor, and resources through infrastructure construction or as a “spatial

fix" to China's industrial overcapacity problem. At the level of direct geoeconomic influence that the BRI appears certain to consolidate, China is becoming an increasingly important and influential source of direct investment and engagement from Africa to Latin America and Asia (Beeson, 2018: 245). The BRI could also be interpreted as China's strategic step for achieving its geopolitical ambition; and finally, the BRI could be interpreted as a geopolitical-economic policy to fight US imperialist attempts to isolate China while also promoting South-South cooperation (Lee et al., 2018: 426).

China's growing geoeconomic power within the BRI has raised many concerns among the United States and other Western powers. The most important of these concerns include standards, beneficiaries, financial risks, debt traps, BRI militarization, and Chinese sharp power. Most Western countries are often concerned about the non-observance of Chinese companies to comply with the common world standards set by Western countries. In terms of beneficiaries, BRI member countries receive huge loans from China, which are ultimately forced to provide facilities to Chinese companies. It also raises concerns in Western countries because it reduces the competitiveness of Western companies with Chinese companies. Financial risk is also a cause for concern as, according to research conducted by the Center for Global Development in 2018, 23 of the 70 countries participating in the BRI are at risk of a debt crisis, and eight countries are increasingly concerned about the BRI debt (Smith, 2018: 12-14).

Debt instead of stocks, known as "debt traps", is a strategic concern toward the BRI. China is said to be using the strategy as a tool to advance its geopolitical agenda (Table 2). The militarization of the BRI is another concern often expressed by Western countries. In this regard, the use of ports that China has invested in the BRI as military bases is a matter of serious concern. For example, as will be discussed in chapter III, the Pakistani port of Gwadar has a high potential for use as a military base by China.

Moreover, in recent years, Beijing has begun to use the instruments of economic power in a coercive, punitive, and intrusive way to induce or implement alignment with its foreign policy priorities. Such China's actions have raised concerns about the rise of China's sharp power. For instance, in 2017, South Korea was subjected to a ferocious retaliation campaign by Beijing in response to its decision to host the THAAD station, a US missile defense system. China imposed restrictions on Korean pop culture, forced Chinese travel firms to stop selling South Korean vacation packages, prohibited the import of Korean cosmetics, and imposed a slew of unofficial economic sanctions (Smith, 2018: 14-17).

Table 2: BRI and Debt Implications	
Country	Implications
Sri Lanka	99-years lease given to China
Pakistan	Cancelled Diamer-Bhasha Dam Project in risk of debt-distress
Myanmar	Scaied down Kyaukpya port from \$ 7.3 billion to \$ 1.3 billion
Nepal	Cancelled \$ 2.5 billion Budhi Gandaki hydropower project
Malaysia	Almost \$ 23 billion projects cancelled
Maldives	In risk of debt-distress
Djibouti	In risk of debt-distress
Tajikistan	Ceded control of 1,158 sq km of dispute territory near border with China and in risk of debt-distress
Kyrgyzstan	In risk of debt-distress

Source: (Chin, 2018)

The misguided policies of the United States contributed to the establishment of the BRI as well as the creation of other institutions led by China. In many cases, Washington has inadvertently helped boost Beijing's interest in the BRI project. For example, Obama's "Pivot to Asia" policy has reinforced the perception in China that the United States and its allies are considering a siege around China (Luft, 2016). On the contrary, China launched a major BRI project to counter the US's passive and aggressive approaches in its sphere of influence. Likewise, the United States pushed Beijing to create a multilateral loan provider by opposing China's demands for a larger stake in the IMF. Even, the unsustainable federal debt of the United States has played a role in the development of the BRI: when it ballooned in the years following the 2008 financial crisis, the yield on U.S. Treasury bonds soared, forcing China, the world's largest foreign holder of U.S. debt, to devote some of its vast savings to infrastructure instead (Luft, 2016: 71-72). Gaining experience from the 2008 financial crisis, China has made investing in infrastructure a priority by changing its investment policy, unlike the United States and other Western countries.

Beijing has been able to use its ability to invest in infrastructure resulting from its economic growth to shift the balance of power in the region. The BRI is aimed at deepening regional cooperation to shape a new model of international cooperation and global governance (Shariatinia, 2016: 100). The BRI is also China's effort to create an alternative global institutional order to the postwar Western one (cited in Lee et al., 2018:427).

So, as a game changer, BRI has raised serious concerns in the United States and has generated strong reactions. The United States has sought to create mechanisms to understand the initiative, monitor it, and measure its progress (Luft, 2017). Despite all major concerns about the BRI, the US has yet to come up with an organized and "well-resourced mission" to oppose and contest when needed, and "offer countries alternative version of economic development and global infrastructure connectivity." (Chance &

Mafinezam, 2016: 15). During the Obama Administration, BRI occupied a minor role in the China-US foreign policy. During the Obama term, the focal area of the bilateral relations was to solidify areas of cooperation, take, for instance, stopping Iran's nuclear weapons development, and dealing with climate change. Although Obama did take a number of initiatives all of which had a de facto effect against the BRI. For instance, the TPP was intended to raise commercial, labor, and environmental standards. TPP function served as a foundation of the future of an American economic order in Asia. Obama and his foreign policy team were confident that TPP would assist the United States to counterbalance the increasing Chinese economic hegemony. Additionally, Obama made inadequate endeavors to promote infrastructural integration mainly without any clear signs of competing with the BRI (Kliman and Grance, 2018: 15).

However, the United States has tried to launch its own project to counter the BRI. For example, in 2013, the USACTI was introduced with the purpose to enhance economic integration within Southeast Asia and energizing non-traditional market players. In the same year, the US Department of State introduced the EPIC, whose main goal was to establish new regional linkages and expand trade and transport corridors (Kliman and Grace, 2018). However, both USACTI and IPEC failed to receive the necessary funds to emerge even as partial substitutes to the BRI. However, the United States formally targeted the China BRI in August 2020, imposing sanctions on several Chinese firms and their executives, including some subsidiaries of the CCCC, for malign activities in the South China Sea (US Embassy in Cambodia, 2020). Until early 2019, the CCCC was in charge of carrying out the CPEC's proposed 300-megawatt coal-fired power plant project for Gwadar.

The US has taken a more strategic approach to the BRI under Donald Trump's administration, seeing it as a global competitor for power, wealth, and influence. For example, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis has stated numerous times that there are "many belts, many paths" expressing systemic problems with China's regional order. Similarly, during the 2017 APEC summit, Trump criticized the BRI, calling for alternatives to "state-directed initiatives with several strings attached." China is referred to as a predatory economic agenda in Trump's 2017 national security strategy. The document fuels the Indo-Pacific region's strategic competition between free and authoritarian conceptions of world order.

Moreover, to counter China's geopolitical agenda, the United States not only refused to acknowledge the importance of the BRI but in some cases, the Americans tried to undermine it (Luft, 2016: 71). For example, in 2017, the United States did not participate in the BRI inauguration and even welcomed India's non-participation in the program. The United States has also strongly opposed the

establishment of the AIIB, a major sponsor of BRI infrastructure projects. The Trump administration has also backed the FOIP initiative to confront China in the face of Beijing's expansionist plans in the Asia-Pacific (Tellis, 2020: 26). In the second chapter, FOIP is studied as one of the US strategies in South and Southeast Asia.

American scholars also believe that the United States should work with its allies in Europe to confront the BRI and formulate common concepts on BRI policies (Luft, 2017). The best way to respond to the challenges that China and other world powers pose to liberal democracies and their liberal values is to work together to reform and reconstruction the system on the basis of which these countries believe in working together (Ikenberry, 2020: 141-142). In other words, responding to the BRI requires a Western-liberal model, as Biden also emphasized the need to create a model similar to the BRI to respond to China's ambitious plans (Renshaw, 2021).

US-China geoeconomic competition will continue as a marathon for a long time (Mahbubani, 2020: 181). However, this competition may not have a clear winner. According to US President Joe Biden, the country will launch a new infrastructure plan specifically to counter the BRI (Aljazeera, 2021). More obvious results could be seen in the future. But the BRI has been successful in influencing China's economy and strategy. Within the BRI, China has been able to create an alternative route for trade and economic relations, even military with other countries. The creation of these routes has helped China create new and diverse markets for its exports and imports.

It is also noteworthy that the 21st century Maritime Silk Road (MSR), known as the BRI naval portion, is studied in the Second Chapter as one of China's geoeconomic strategies in the region.

Overall, although the rivalry between the United States and China has become inevitable, many scholars argue that China and the United States can work together in various fields. Cooperation in areas such as climate change and global terrorism is the most important argument for the fact that these two rival powers can work together (Mahbubani, 2020: 268). Also, Mahbubani says that "the only way for China and America to learn to work together is to understand where both sides have gone wrong. And so this is where our journey will begin" (Mahbubani, 2020: 23). The US and China should accept each other. The main reason is the need for each other. The BRI is a vast project and is beyond China's power. That is why it needs the cooperation of the United States in carrying out this project. That is, it needs the cooperation of American companies in the fields of technology and security. This is a great opportunity for the US (American companies - especially technology and security companies) to take advantage of

this ambitious project. China and the United States can turn competition into an opportunity for cooperation (Luft, 2016).



CHAPTER III

SOUTH ASIA'S IMPORTANCE AND THE POLICIES OF CHINA AND UNITED STATES TOWARD THE REGION

In this chapter, the importance of South Asia region is viewed with a different approach through study the military and economic strategies of China and the United States toward the region. These strategies include White Paper documents, Two Oceans Strategy and String of Pearls Strategy as China's military strategies, 21st Century MSR as Beijing's geoeconomic strategy, as well as Pivot to Asia, TPP, FOIP, 2017 NSS as the United States' security-economic-oriented strategies.

As discussed in Chapter One, the competition between the United States and China will continue for a long time as a marathon in various fields and in different parts of the world. But with the expansion of China's power and influence and a shift in the core of US foreign policy from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific, the coming years will see many geoeconomic, economic, and political, as well as military rivalries between Washington and Beijing in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, the location of South Asia in the IOR (Map 3) is one of the most geostrategic significance of this region. The Indian Ocean is one of the most strategic open seas in the world. It is of particular importance in international trade, energy security, and military activities. It is considered one of the most important regions for regional and supra-regional powers. With such importance, the rivalry between the United States and China in South Asia can be described as a rivalry for "dominance" in the Indian Ocean.

South Asia is providing the shortest land route between China and the Indian Ocean, supply the ability to bypass the Strait of Malacca and gain the shortest access to energy-rich Central Asia. Influence in South Asia will therefore strengthen dominance in the Indian Ocean and will be of particular importance to the United States and China in future geopolitical equations. Moreover, because of the presence of two regional nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, security problems and terrorism in Afghanistan, and its proximity to Central Asia, South Asia has become a vulnerable region in the competition between the United States and China.

South Asia's importance in China's BRI geoeconomic project, which includes infrastructure projects such as economic corridors, highways, railways, and ports in the region, has risen to the strategic significance of the region. The ports that China has invested within the BRI have the potential to become military bases as well as the economic-trade hub of Beijing in the future, which has raised US concerns. It is therefore the United States, with its security-economic approach, laid out its strategies to counter China

in the region. In other words, the United States has expanded its numerous security and economic cooperation with countries in the region, such as India and others, in order to combat the expansion of Chinese influence in the region.

As the strategic importance of the region increases, there is evidence that Southeast Asia, in general, and South Asia, in particular, may become a battleground region between the United States and China in the future. Southeast Asia includes Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. However, South Asia includes the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Maldives (Table 3). Myanmar is considered a South Asian country in many sources. In this thesis, therefore, Burma is viewed as a country in South Asia.

The rivalry between the United States and China in South Asia can be examined in the strategies of the two countries towards this region. Because of the importance of the region, both the United States and China have so far adopted several security-economic-oriented strategies toward the region. The two countries have approached South Asian affairs differently with various policies and strategies that will be discussed in the following sections.

China is investing in many infrastructure projects, which leads to the increase of Beijing's economic and political influence, as well as the economic and infrastructural growth of the host countries. In contrast, the United States, contrary to China's actions, has sought to expand its influence in the region through bilateral technology and defense agreements, relying more on its regional allies. China invests in employment creation, and the revenue obtained from job-making opportunities is consequently shared with the host country, whereas the revenue from the same channel earned by American companies is transferred directly to the US treasury (Shambaugh, 2018). As a result, this is the vital factor why countries in the region tend towards China than to the United States when trade and economic ties are concerned.

Table 3: General information about the countries of South Asia					
Country Name	Population (Million, 2019)	GDP (Billion USD, 2019)	Land Area (km²) ***	Capital	Language
India	1.3 Billion	2.869*	3.287 million	New Delhi	Hindi and English
Pakistan	216	278.222	881,913	Islamabad	Urdu and English
Bangladesh	163	302.571	148,460	Dhaka	Bengali
Afghanistan	38	19.291	652,860	Kabul	Pachto and Dari
Nepal	28	30.641	147,516	Kathmandu	Nepali
Sri Lanka	21	84.009	65,610	Colombo	Sinhala and Tamil
Bhutan	763**	2.531	38,394	Thimphu	Zonca
Maldives	530**	5.642	300	Male	Dhivehi
Burma	54	76.086	676,575	Naypyitaw	Burmese
* Trillion ** Thousand *** Google					

Source: (World Bank, n.d.)

3.1. The Importance of South Asia

The IOR, and especially South Asia, has been the focus of global and regional powers for centuries. The Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean in the world and has become increasingly important in the global political agenda over the past decades. It has a special geographical structure: it borders Africa in the west, Asia in the north, Antarctica in the south and Australia in the southeast. From a security point of view, the Indian Ocean has a number of access points and chokepoints (e.g. Strait of Malacca and Strait of Hormuz) that make this ocean unique. By controlling these chokepoints, it provides access and control of extensive transportation lines. In terms of energy, the Indian Ocean continues to include regions that produce more than 40% of the world's offshore oil (Suri, 2017: 9).

The Indian Ocean is also an important route for international trade; two-thirds of the world's oil trade, 50% of the container trade and one-third of the world's major maritime shipments are transported via this ocean, of which only 20% is intra-regional and 80% is trans-regional (Shambaugh, 2018: 89-92; Suri, 2017: 10). The Indian Ocean, for all its merits, also has its weaknesses. These disadvantages include the presence of many unstable countries, piracy, and terrorism.

South Asia (Map 2), located on the northern shores of the Indian Ocean, is geopolitically diverse in terms of cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, as well as a nuclear arms race between the region's two main players, India and Pakistan. In addition, the issue of Afghanistan and the US and Chinese policies/competitions in the region have added geoeconomic significance to the South Asia region. The countries of this region, with the exception of India, have witnessed various political developments. Many South Asian countries, which are rich in cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, have experienced numerous conflicts. This has affected the economic and political stability of these countries and the entire South Asian region.

In recent years, China-Pakistani relations and the recent Indo-US civil nuclear deal, as well as the various strategies of the two world powers (US and China) in the region, indicate the geoeconomic importance of South Asia in world politics and international relations. This region possesses many natural resources, the proper use can lead to the economic prosperity of the whole region. For example, its vast water resources can make hydropower available, especially to support industrial development (Ahmad & Singh, 2017: 138-139).

Map 2: South Asia countries



Source: (Countryaah, n.d.)

In recent years, with the rise of China and its growing economic and military access to the Indian Ocean and South Asian region, serious regional and global concerns have arisen. These concerns have taken different forms and reacted differently. For instance, Indian experts are concerned about Beijing's growing influence in the region, given China's advanced and sophisticated military capabilities and economic development. American strategists, on the other hand, are concerned about China's rise and its growing ability to challenge the US-led liberal world order. An example of this is Washington's concern for the maintenance of maritime order in the Indian Ocean, challenged by China's rise to military and economic power in the Ocean. The United States also remains concerned about China's "debt-trap diplomacy" as it focuses on the multilateral competition with China. Cases in South Asia, such as the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka, are cited as examples of concern.

Small countries in the region have also quietly expressed concern about China's growing influence, trying to take advantage of the rivalry between China and India, as well as between China and the United States, whether they can use China's political influence while maintaining freedom of maneuver. However, the escalation of US-China rivalry, as well as the start of a trade war between Beijing and Washington, and the deterioration of US-China relations during Donald Trump's presidency, have raised concerns that the Indian Ocean and South Asia region may turn into a region for proxy conflicts between Washington and Beijing (White, 2020: 2). However, most are based on future projections of China's role

in the Indian Ocean rather than current assessments of its influence, access, or capabilities in the region, all of which remain modest. Forecasting China's influence in the IOR is a difficult task, made even more difficult by the as-yet-unknown implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for geopolitical competition in general, and China's global investment strategy, in particular (White, 2020: 2).

In short, the evidence show that South and Southeast Asia have the potential to become a competing area between the United States and China in the future. In this respect, the competition between the two countries in South Asia can be seen in the strategies of the two countries toward the region. In other words, the significance of South Asia is important because both the United States and China have so far presented several strategies toward the region in particular, and toward the Indian Ocean in general. Both countries approached South Asia with different approaches and strategies, which will be discussed in the following sections.

3.2. China's South Asia Policies

In this section, by dividing China's South Asia policies into security-military and geoeconomic sections, the country's strategies in the military and security sector (White Paper documents, Two Oceans Strategy and String of Pearls Strategy) and geoeconomic sector (MSR) have been studied.

The Indian Ocean and its sea lanes have been China's route to various parts of Africa and Asia since the 15th century (since Zheng He's travels). But over the past three decades, along with China's economic growth and foreign trade development, the country has become more interested in the region. Ensuring the energy security and economic security of merchant ships are two main reasons for this focus. China receives about 4/5 of its energy from various sources in the Middle East and Central Asia. Most of the energy imports should be carried out by sea and along the sea routes of the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, and Lombok Strait, 75-80% of which pass through the waters of the Indian Ocean and 10-15% through the Pacific Ocean (Suri, 2017: 19). China remains a major driver of maritime trade, with Chinese shipping accounting for approximately 15% of the world's maritime fleet (Suri, 2017: 24).

The Indian Ocean is of particular importance to China for several reasons: (a) in terms of maritime security, the Indian Ocean is a fragile region; (b) in terms of economic interests, the Indian Ocean is a key region; and (c) strategically, the Indian Ocean is the path to the West (Duchâtel, 2019). But China's most important strategic imperative in the Indian Ocean is the protection of SLOCs in that ocean. These SLOCs, China's most important energy transportation route, extending from the Strait of Hormuz at the Persian Gulf around the Indian Subcontinent to the Bay of Bengal and the Strait of Malacca. China is

more vulnerable in the Straits of Malacca, which accounts for about 80% of China's oil imports (Berkeley Political Review, 2019). Chinese former President Hu Jintao called Malacca's chokepoint China's "Malacca Dilemma." China is also facing the so-called "Hormuz Dilemma" in the Persian Gulf, where about 40% of Chinese oil imports pass through the strait (Brewster, 2015: 2).

China still faces numerous challenges and obstacles in the Indian Ocean for natural reasons (such as the formidable geographical barriers created by mountains, deserts, and forests along the southern edge of the Eurasian continent). In this regard, China seeks to reduce its vulnerability in the Indian Ocean region (a) by increasing its naval capabilities, (b) by expanding military-economic access to strategic ports in the Indian Ocean, and (c) establishing land transport connections to the Indian Ocean (creating economic corridors) (Brewster, 2015: 3).

Given vulnerabilities in the Indian Ocean, China is seeking a new international and regional maritime order. China has intensified its efforts for deep interactions with various institutions and organizations. China, for example, is a Dialogue Partner in the IORA and holds an "observer" position at the IONS. The country is also sponsored the second IORA Blue Economy Core Group workshop on "Maritime Connectivity and Financing for Development in the Indian Ocean Rim" held from July 13-14, 2016, in Qingdao, a port city in Shandong province (Suri, 2017: 53). Chinese investments in strategic ports in the Indian Ocean and the establishment of a military base in Djibouti are also part of Beijing's plans to establish a new international maritime order in the ocean.

China's economic influence as a global economic power is growing throughout the IOR. China is currently the largest trading partner of many IOR countries and a major source of investment, especially in infrastructure projects. Many countries also seek to use China as a balance in their political and economic relations with larger powers such as the United States and India (Kaplan, 2009; Mohan, 2012, cited in Brewster, 2015: 8). There are also signs that this economic relationship has evolved into a security or defense relationship, especially in the maritime realm. Various factors are involved in the development of these relationships. For example, the relative cost of China's defense technology (for Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka), the existence of international arms sanctions (for Myanmar and Sri Lanka), and balance considerations (for Myanmar and Bangladesh) have led these countries of the region to consider China as a major source of arms (Brewster, 2015: 8).

China's dependence on maritime trade and access to SLOCs is essential for the country. However, the Chinese are well aware of possible disruptions to such access, especially due to the global American presence. Therefore, given the US maritime hegemony, China is more interested in expanding its navy in

order to provide free and unhindered access to sea routes. Alongside the United States, China's perception of India's ambition to control the Indian Ocean further reflects their need for free access to the ocean's transportation lines. Therefore, the Chinese will never lose the right to free access to the waters of the Indian Ocean for all countries, reaffirming their legitimacy in the Indian Ocean (Suri, 2017: 30).

Given the importance of the Indian Ocean, as well as the geoeconomic and geopolitical position of South Asia, the significance of this region in China's foreign policy has increased in recent years (especially during the Xi period). The BRI underlines the strategic importance of South Asia, known as the rediscovery of the strategic situation in South Asia (Peng, 2014, cited in Kumar, 2019: 138). The importance of the sea, especially the Indian Ocean, in China's trade and economic growth has prompted it to adopt a number of security and economic strategies to ensure the safety of trade routes as well as access to world markets. These strategies, which are divided into two categories, military and economic, are studied separately.

3.2.1. China's Military-Security Strategies in South Asia

The Indian Ocean and the South Asian region are of particular importance to China in several respects. Security issues are one of them. In the last two decades, when China has seen significant economic and military growth, it has adopted different but interrelated strategies in the Indian Ocean, and especially in South Asia. White Papers Documents, String of Pearls Strategy and Two Ocean Strategy are among the most important security strategies of China in the region. Each of its strategies has a special role to play in empowering China and plays a major role in US-China rivalries.

3.2.1.1. White Papers

China's Defense White Paper is a bi-annual document outlining China's national defense strategy. However, significant White Paper documents issues in different years are studied in this section as a case study. So, the first White Paper was published in 1998, which was reflecting the limited naval ambitions. The document is intended to remind that Beijing will not deploy troops outside China and will not establish military bases in any foreign countries. But in 2004, as China's economic growth began, Chinese President Hu Jintao, in his address to the Central Military Commission, mandated the PLAN to protect China's expanding national interests and "defend world peace", and expanded the ambitions of the country's navy. PLAN's priority until then was to protect the nearby waters of China, the new mission planned a more ambitious and active role for the Navy in waters and seas farther away from China (White, 2020: 3).

The 2006 White Paper noted an increase in issues related to energy security and international transportation routes. The paper considered the need for a plan to operate in distant waters, citing growing global competition for resources. The 2010 White Paper emphasizes the importance of logistical support for activities outside the region, and the 2013 White Paper explicitly mentioned the development of China's water capabilities. The document emphasized specific missions such as protecting merchant ships, evacuating Chinese citizens overseas, and securing reliable protection of China's interests overseas (White, 2020: 3–4).

The White Paper, published in 2015, highlighted issues related to the protection of maritime interests, the security of overseas interests, and strategic SLOCs at the forefront, and outlined strategic tasks for the Chinese armed forces. One of the most important tasks presented in this document was to change the PLAN program, which gradually focuses on the protection of offshore waters in combination with the defense of foreign waters and the protection of the high seas. The document also emphasizes the need to abandon the traditional mentality that land is more important than the sea, and places great importance on managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests (Suri, 2017: 49). The establishment of the PLAN base in Djibouti, as well as wider efforts to expand the presence of these forces in the far seas and concluding defense cooperation agreements with other countries, mark a change in China's military doctrine, including a ban on the deployment of troops outside the mainland (Vertin, 2020: 7). The 2015 White Paper also includes cybersecurity issues discussed in the first chapter.

Subsequent defense documents, published in 2017 and 2019, have been prepared and published in a manner that appears to support the vision of the BRI. The documents placed particular emphasis on the PLAN's role in protecting the interests of China and Chinese citizens abroad (White, 2020: 4).

Examining the White Paper documents over the past two decades shows that along with economic growth, China's security programs have widened, and the Chinese navy has expanded to provide security for its trade and energy routes. As the economy grew, China expanded its security and trade security programs and coordinated its ambitious economic and security plans. However, this strategy is not China's only security program.

3.2.1.2. China's Two Ocean Strategy

The "Two Oceans" strategy appeared in 2005 with the strategic goals of the CCP in literature. The essence of this strategy is that China must take control of the surrounding waters and end its neglect of the navy as the economy grows. While previous versions of China's strategy have focused on areas around

some of China's coastal cities (most notably Tianjin), the Two Oceans strategy has shifted its focus beyond the country's coastal waters (Sun & Payette, 2017: 2).

This strategy was redefined in the book “Science of Military Strategy”, published in 2013 by the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences. Although the book was previously published in 1987 and 2001, the 2013 edition defines the strategic concept of “active defense” as a dynamic concept that cannot be limited to the defense of mainland China. The book also notes that China's interests have expanded beyond traditional territory and territorial waters and become global in nature (Suri, 2017: 46). The strategy emphasizes the need to establish a "strategic border" off the coast of China in northeastern, southeastern, and southwestern directions along the arc of the western Pacific and northern Indian Oceans, known as the "Two Oceans" (Suri, 2017: 47).

In the "Two Oceans" strategy, the geological boundaries of the strategy are associated with the capabilities of PLAN, which is one of the main features of this strategy. Also in this strategy, the PLAN area of influence is defined by the term "near and far sea". The near seas include the waters adjacent to China's borders, namely the East China and South China Seas and the Yellow Sea, while the far seas extend beyond these areas. More specifically, the “Two Oceans” strategy includes the Pacific and Indian Oceans, which are of particular importance to China for security and economic reasons. The Pacific Ocean is of military-security importance to China because of its proximity and has always been a major concern for the country's political and military elites. For example, the Taiwan issue, the significant presence of US forces in South Korea and Japan, and disputes over territorial claims with Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam are issues of Chinese security-military concern in the Pacific. On the other hand, the Indian Ocean, in addition to being an excellent maritime training area for PLAN and the next step in predicting China's maritime power, has numerous economic and commercial advantages in areas bordering the Indian Ocean (Sun & Payette, 2017: 5).

China seeks to dominate the Pacific and become a resident power in the Indian Ocean. In order to carry out this policy, it has called for the construction of “at least five to six aircraft carriers” to maintain “two carrier strike groups in the West Pacific Ocean and two in the Indian Ocean” (Malik, 2020).

China's "Two Ocean" strategy could have three important geoeconomic implications. The first consequence of this strategy will be the expansion of China's military presence in areas far from the Chinese coast. In other words, as part of this strategy, PLAN will continue the modernization process and thus expand its operating areas. Second, within the framework of this strategy, China's “hard” and “soft” economic presence in the region will expand. China's hard economic presence includes physical

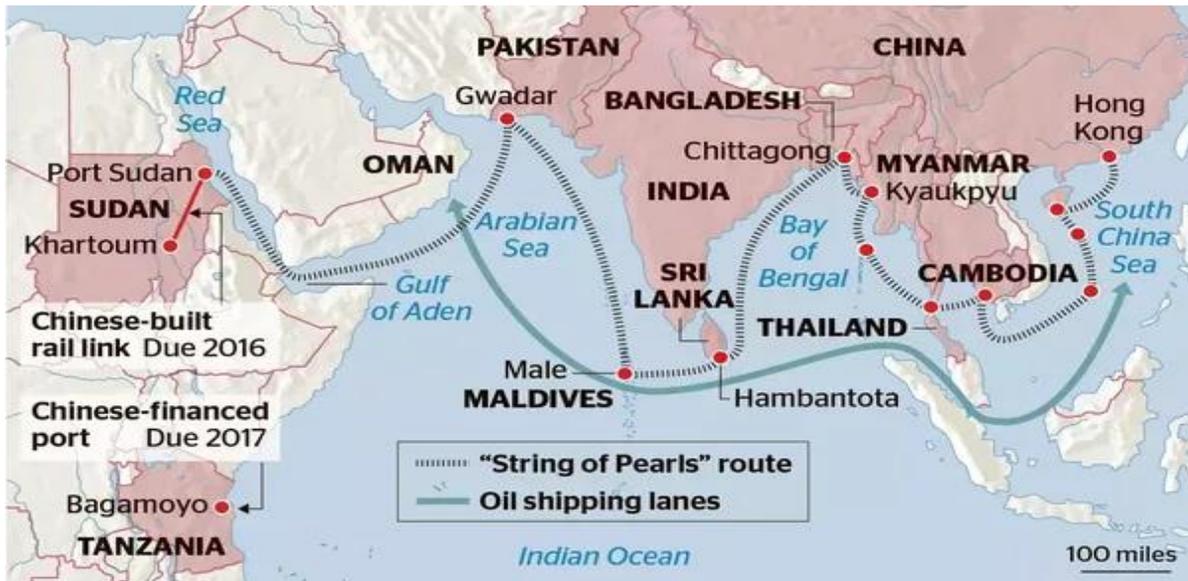
infrastructure, increased trade and consequently Chinese goods, and the presence of Chinese businesses. Its soft economic presence includes trade, the central bank's foreign exchange agreement, credit, and new foreign direct investment. Ultimately, this strategy will expand China's presence in all areas as a regional player. In other words, by merging the previous two, this strategy will expand China's economic and military presence in a coordinated manner (Sun & Payette, 2017: 6-8). This means that the country will expand its influence beyond the mainland by expanding the scope of its economic and military activities.

Overall, it can be said that the Two Ocean and BRI strategies complement each other as military-security and economic strategies, respectively. The reason is the coordination in the redefinition of the two oceans strategy and the BRI strategy in one year, in 2013. The coordination of these two strategies not only marks the consolidation of China as a global economic superpower, but also its transformation into a global military superpower capable of challenging the United States (Sun & Payette, 2017: 16).

3.2.1.3. China's String of Pearls Strategy

Over the past two decades, Beijing has increased its military activities in the IOR and expanded its navy to the west. In addition to multimillion-dollar aid, it has financed trade and defense agreements with countries in the region, as well as trade ports in Bangladesh (Chittagong), Myanmar (Kyaukpyu), Pakistan (Gwadar) and Sri Lanka (Hambantota and Colombo), and at the same time, it expanded its maritime relations with the Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius (Map 3) (Mahadevan: p. 1). Beijing's economic initiatives have raised Western concerns about China's long-term strategy. Many analysts believe that with the PLAN modernization program, the commercial ports on which China has invested will one day become permanent Chinese naval bases (Tariq, 2016: 19-20).

Map 3: String of Pearls Strategy



Source: (Pilar, 2020: 3)

With increasing trade and dependence on sea routes, China faced piracy and the Malacca dilemma in 2004. For this reason, China decided to build and renovate various ports to secure its sea routes in the Indian Ocean (Khalid et al., 2017: 28-29). In this regard, some believe that China is seeking to reduce its vulnerability in the Indian Ocean by establishing naval bases through which the PLAN will have access to logistical support facilities throughout the north of the Indian Ocean (South Asia region). This strategy of China has been called the "String of Pearls".

The term "String of Pearls" was first coined by the US Department of Defense (Energy Future in Asia report) in 2005 by Booz Allen. The "String of Pearls" theory suggests that Beijing, under the pretext of developing and building seaport infrastructure along the Indian Ocean coast, may have secret agreements with local governments to build dual-purpose ports (commercial and military), which would later provide a framework for establishing permanent naval bases for Beijing (Mahadevan, 2014: 2). It is sometimes claimed that China has negotiated with governments with secret rights to allow PLAN a permanent presence in these ports if necessary (Brewster, 2015: 4). It should be noted that since this is a term defined by Americans, there is no official document in this regard in the Chinese public media or in the institutions of the Chinese private think tank.

The ports of Gwadar, Kyaukpyu, Hambantota, Chittagong are among the ports that are considered by China within the framework of the String of Pearls strategy. Of these ports, however, the nature of Chinese investment in the port of Gwadar has raised concerns in the West, as the port has been defined as a key component of China's "String of Pearls" strategy. China reportedly requested and received "sovereign guarantees" for the use of Gwadar before participating in the Gwadar project in 2002. The reason for China's request was the fear that the United States would use regional air bases to launch attacks on Afghanistan (Daniels, 2013: 95). The importance of ports and the goals of Chinese investment in these ports will be studied in the following chapter.

In the event of a conflict, China is also believed to be able to threaten global shipping lines and challenge US dominance in the region by building a network of quasi-bases on the northern shores of the Indian Ocean (Tariq, 2016: 19-20).

Along with the United States, Indian experts believe that the "String of Pearls" is part of China's military strategy to isolate India's political, commercial and energy interests in the region (Tariq, 2016: 1-2). According to Indian experts, the "String of Pearls" is a strategic program that, through China's military and commercial activities, stretches from SLOCs on China's mainland to strategic ports in Africa (such as the port of Djibouti), as well as reflects China's national goals in the IOR. These SLOCs cover chokepoints including the Strait of Mandeb, the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Strait of Lombok. Accordingly, China will also control strategic naval centers in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Somalia (Khalid et al., 2017: 28).

In response to China's "String of Pearls" strategy, India has adopted 'Look East Policy'. Indian defense experts believe that by improving and strengthening its relations with neighboring countries, India can challenge China's "String of Pearls" and further isolate Beijing. New Delhi seeks to improve relations with China's southeastern neighbors such as South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Japan through Look East Policy. In addition, India is working to improve its relations with other countries such as Iran, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bengal, Myanmar, Vietnam, Australia, and Fiji. In this regard, India has developed its political-economic relations with these countries, and the Chabahar port project is one of the examples of India's efforts to strengthen its relations with countries in the region and to compete with China's expansionist programs. India has also strengthened cooperation with Japan and Australia to counter China's "String of Pearls" strategy (Khalid et al., 2017: 29-34), of which the FOIP Strategy is one example.

A comparison of China's three military strategies shows that ports play a central role in all three strategies in the Indian Ocean and South Asia. While no port in South Asia has been officially used by the Chinese military so far, pessimism suggests that China plans to use these ports for military purposes as well. These strategies, along with China's ambitious economic plans, complement each other and fill a strategic gap in China's long-term plans. For example, the White Papers characterize China's defense programs, the String of Pearls proposes solutions to reduce China's maritime vulnerabilities, and the Two Ocean strategy simultaneous with the BRI formally recognize China as a power, which could challenge the US, both military and economically.

3.2.2. China's Geoeconomic Strategy in South Asia

Although the role of the BRI in intensifying US-Chinese rivalry was studied in the first chapter, this section specifically addresses the MSR program, known as the road portion of the BRI. By studying the MSR, it is tried to examine China's geoeconomic projects in South Asia, which include investing in strategic ports in the region.

3.2.2.1. 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road was first introduced in October 2013 by the current President of China Xi Jinping in the Indonesian parliament. In his speech, the Chinese president proposed the creation of a "*close-knit China-ASEAN community*" and provided guidance on the construction of the "*21st Century Maritime Silk Road*" and the promotion of maritime cooperation. Xi also proposed the creation of the AIIB to finance infrastructure construction, promote regional ties and economic integration. The NDRC of China, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, subsequently issued an Action Plan for the BRI, following approval by the State Council on March 28, 2015 (Suri, 2017: 59).

The MSR is officially attended by 11 countries bordering the Indian Ocean, including Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan, Singapore, and Sri Lanka (Scott, 2017). And according to MSR Outlook released in June 2017 by the NDRC and SOA, the project promises green development, ocean-based prosperity, and maritime security, innovative growth, and shared governance (Nouwens, 2019: 5).

China has described three official "blue economic passages" within the MSR: (1) China–Indian Ocean–Africa–Mediterranean Sea Blue Economic Passage, which includes the South China Sea, CPEC,

CICPEC, and BCIM; (2) China–Oceania–South Pacific passage; and (3) Europe–Arctic Ocean passage, which will link China to Europe through the Arctic, also known as the Polar or Ice Silk Route (Nouwens, 2019: 9).

MSR is an ambitious geoeconomic project in which China intends to invest in transport, construction, energy, trade, tourism, information technology, biotechnology, and alternative energy sources. In addition, the project includes the construction of large industrial parks and SEZ, as well as manufacturing enterprises in the region (Blanchard & Flint, 2017: 227). MSR aims to expand economic ties and accelerate economic development in the region. According to BRI, China plans to build an integrated maritime transport network that will connect the region's main ports. It also connects pivotal chokepoints on the Indian Ocean coast. Beijing's presence in strategic ports could expand China's power and increase China's commercial traffic. In other words, the MSR project complements the "String of Pearls" strategy, which is China's strategy to establish bases and facilities across the Indian Ocean (a chain of ports from Sittwe, Chittagong, Hambantota, and Gwadar) (Scott, 2017).

Under the MSRI, China plans to create a unified regional market and industrial value chains. Thus, Beijing decides to use MSR projects to facilitate the withdrawal of its huge foreign exchange reserves (Blanchard & Flint, 2017: 229). MSR paves the way for the expansion and consolidation of China's economic influence. Also, since this project is a complex of land and sea infrastructure networks, it will provide the basis for expanding China's military presence overseas (Sun & Payette, 2017: 15). In this regard, while the economic aspects of the MSR program have received more attention, less attention has been paid to the naval-military aspects of the project. However, Liu Cegui, the former Director of the State Oceanic Administration, called maritime safety a key factor in sustaining MSR's development and said ports along the BRI to act as safe shipping lanes and act as maritime sea posts (Suri, 2017: 62). In other words, the MSR may not have a specific naval component, but when there is an increase in PLAN activity during the project, it seems that there is a possible strategic goal that needs to be achieved.

As investments are made and new facilities are constructed, the MSR became a reflection of geoeconomic practices. The MSR is also portrayed as a form of economic development that will benefit all countries involved in a variety of ways, particularly by the Chinese government. An alternative narrative is a zero-sum strategy. The ability of one of these representations to gain widespread acceptance, or "common sense," will be critical in determining whether the MSR's investment, trade, and other practices can be completed. As a result, geopolitical practices and representations are critical components of a project like the MSR (Blanchard & Flint, 2017: 232). In this sense, the MSR is a geoeconomic project aimed at creating built landscapes that facilitate trade and investment flows. As a

result, it is both the product and the stage for a wide range of geopolitical actors. If we view the world through the narrow lens of social science disciplines, some of these actors, such as MNCs, can be classified as "economic," while others, such as states, can be classified as "political" (Blanchard & Flint, 2017: 233).

China has pursued an active economic and diplomatic policy in the IOR as part of MSR. Apart from its long-standing ties with Islamabad, China's involvement and influence in South Asia have been limited in comparison to India's. China, on the other hand, has established a significant economic presence in the region over the last decade, forging strong ties with countries such as Bangladesh, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka through trade, diplomacy, aid, and investment.

Studies show that MSR's most strategic projects, including the construction and development of ports, economic corridors, and pipelines, are located in South Asian countries. Therefore, the importance of South Asia in the MSR initiative is undeniable, and this region is one of the areas of interest in China's economic, political and military policies.

The MSR can be seen as a response to the US Pivot to Asia, which was presented as a US strategy to contain China's growing power in Asia (Wang 2016: 461, cited in Demir, 2018: 53). The US Pivot to Asia strategy will be analyzed in detail in the following sections. But MSR has enhanced China's ability to compete with the United States and its allies in the region and has boosted Beijing's ability to challenge Washington.

3.2.2.1.1. Ports and Corridors Investments

MSR is cited as a complement to the String of Pearls strategy (Brewster, 2015: 5). As mentioned in the previous sections, the String of Pearls strategy is designed for military purposes and to expand China's sphere of influence, and ports are of particular importance in this strategy. The String of Pearls and MSR strategies are military-economic strategies designed for China's long-term goals and future leadership role.

The ports Beijing has invested in have probably been selected for economic, strategic and geopolitical reasons. The choice of these ports can also have political and economic implications. From a political point of view, port projects in the South Asia region are being implemented at strategic locations along vital energy import routes. These ports have the potential to contribute to the maneuverability of Chinese ships (both commercial and military). From an economic point of view, the construction of the

ports also has a significant impact on the domestic economic development of China. Most of the port development programs are designed to help China's domestic economy by increasing transport capacity, creating free trade zones and industrial parks that foster innovation and industry (Nouwens, 2019: 6–7).

It should be noted that China has developed its seaports before investing in foreign ports. Chinese ports currently account for a significant share of global shipping. In 2014, ten ports in China were ranked among the 20 largest container ports in the world, making Shanghai the largest exporter of containerized cargo in the world. This superiority paved the way for closer maritime relations with other countries on the MSR routes and closer cooperation in the field of transport with Asian (and even European) countries (Yu, 2017: 357).

The construction of pipelines connecting the Indian Ocean with the southern and western regions of China is one of the strategies that will create routes bypassing the Strait of Malacca. China is operating the Myanmar-China oil and natural gas pipeline, and a pipeline is being planned along the CPEC (Suri, 2017: 81).

China (originally Chinese companies) has invested in many ports strategically located along the MSR and has exclusive management rights. The development and construction of these ports will allow China (1) to control the transportation of goods in the region; (2) diversify the supply of energy and raw materials; and (3) maintain their national and economic security (Yu, 2017: 360). Investments in China's ports are carried out by SOEs such as the CHEC, which not only provide the money needed for such investments, but also oversee the construction and subsequent operations of the ports (Suri, 2017: 71). Because the external maritime development of China is determined by the acquisition of existing ports, the development of new ports, and the control of port operations in these places. It is reported that in exchange for China's investment, MSR countries have also pledged to negotiate an agreement on project assistance to remove barriers to trade, create an enabling environment for China's infrastructure and investment to conclude bilateral investment agreements with Beijing. These countries have also liberalized market segments for foreign investment and entered into agreements to increase the volume of cargo and passenger flights and to create or strengthen financial institutions (Blanchard & Flint, 2017: 227).

As shown in Table 4, China has invested in a total of 25 seaports under the BRI, six of which are located on the northern shores of the Indian Ocean. With the exception of Melaka Gateway/Kuantan (Malaysia), the other four ports are located in South Asia: Gwadar (Pakistan), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), Kyaukpyu (Myanmar), and Chittagong (Bangladesh). The strategic, geopolitical and geoeconomic

importance of the port of Gwadar is intensively studied in the third chapter. Here this thesis briefly studies the importance of the other three ports.

Table 4: China's Seaport Investments and its Participation in Seaport Constructions Abroad

Number	Year of Investment	Sub-regions	Chinese Companies	Ports Investments	Host state
1	2010	Asia-Pacific	Donglin Economic and Trade Co. Ltd.	Port Rajin (10 years' Lease)	North Korea
2	2016	Asia-Pacific	Power China Limited	Melaka Gateway	Malaysia
3	2013	Asia-Pacific	China Landbridge Group	Port Darwin	Australia
4	2014	Bay of Bengal	China Harbor Engineering Company Ltd.	Kyaukpyu	Myanmar
5	2008	Bay of Bengal	China Merchants Port Holdings Co. Ltd.	Hambantota	Sri Lanka
6	2014	Bay of Bengal	China Harbor Engineering Company Ltd.	Port Colombo	Sri Lanka
7	2015	Bay of Bengal	China Communications Construction Company Ltd.	Chittagong	Bangladesh
8	2003	Southwest Asia	China Overseas Port Holding	Gwadar	Pakistan
9	2007	Southwest Asia	China Harbor Engineering Company Ltd.	Jeddah Port	Saudi Arabia
10	2016	Southwest Asia	COSCO Shipping Ports	Khalifa Port	Abu Dhabi, the UAE
11	2016	Southwest Asia	China-Arab Wanfang Co. Ltd. (Ningxia)	Industrial Zone of Doqm	Oman
12	2013	Eastern Africa	China Road & Bridge Corporation	Berth 19, Mombasa Port	Kenya
13	2013	Eastern Africa	China Merchants Port Holdings Co. Ltd.	Bagamoyo	Tanzania
14	2014	Eastern Africa	China Merchants Port Holdings Co. Ltd.	Port Djibouti	Djibouti
15	1990s	Eastern Africa	China Harbor Engineering Company Ltd.	Port Sudan	Sudan
16	2014	The Mediterranean	China Merchants Port Holdings Co. Ltd.	Ashdod	Israel
17	2015	The Mediterranean	Shanghai International Port Group	Port Haifa	Israel
18	2007	The Mediterranean	China Shipping Port Development Co. Ltd (merged by COSCO in March 2016)	Port Damietta	Egypt
19	2012	The Mediterranean	China COSCO Shipping Group	Port Suez	Egypt
20	2016	The Mediterranean	China Merchants Port Holdings Co. Ltd., China COSCO Shipping Group, and CIC Overseas Direct Investment Limited Liability Company	Kumport	Turkey
21	2008	The Mediterranean	China COSCO Shipping Group	Piraeus	Greece
22	2015	The Maghreb	China Merchants Port Holdings Co.	Tangier and	Morocco

			Ltd.	Casablanca	
23	2016	The Maghreb	China Construction Algeria Co. Ltd. and China Harbor Engineering Company Ltd.	The New Central Port	Algeria
24	2014	Atlantic	China Landbridge Group	Port Friendship	Mauritania
25	2016	Atlantic	China Landbridge Group	Port Cabinda	Angola

Source: (Sun & Zoubir, 2017: 41-42)

Hambantota (Sri Lanka): The Hambantota Port project, as the largest port in South Asia, was launched in 2008 by the CHEC in collaboration with Sinohydro to build a port with two cargo terminals, a refurbishment yard, and a tank farm and bunkering system (Suri, 2017: 75-76). The port of Hambantota economically and militarily has a strategic position and overlooks the busiest transportation lines in the IOR. China's dominance of the port could reduce its security vulnerabilities in the Indian Ocean. However, the Hambantota port project has not been a very satisfying experience for Sri Lankans, as the country owed \$ 8 billion to the Chinese during the project. Instead, the Sri Lankan government approved a 99-year lease of the port of Hambantota to China Merchants Ports Holdings Ltd in 2016 (Suri, 2017: 75-76).

Kyaukpyu (Myanmar): China has invested heavily in the port of Kyaukpyu in Rakhine State in the Bay of Bengal. Kyaukpyu Port includes the construction of 10 berths at the Mada Island Terminal and the Yanbei Island Terminal, which will be completed in four phases over a 20-year period. Construction of the port began in 2015 and includes the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone, as well as the construction of oil and gas pipelines through which oil unloaded from tankers on Madai Island is transported overland to China. The China-Myanmar Oil and Gas Pipeline projects are a joint project of Beijing and Nay Pyi Taw, which includes a crude oil pipeline and a gas pipeline. Construction of the China-Myanmar crude oil pipeline began in June 2010 and was completed in May 2014. The project was jointly built by the CNPC and the MOGE with shares of 50.9% and 49.1%, respectively. The 771-kilometer pipeline with a capacity of 22 million tonnes per year begins near Kyaukpyu and ends in the border town of Ruili, Yunnan Province, China (Suri, 2017: 81-82). The 2,806-kilometer China-Myanmar natural gas pipeline starts at Kyaukpyu and ends at Kunming, China. The project was completed in 2013 and became fully operational (Suri, 2017: 73-7; Tariq, 2016: 21-22). Due to a reduction in the need for the Strait of Malacca, these pipelines are very much in line with China's needs. In other words, the strategic importance of the Kyaukpyu port and pipelines for China is to allow it to bypass the Strait of Malacca and reduce China's energy security vulnerability.

As part of the Chinese investment in Kyaukpyu Port, CHEC, CMH, TEDA Investment Holding, and Yunnan Construction Engineering Group are Chinese companies that operate in the port under CITIC consortiums.

Chittagong (Bangladesh): China has also invested in modernizing the port of Chittagong in the Bay of Bengal. The port will be connected to Yunnan Province in southwest China via rail and road networks. Because the port can be used through India using the BCIM corridor, in June 2014 China and Bangladesh signed a MoU to allow Indian cargo ships to use the port as well. The use and benefits of this port for China are not clear. Because Chinese plans to build a corridor from China to Bangladesh via India are still on the horizon, and Beijing and New Delhi have not officially reached an agreement (Suri, 2017: 74-75; Tariq, 2016: 23).

Jask (Iran): China intends to invest in the Iranian port of Jask as part of a 25-year plan of cooperation between Beijing and Tehran, signed at the end of March 2021. Plan's central pillar is China's \$ 400 billion investment in Iran, which is to be implemented in two separate parts in the form of \$ 280 billion and \$ 120 billion. The first part of this investment is to be spent on the development of Iran's oil, gas, and petrochemical sector, and the second part is to be used to upgrade Iran's transportation and production infrastructure (Xiyue, 2020). The Iran-China 25-Year Strategic document includes cooperation in the field of (1) defense, military, and security cooperation, (2) long-term energy security, (3) financial, banking and insurance cooperation, (4) as well as China's involvement in the development of Iran's maritime and port infrastructure, which has close links to Chinese BRI. In this regard, Chinese companies will involve in the development of Jask port and will participate in the construction of refineries, petrochemical, steel and aluminum industries and tourist cities along the coasts of Makran – Oman Sea.

These Chinese investments are part of Beijing's long-term strategies in South Asia and the Middle East. China is working to make the port of Jask an important commercial and military port in the face of US and Indian threats. Since the port of Jask has military and commercial advantages, then if Chinese investments were implemented in the port, it would solve Beijing's "Strait of Hormuz Dilemma". It can be also said China seeks to compete with India and the United States by investing in the port of Jask.

The ports in which China has invested, with the exception of the port of Hambantota, are connected to the mainland via land corridors. In light of this, it's understandable that the Chinese government's March 2015 document, titled "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (Vision Document)," stated: "China will fully leverage the comparative advantages of its various regions to advance the BRI, adopt a proactive strategy of further opening-up,

strengthen interaction and cooperation among the eastern, western, and central regions, and improve the openness of the Chinese economy comprehensively” (NDRC, 2015). The CPEC and the BCIM corridors are both closely related to the BRI, according to the Vision Document, and thus require closer cooperation and progress (NDRC, 2015). The BCIM project, which would involve building a road and manufacturing corridor from Kunming to Calcutta via Myanmar, India's northeast states, and Bangladesh at a cost of \$20 billion, is China's other major Indian Ocean corridor project (Brewster, 2015: 6).

The trans-Myanmar and trans-Pakistan projects are part of Beijing's 'bridgehead strategy,' which aims to turn the provinces of Yunnan and Xinjiang into economic gateways to the Indian Ocean. It is planned to build a series of overland routes to the Indian Ocean, with Yunnan serving as a "base" for export processing to South Asia and Southeast Asia. The western Chinese province of Xinjiang will serve as a crossroads for connections to Central Asia and Pakistan. If completed, the projects will have significant economic and strategic implications for China's role in the region (Brewster, 2015: 6).

The development and construction of ports, as well as economic corridors within the framework of the long-term BRI strategy, will increase the influence and role of global leadership.

Critics of MSR often argue that while these investments are driven by economic factors, they are primarily driven by strategic objectives. In this regard, there are concerns that China may use MSR-related ports to support China's growing security interests, such as building military bases. These concerns are mostly focused on several port projects, including the Gwadar projects in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and Kyaukpyu in Myanmar (Funaiole and et., 2018: 21). Still, some argue that there is a link between Chinese port companies and its navy. A Clingendael Institute report (2014) reveals that COSCO is the main provider of Chinese naval logistics support to commercial ports in the IOR. Another example of this is the dual use of Chinese-built ports in Colombo, Sri Lanka. In 2014, a Chinese submarine did not dock at the ports of the Sri Lankan Port Authority with a mission to maintain military ships, but instead went to CSCT, thus violating the port protocol (Nouwens, 2019: 27-28).

In addition, the choice of ports adjacent to major transport arteries reflects China's desire to protect the country's long-term interests as a developing country in this direction. These projects will allow China to have a very strong relationship with these countries (Suri, 2017: 82-83). But these projects have also increased their debt to China. Because all the countries chosen by the Chinese are underdeveloped or developing countries that have gone through decades of political turmoil and are in dire need of foreign investment to ensure their economic and infrastructural development (Suri, 2017: 82-83).

3.2.2.1.2. MSR Challenges

China faces other major challenges related to investment in ports in South Asia. The problems of Chinese investment in ports in Sri Lanka are one of the most prominent examples of the country's port investment challenges. In Sri Lanka, the country has faced street protests, especially over the 99-year lease of the Hambantota Port and the transfer of 80% of the port to China's CMG. As a result of protests, the deal was modified to include new conditions in which two new joint ventures were created between Sri Lanka and China to manage port operations and security.

In addition to the port of Hambantota, China has also faced challenges in investing in Myanmar's Kyaukpyu port. China, for example, was supposed to own 85% of shares in Kyaukpyu, but due to local concerns about China's economic influence in the country, the Chinese government was forced to agree to a 70% stake in the port. As a result, the initial cost of the project for the first phase of the two deep-water piers has been reduced from about \$ 7.3 billion to \$ 1.3 billion. In addition, the government of Myanmar has agreed to a request from CITIC Group for 30% of the cost (15% initially preferred), half of which is provided by local Myanmar companies. Chinese investment in Pakistan also faces challenges. For example, the \$ 14 billion Diamer-Bhasha-Dam project, one of CPEC's major projects, has been canceled. The reason is in the very harsh financing conditions and opposition to the interests of Pakistan (Nouwens, 2019: 21-22).

These are examples that have been experienced and happened, and such a reaction to Chinese capital may intensify in the future. The BRI, in addition to economic and development benefits for host countries, also creates problems and challenges for them. For example, this mega-project could pose a Chinese-nature threat as well as lead to national sovereignty for governments. In addition, projects in which China has invested face cross-border problems. For example, the CPEC project passes through the region in Kashmir, which is in dispute between India and Pakistan. Countries under the BRI project are also facing a debt crisis (from China) that could trap them (Demir, 2018: 54-55). An example is the port of Hambantota, Sri Lanka.

However, apart from the major challenges facing BRI in general and MSR in particular, China has shown resilience to its investment challenges in South Asian ports. Even in cases, it is satisfied to review contracts that have led to local sensitivities. In other words, China does not tolerate popular resistance and will review its contracts if it finds itself in a tight spot. An example of this is the review of the Hambantota port agreement and the acceptance of a reduction in its stake in Myanmar's Kyaukpyu port.

3.3. US's South Asia Policies

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, this section will examine the US Pivot to Asia, TPP, FOIP, 2017 NSS strategies as its general policies towards Asian countries during the presidencies of Obama and Trump. It is noteworthy that US policies towards South Asia have been reviewed in the context of US general policies towards the Indian Ocean, as well as US strategies in Southeast Asia.

The Indian Ocean is one of the seas that is of strategic importance to the security and military strategy of the United States, as well as to its foreign trade. The strategic importance of this ocean can be attributed to the presence of US military bases in the IOR. In recognition of the growing connectivity between the two oceans, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, the US military renamed its Pacific Command as “Indo-Pacific Command” in 2018. The Pentagon published an Indo-Pacific policy a year later, describing the trans-oceanic frontier as the single most important area for America's future (Vertin, 2020: 4).

The US Indian Ocean strategy is based on three necessities: a) ensuring securing the Indian Ocean for international trade; (b) conflict prevention over strategic ocean chokepoints (such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca); and (c) monitoring Sino-Indian competition in the Indian Ocean. In this regard, the US Department of Defense's Strategic Choices and Management Review, published in July 2013, highlighted the need for the United States to evolve its Indian Ocean policy by forging alliances with regional allies such as Australia, Japan, and India (Bhattacharjee, 2014: 9).

In the past two decades, with the rise of China and its military and economic strategy in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the United States has become concerned about the global maritime order under its leadership on the high seas, especially in the Indian Ocean. The United States has full control over the seas as part of the RMSI and the PSI and can occasionally seize ships and cargo in the oceans under various pretexts to control. The dominance that is challenged by China's growing power and could pose a major obstacle to US maritime hegemony in the region in the future.

Since China's rise as a military and economic power and at the same time a challenging power, the United States has presented various strategies to counter China's growing power. With characteristics of security, diplomacy, and economics, these strategies demonstrate US strategies for China in South and Southeast Asia.

3.3.1. US Pivot to Asia Strategy

As mentioned in Chapter I, the 2008 global financial crisis marked a turning point in the geopolitical and geoeconomic rivalry between the United States and China. This crisis is seen not only as a starting point for the fall of US hegemony, but also as an excellent opportunity for China to become a world power. The Obama administration has unveiled a Pivot Asia strategy (also called “rebalancing with Asia”) to counter the decline of US hegemonic influence and respond to the rise of China (Lee et al., 2018: 425). In fact, as part of the Pivot to Asia the United States has shifted its focus from the Euro-Atlantic region to South and Southeast Asia (Asia-Pacific). In this regard, the United States has improved and strengthened bilateral and multilateral relations with regional actors, especially its regional allies (Demir, 2018: 55; Schmidt, 2014: 217).

The Pivot to Asia strategy had four main objectives: (1) to prevent the rise of regional hegemonic power (i.e. China); (2) prevent the polarization of the region; (3) prevention of political and economic crises; and (4) expanding relations with the countries of the region to jointly address the growing range of non-traditional transnational security challenges (Shambaugh, 2013: 16). Since this strategy has unveiled, competition between China and the United States has become much more intense. Many functional components were included in the pivot (Shambaugh, 2018).

In the "Pivot to Asia" strategy, South Asia was one of the most important and strategic regions, the main reason is India's outstanding role in this strategy. In the context of this strategy, building comprehensive and deep relations with India became an important priority for the United States. Obama described the relationship between Washington and New Delhi as a "*partnership of the 21st century.*" In this regard, the two countries expanded their interactions in the form of bilateral, regional, and global interactions (Shambaugh, 2013: 14-15). "Pivot to Asia" allowed New Delhi to trade with Washington on a wide range of issues, including military and civilian nuclear technology. The strategy also paved the way for cooperation between New Delhi and Washington to maintain and strengthen global norms such as freedom of navigation, democracy, and human rights in the Asia-Pacific region (Schmidt, 2014: 206).

In reaction to the "pivot to Asia" strategy, China has interpreted it as the strategy of creating a containment ring around China. China is concerned about other US policies, such as the RMSI and the PSI. Under the RMSI, the United States has called on ASEAN countries to allow US Marines to patrol the region's waters against piracy and terrorism. PSI also allows US troops to attack suspected foreign ships to prevent weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) from being transported into open waters. Some

Chinese analysts are also worried about a scenario in which Washington could seize China's energy supplies in the Strait of Malacca, dominating the Indian Ocean (Suri, 2017: 35).

China is also deeply concerned about the expansion of India's influence in the Indian Ocean, calling it contrary to its interests in the IOR. In recent years, India has expanded its naval presence in Southeast Asia as well as toured the Pacific region (Suri, 2017: 36). For example, in November 2017, India and Singapore signed a maritime agreement aimed at strengthening the strategic maritime relationship between India and Singapore to counter China's maritime expansion and enhance maritime security. According to the agreement, Indian warships are allowed access to the ports of Singapore near the Strait of Malacca. The deal is part of India's naval activities, which has raised serious concerns in China over the expansion of Indian naval activities in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia (Rahim & Ali, 2018: 91-92).

3.3.2. Trans-Pacific Partnership

Simultaneously with the introduction of the BRI by the Chinese government, the United States promoted an advanced version of a regional free trade agreement in Asia known as the TPP, which was signed in February 2016 by 12 members (Lee et al., 2018: 425-426). The TPP was a trade agreement comprising 40% of the world's GDP. The main goal of the TPP was to create a geopolitical discourse framework for containment and confrontation with China in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly against the Chinese MSR initiative.

TPP was to create common rules on tariffs, labor standards, and the environment, which were to counterbalance China's economic strength. TPP could turn China from a rule-maker to a rule-taker. The European Union and the United States negotiated to join the TPP at the end of the Obama administration. If the US re-joins the TPP and the European Union joins it, about 70% of world GDP will be together versus 20% of China (Allison, 2020: 38). The TPP was also planned by the Obama administration, primarily to promote economic cooperation with parented Asian states, as well as to find ways to gain an economic advantage over rival states (Mearsheimer, 2018).

The agreement met with strong opposition within the United States and became a major issue during the 2016 US election campaign. In response to the objections, Obama wrote in a Washington Post article entitled "*The TPP would let America, not China, lead the way on global trade*", warning of China's progress in its version of a regional economic agreement (RCEP), highlighted the importance of the TPP as a geoeconomic tool for strengthening US-oriented legal and trade regimes against China. Regarding

the geopolitical value of the agreement, Obama said that the TPP would strengthen US hegemony in Asia (Lee et al., 2018: 428). So, it can be said that the Obama administration initially presented this agreement as part of a strategy to counter China's ambitious plans, RCEP and BRI.

In addition to TPP's geoeconomic importance, the agreement had defense implications; then-US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter said in 2015 that "from the point of view of our rebalancing in the broadest sense, the passing of TPP is as important to me as another aircraft carrier" (cited in Lee et al., 2018: 42). Another goal of the agreement was to expand US military territory through the establishment of new bases, conducting joint exercises and developing new security relations with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region (including Australia, Northeast, and Southeast Asia). In this regard, the return of naval bases in the Pacific Gulf of the Philippines to the United States and the creation of a naval base in Darwin, Australia, as well as increased militarization in Okinawa, Japan, Singapore, and Guam (Lee et al., 2018: 429). Thus, this strategy can be called response or reaction to China's "String of Pearls" strategy, according to which Beijing seeks to build a network of port-based military bases in the Indian Ocean region (especially in South Asia).

Despite all the efforts of the Obama administration to highlight the geopolitical and geoeconomic importance of the TPP, the Trump administration withdrew from the agreement shortly after Donald Trump was elected President of the United States in 2017. Trump's withdrawal from the TPP shocked all Asian countries. The TPP was Obama's economic policy aimed at closer ties with the Asia-Pacific region but with the exit of Trump, the wave of mistrust toward the United States has intensified (Shambaugh, 2018: 108). Mahbubani (2020: 51) believes that by pulling out of the TPP, Trump gave China a great geopolitical gift.

The Trump administration has also continued to abandon Obama's "Pivot to Asia" strategy. Trump made his administration's primary goal of prioritizing bilateral trade agreements. In other words, the Trump administration favored bilateral agreements over multilateral ones. In short, under the TPP as an economic organization, Obama sought to curb China's expansionist plans, but Donald Trump nullified Obama's plan by leaving the agreement.

It should be noted that, even though the United States made the mistake of withdrawing from the TPP, the other 11 members continued to incorporate it under a new name, the CPTPP (Mahbubani, 2020: 212-213). The continuation of TPP's activities under the CPTPP showed that it is possible to interact with or without the United States in the framework of comprehensive agreements.

3.3.3. Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, known as Quad, was first proposed by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007 with a proposal to expand cooperation between New Delhi and Tokyo against a common rival, China. Abe called for increased cooperation between the two countries, saying that the alliance between Japan and India would create a wider, open, and transparent Asia which allows people, goods, capital, and knowledge to move freely (Reeves & Wallis, 2020).

The US interest in Indian and the Pacific Oceans arose long before the launch of the FOIP strategy under Obama as part of the “Pivot to Asia” strategy (Demir, 2018: 55). But since Donald Trump came to power in 2017, Washington has adopted several "principled" realistic approaches to relations with China, one of which is the introduction of the FOIP strategy. In November 2017, Donald Trump presented the FOIP strategy at the APEC Summit in Vietnam. The strategy is seen as a response to China's increasingly aggressive policies in the region. This strategy replaced Obama's “Pivot to Asia” strategy. The only difference was that Obama's strategy was more focused on working with China, while Trump's strategy, on the contrary, prioritized retaliatory actions. However, the similarity between Trump’s and Obama’s strategies is acknowledging India's role in building a strong coalition to counter China's growing influence (Hong, 2018: 32-33).

The FOIP strategy has four specific features: (a) This strategy recognizes China's growing influence and potential for undermining the principles of the regional liberal order. In this regard, the FOIP recognizes that more economic, political, and even military pressure should be exerted on Beijing if necessary; (b) the FOIP is a favorable approach to responding to challenges such as BRI. In this regard, since freedom of navigation and respect for international law in the Asia-Pacific region are the most important conditions for this strategy, there is no doubt that it can challenge China's plans in the region; (c) the FOIP acknowledges India's role in regional stability and its potential balancing China's influence; (d) the FOIP, continuing Obama's "Pivot to Asia" strategy, the United States aims to strengthen ties with key Asian partners such as Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar (Hong, 2018: 36-37).

As part of this strategy, the United States, in cooperation with its regional allies, is also investing in a number of infrastructure projects in the region. In July 2018, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the United States would spend \$ 113 million under FOIP to invest in digital technology, infrastructure, and energy projects. Pompeo said the purpose of the investment was to counter China's BRI program (Allison, 2020: 30-34; Matsumura, 2019: 143). Before Trump, USACTI and EPIC were introduced to enhance economic integration and establish new regional linkages and expand trade and

transport corridors with Asian countries (Kliman and Grace, 2018; Scott, 2017). However, neither USACTI nor IPEC was able to achieve the desired result to partially replace BRI.

The FOIP strategy includes a strong coalition of like-minded regional democracies in Asia (coalitions from the US, Australia, India, and Japan). One of the goals of this coalition is to maintain an international order based on liberal global rules and values by ensuring free access to global maritime jobs.

Partner countries in this strategy have numerous concerns about China's growing power. These concerns have been the main reason for the unity of these countries in dealing with China. For example, India and China are competing for the same strategic space in the IOR. The increase in Chinese investment in infrastructure development (such as ports, airports, pipelines, etc.) in the region, as well as the expansion of its naval modernization, are raising India's concerns about China's growing economic and military influence in the ocean (Bhattacharjee, 2014: 5).

India also remains deeply concerned about China's MSR program. Following the introduction of the MSR initiative, the Indian scholar V.S. Shekhawat predicted that China is building a "string of military pearls" called "business activities" aimed at creating a containment ring around India (cited in SUN & Zoubir, 2017: 37). Indian politicians and strategists are concerned that China's Belt and Road Initiative will allow China to gain regional dominance over India in the Indian Ocean and on the continent of South Asia. India is concerned that China will use these infrastructure facilities to build a naval fleet for military purposes. The docking of a nuclear-powered Chinese submarine in Sri Lanka's Colombo International Container Terminal stunned India in 2014 (Yu, 2017).

New Delhi has always expressed its displeasure with the strengthening of ties between Islamabad and Beijing. As a result, New Delhi has recently increased its efforts to advance its "Look East Policy" and the quadrilateral strategic alliance between India, Japan, Australia, and the United States (Kavalski, 2019). In November 2017, India and Singapore signed a naval agreement with the goal of strengthening India-Singapore maritime strategic cooperative relations by allowing each other's bases to counterbalance China's maritime expansion.

India to challenge growing Chinese presence plans to counter Beijing with its own initiatives. Expanding ties with Central Asia is one of India's initiatives to confront China. In this regard, The New Delhi-Dushanbe axis exhibited yet another balancing behavior. Tajikistan is seen as India's gateway to Central Asia from a strategic standpoint (Kavalski, 2019). India's construction of an airbase in Tajikistan,

as well as diplomatic and military installations in Afghanistan, has heightened Pakistan's fears of strategic encirclement. Pakistan and Afghanistan share a large ethnic Pashtun population, and Pakistan sees a benefit in maintaining its own "strategic depth" with an Afghan government sympathetic to Pakistan's interests (Daniels, 2013).

In line with MSR's strategy, India has introduced "Mausam Cotton Route" projects aimed at reuniting and restoring sea routes, cultural and trade relations with countries around the world. None of the Indian projects are related to China (Scott, 2017). In response to China's Indian Ocean strategies, New Delhi has also expanded its participation in multilateral forums such as the IOR-ARC and the Indian Ocean Navy Symposium. It is also reported that the United States has been invited to join the IOR-ARC (Bhattacharjee, 2014: 8).

China-Japan relations, on the other hand, are becoming more competitive and confrontational. Japan and China have historical animosities. The Sino-Japanese War in 1945 and the Nanjing Massacre, as well as the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute in the East China Sea, are two main dispute issues between the two countries. So, in addition to India, Japan is also concerned about China's growing influence in the IOR. The reason is also clear; 90% of Japan's oil imports enter the country through the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, and Tokyo is known to see any undue Chinese influence in the region as a potential threat to its economic and energy security (Bhattacharjee, 2014: 5).

Under the FOIP Strategy, the US and Japan are aligned on defense issues, dealing with North Korea in terms of security threats, dealing with China on economic security, and cooperating with India (Chanlett-Avery, et al., 2017 pp. 19-21).

Japan also has not joined the AIIB or endorsed China's BRI. Through the ODA program, Japan has provided large sums of money to fund infrastructure projects aimed at countering China's BRI. It plans to invest \$ 230 billion in infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia (Smith, 2018: 20-23). Also, in May 2015, the Japanese government proposed the "Partnership for quality infrastructure investment for Asia's future" to compete with China in steering infrastructure projects in the region, pledging funding of \$110 billion. The bidding battle for the construction of the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway in Indonesia, which was eventually won by China, exemplifies the usual fierce competition between Tokyo and Beijing over infrastructure construction. Furthermore, Japan is the most important source of foreign investment for ASEAN countries, and China's outward investment in ASEAN is far less valuable than Japan's. China received 7.2% of global outward FDI, while the United States and Japan received 24% and 9.6%, respectively (Yu, 2017).

In addition, to counter China's geoeconomic projects, India and Japan have launched the AAGC, which does not include China (Scott, 2017). The AAGC was established in November 2016 based on four pillars: *Development and Cooperation Projects*, *Quality Infrastructure and Institutional Connectivity*, *Capacity and Skills Enhancement*, and *People-to-People Partnership* (ERIA, 2017). It focuses on health and pharmaceuticals, agriculture and processing, disaster management, and skill development projects. In terms of connectivity, it prioritizes high-quality infrastructure, which is consistent with Japan's infrastructure export policy, promoted since 2015 (Taniguchi, 2020).

Japan is said to be targeting the FOIP strategy with foreign economic assistance and cooperation. Japan has developed this strategy to develop infrastructure, build flexible health systems, and build the foundations of peace and stability through public-private partnerships between Japan and partner countries (Matsumura, 2019: 132).

Australia is also not indifferent to China's ambitious plans. The country participated in the "Quad" negotiation process between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States on November 12, 2017, and officially joined the informal coalition of Washington, New Delhi, and Tokyo against China (Scott, 2017). With nearly 35% of its exports going to China, Australia is especially (greatly) reliant on the Chinese market. All these resources come from Australia, which far outnumbers the next closest supplier to China (Suri, 2017: 25-26).

Two China documents, the 2013 MSR and the 2015 White Paper, have heightened concerns about Beijing's growing influence in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. These China's activities have accelerated the initiatives of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia to launch FOIP. In short, it can be claimed that the FOIP strategy was designed and presented in response to China's 2015 White Paper, as well as its ambitious plans under the MSR.

3.3.4. US 2017 National Security Strategy

While Obama pursued a policy of engagement with China with a liberal pragmatic approach, Trump adopted an aggressive approach based on calculations of power among governments. The foreign policy perspective of the Trump administration's "principled" realistic approach is clearly evident in the 2017 NSS and a summary of the 2018 NDS documents, as well as in its threats and actions against a trade war with China (and even with US allies).

In December 2017 and January 2018, the Donald Trump administration published two documents, the NSS and the NDS, to describe the main characteristics of the overall US security position towards the world. The NSS was established to provide a shared vision of the US strategic environment as well as key global security interests and goals. However, the purpose and focus of the NDS, which inspired by the NSS, was to (a) identify and prioritize the specific threats facing the United States; (b) define a national military strategy to counter these threats; and (c) provide a description of the specific objectives, concepts, and resources required to successfully implement this strategy have been interpreted (Swaine, 2018: 1).

These strategic documents identify strategic competition between governments as a major concern for the United States and define China as a "strategic competitor" and a "revisionist power" that is actively competing against the United States and its allies. Furthermore, these documents emphasize that "*China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region* (NDS, 2018: 1-2; White House, 2017: 25-27; Shambaugh, 2018). The 2017 NSS reflects the fact that "strategic competition" should be the US approach to dealing with China. However, "strategic competition" involves a lack of clarity in competing for what and "winning" for what (Campbell & Sullivan, 2019: 96). In this regard, Mahbubani (2020: 79; 83-85) claims that China has deceived the US by failing to follow through on its promise not to militarize the South China Sea. However, it should be remembered that, despite building the world's first warships, China has never been an expansionist power in history to counter another country. The Taiwan issue is exception.

Both the NSS and the NDS documents are widely circulated about China and the threats posed by the rise of China. In fact, China is listed on the 2017 NSS 23 times (almost double the number in the latest Obama administration report). In addition, both documents explicitly define Beijing as a full-blown threat to the United States and its allies, which seek to create a repressive prospect, rather than a liberal, US-led world order (Swaine, 2018: 1). In these two documents, contrary to previous US strategies, China is ignored as possible cooperation in various fields, including issues of global and regional security (and even others). Instead, both documents seek to pit the United States and other democracies against China in a *zero-sum* competition for dominance (Swaine, 2018: 1).

To resist threats from China and other countries, such as North Korea, and to keep Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific open, the United States is increasing the role of its long-term allies, such as Japan, Australia, and India, as a strategic and defensive partner, welcomed under the Quartet (White House, 2017: 45-47). In order to win the long-term strategic competition with China and maintain the balance of power, the FOIP strategy is the top priority of the United States. To this end, the Trump administration

has described its regional priority policy as creating a networked security framework that includes multilateral and bilateral security alliances and partnerships (Demir, 2018: 56). In other words, the 2017 NSS and the FOIP strategy complement the US plans to deal with China. These two documents represent a fundamental shift in the national security and defense priorities of the United States. Since September 9, 2001, the United States has focused on countering terrorism and other transnational threats, requiring China's cooperation. But these two US documents highlight great power rivalry and the growing threat from China (Swaine, 2018: 2).

According to authoritative sources, the 2017 NSS and 2018 NDS are more examples of a US "Cold War mentality" in pursuit of a "zero-sum game," echoing previous Chinese descriptions of negative US assessments of China and Asia security environment. Such viewpoints are labeled as "fundamentally incorrect." Further, in addressing the 2018 NDS, a Ministry of National Defense (MND) spokesperson implies that the MND's view of China as a military threat is an example of "sick mentality." "It makes no difference whether people speculate on, sabotage, or contain [China]," he adds. Everything is a waste of time." "I cannot help but wonder that as the world's top military power with a military budget exceeding the total of the other top seven, how could the US still allege that it is threatened by others," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson says naively (Swaine, 2018: 3).

CHAPTER IV

IMPLICATIONS OF THE US-CHINA RIVALRY ON THE STRATEGIC PORTS IN SOUTH ASIA: PORTS OF GWADAR AND CHABAHAR

Using the geoeconomic approach this chapter aims to examine the implications of the US-China rivalry on the strategic ports of Gwadar and Chabahar. It also examines possible implications for two host countries, Pakistan, and Iran, and for vulnerable neighboring countries Afghanistan and Central Asian states.

As discussed in Chapter Two, China, the world's second-largest economy, is investing in the infrastructure of several major ports in developing countries in South Asia. Investments that have heightened the geopolitical competition between the United States and China. In other words, while two economic giants used to compete over trade surpluses, exports, and imports, their core rivalry now revolves around the issues of uniqueness in the global economy and the conquest of emerging and developed markets. As discussed in Chapter One, there are several facets to the US-China rivalry, and rivalry over ports, as the geopolitical contest, is one of the most important areas where the rivalry is manifested.

The United States aims to obstruct China's access to the global market and to stifle its economic growth by denying China access to vital and strategic ports. Nonetheless, facing US opposition, China has been able to lease many strategic ports for the long term and convert them into economic hubs in various countries as part of the BRI initiative. One of these ports is the Gwadar port of Pakistan in South Asia. China is investing approximately \$ 46 billion in this port as part of the CPEC project, which is intended to be China's land route access to the Indian Ocean, the Middle East region, and European markets.

In contrast, the Iranian port of Chabahar, which is also located in the Indian Ocean in South Asia, is on the path of two major global transit corridors. The port, which is located along the north-south corridor, connects South Asia with Central Asia and Russia, as well as Europe with South Asia, without using the Suez Canal. The port of Chabahar and the port of Gwadar have become a center of strategic rivalry between India (a strategic partner of the US) and China as a result of India's investment in the port of Chabahar and the port's exemption from US sanctions.

As discussed in the second Chapter, the importance of the Indian Ocean in US strategies (e.g. FOIP, 2017 NSS, TPP, and Pivot to Asia), as well as the ocean's position in China's long-term

geopolitical projects (e.g. BRI, Strategies of Two Oceans, String of Pearls, and White Papers), has rendered the region unaffected by US-China competition. In this regard, China must use the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, and Taiwan's coast to transport energy to the country. Except for the Strait of Hormuz, the Americans have complete control over all these routes. This is why China wishes to move its reliance from the sea to the ground, which necessitates cooperation with neighboring countries such as Pakistan. In other words, the Pakistani port of Gwadar allows Beijing to bypass the Malacca Strait and the Taiwanese coast in order to gain access to the strategic waters of the Indian Ocean via land.

It is not unlikely that investment in ports like Gwadar would be distinct from China's long-term strategies. On the other hand, the United States, in partnership with India, Japan and Australia, has sought to counter China and its dominance in the region. These efforts have been undertaken through the Pivot to Asia and TPP strategies during Obama's presidency, and through the FOIP and 2017 NSS during Trump's presidency. As a result, there is no doubt that China's attempts to gain access to significant and strategic ports in the Indian Ocean would concern the US and its allies.

China's investment in several infrastructure projects in the region, including in Gwadar port of Pakistan, has transformed the US-China rivalry from a trade dispute to a geoeconomic rivalry. In other words, China's investments in the infrastructure of several major ports have heightened regional rivalries and tensions between the world's two economic giants, with significant implications for host and neighboring countries.

4.1. Geoeconomic Importance of Chabahar Port

Chabahar port is one of the most strategic ports in Iran, which has gained international importance with the signing of a tripartite agreement between Iran, India, and Afghanistan. Due to the strategic location of this port, in this section, it is attempted to study the geoeconomic significance of this port and its importance in the INSTC.

The development of the Port of Chabahar dates back to 1973. The port's construction first was suggested by Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1973. The effect of the 1979 Revolution and several other factors for the initiative was postponed owing to monetary obstacles. Iran had seen the strategic significance of the Chabahar Port mostly during 8 years long Iran-Iraq war owing to the Hormuz Strait's increasing reliance and possible vulnerability. Subsequently, just after the conflict, the importance of the Chabahar project rose high. That being said, the initiative could only have been partly worked out due to the scarcity of financial capital as well as too unpredictable political activities. For its placement independent from the

narrow channel, the central importance of the Chabahar Port beyond the Hormuz Strait provides excellent and quicker transport. As this is the only ocean water outlet for Iranian shipments to foreign markets, this waterway also holds a critical location for Iran.

The yearly output of the Chabahar Port as of 2016 was nearly 5 million tons, with a payload volume of 25,000 tons per tanker. The annual capacity of the port of Chabahar rose from 2.5 million tons to 8 million tons in a few years and is projected to exceed 86 million tons each year until the end of the year 2030 (Fars News Agency, 2016). That being said, international firms remain wary about future investment after the re-imposition of restrictive measures against Iran. The port tackled approximately 3 million tonnes of freight in 2019 and is expected to be expanded in the upcoming time.

In the meantime, Afghanistan, Iran, and India here have entered into an agreement granting Indian goods bound for Central Asia favorable protection and duty decreases, resulting in a short-term benefit that will help to support the long-term goal of reaching Europe (Daniels, 2013). Tehran, New Delhi, and Kabul managed to reach to a settlement on special privileges and tax incentives for products shipped via Chabahar Port.

Chabahar is a safety net for Iran that lets it push through American-led detachment; Chabahar offers links to Central Asia's inland zone, together with Afghanistan, South Asia, and the Middle East for India. Additionally, the port of Chabahar also provides India with entrance into strategic and crucial Afghanistan. The extension of the free trade areas to the Chabahar facilities to further incorporate them into the international economic structure is another measure taken by Iran (Aslan & Rashid: 12).

With the electoral win of Hassan Rouhani in Iran in 2012, which triggered a major decrease in friction with the US under President Barack Obama, India participated in \$500 billion investment talks to build Chabahar Port in 2012 (Harsh & Mehta, 2018: 661). In October 2014, India accepted the Inter-governmental MoU mechanism for establishing a joint partnership for the equipment of two fully built bays at the port of Chabahar. As per the scheme, for a term of ten years, an Indian joint venture corporation will rent two fully built berths, that could be extended by "mutual consent." Within this deal, Afghanistan and India will have connectivity to each other's markets via the Port of Chabahar and, in particular, Afghanistan that is a landlocked country will be linked to transboundary waters and foreign markets. India, where the port would enable Indian merchants to enter Central Asia along with West Asia and the Middle East from Afghanistan, is the most significant beneficiary of the venture. The Chabahar pathway to Afghanistan would enable products from India to Kabul to be directly accessible without having to travel across from Pakistan (Aslan & Rashid: 13).

There are disputes about both the service of the port in the Iranian national sense, and the relocation of the Port of Shahid Beheshti has been challenged. Some say the port has been passed over to the Indians by Iran. However, according to an arrangement between India and Iran, just the operator of the Chabahar Port will be taken over by the Indians (General Authority of Sistan & Balochestan, 2018). And the Indian contractor, India Ports Global Limited (IPGL), is scheduled to perform one phase of the four phases of the Shahid Beheshti Port. The Indians have also reported that the Chabahar Port activities have been taken over by the state-owned IPGL. During the Chabahar Trilateral Settlement meeting held there on December 24, 2018, the Indian government did take over the operational activities of a portion of Shahid Beheshti Port, Chabahar, in Iran, the Shipping Ministry announced there (Ministry of Shipping of India, 2019).

The geopolitics of the Port of Chabahar are also a tremendous chance to improve the incorporation of the region into the global economy. The port is globally on the path of the three major transport routes around the world: (1) The eastern-western pathway begins from China's Silk Road and transmits via the Caucasus, Western Asia and the Mediterranean, and the southern part of the route enters South Asia and the Persian Gulf via the port of Chabahar; (2) The north-south route moving across Iran from northern Europe stretches to Mumbai Port in the Indian Ocean and South and Southeast Asian states; and also (3) The South Asian Corridor initiates right from Southeast Asia and India, and stretches via Iran, Iraq and Turkey to the Mediterranean and European countries, one of the most essential dimensions of the Chabahar Port. This port has a strategic positioning and exposure to international waters (Asadi, Amini & Tajeri, 2018:1). In addition, Chabahar is also regarded as the entrance to the collaboration of countries, with the geographical advantages in the east of the Strait of Hormuz and the Oman Sea on the main sea routes to Africa, Asia, and Europe, and is also the shortest path to link Central Asian nations and Afghanistan to markets in the Gulf, East Africa, and throughout the world.

Chabahar also has a promising prospect of becoming one of the region's most important transport hubs. In this respect, the comparatively low political pressures, and the economic influence of the three countries participating in the initiative, Iran, Afghanistan, and India, have made the project more viable than ever before and will inevitably contribute to drastic improvements in the political relations of the countries in the region. Through Afghanistan and Central Asia, the complete project foresees connecting Mumbai (via Chabahar) to Moscow. Particularly in comparison to the Suez Canal, this connection will reduce cargo transport distances from the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf territories to Northern and Eastern Europe by two-thirds, increasing trade along the pathway and promoting increased financial cooperation between Europe and Asia (Daniels, 2013).

India and Iran signed 12 agreements in May 2016, including that of the Port of Chabahar Deal. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani have concluded an intergovernmental transit trade deal during the summit meeting of the mentioned treaties via the territories of Afghanistan and to facilitate India's link to Afghanistan and beyond via the Port of Chabahar. These ventures have prospects for India with exposure to four of Afghanistan's large cities, namely Herat, Kandahar, Kabul, and Mazar-e-Sharif (Aslan & Rashid: 14).

Multiple bilateral and trilateral deals were agreed upon throughout this meeting. All these deals have financial impacts of up to \$20 billion. The Chabahar Port is expected to be linked by railroad to the Afghan mining area, together with the Chabahar-Hajigak route, a bilateral trade deal arranged for Indian investment in the Chabahar Special Economic Zone; Indian mining firms were awarded \$11 billion in additional iron and steel mining ventures in the mining area of Hajigak. The wider International North-South Transport Route is expected to be part of the Chabahar-Zahedan-Hajigak railway. Such transport ventures will connect coasts on India's western coast to the port of Chabahar, covering a number of roads and railways connections between Chabahar and Afghanistan. India initiated constructing a \$1.6 billion Chabahar-Zahedan Railroad in July 2016; and the first freight supplies to Afghanistan were shipped from the Chabahar Port towards the end of 2017. India took the control of the port's operations in December 2018. Iran and India signed a mutual contract during the May 2016 Meeting, in which India agreed \$8 billion to invest in the Special Economic Zone of the Chabahar Port. New Delhi has vowed to rebuild one of the bays at the port of Shahid Beheshti under another mutual deal between Iran and India. The port, because it is 800 kilometers nearer to the border of Afghanistan than Pakistan's Karachi Port, is partially planned to provide an option for trading between Afghanistan and India. This arrangement forced the Indian government to spend \$500 million in the reconstruction of the Port of Chabahar to make it more usable with higher capacity (Aslan & Rashid, 2020: 14-15).

4.2. Geoeconomic Importance of Gwadar Port

Chinese investment in the port of Gwadar has increased its strategic importance. In this section, it is tried to study the geoeconomic significance of the port of Gwadar for Pakistan and China and its role in the CPEC project.

There are two operating deep-sea international ports in Pakistan: Karachi Port and Port Qasim. Since the expected demand has been increasing, the Pakistani government has investigated to have another port. Due to its position within the populous city of Karachi, which is the 12th most populous city in the world with 16.1 million inhabitants in 2020, the Karachi Port has considerable limitations. Besides,

Port Qasim has got some advancement limitations. Because of these reasons, the government of Pakistan has decided to set up a new deep-sea port and Gwadar Port was established in 2007 (Aslan & Rashid, 2020: 11). After several years of inspection by Pakistan authorities, among eight possible sites of Keti Bandar, Sonmiani, Hingol, Ormara, Khor Kalmat, Pasni, Gwadar, and Jiwani, Gwadar was selected as the most appropriate port along with the two other ports of Karachi and Bin Qasim Ports.

The Gwadar Port holds 50,000 deadweight tonnage bulk carriers' space at a maximum depth of 12.5 meters. It has got three multipurpose compartments each one which has a 200-meter length (CPEC Info, 2020).

The development of the port of Gwadar is taking place within the CPEC and is an integral part of China's BRI. The CPEC project is an economic gateway that connects the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) in the south.

In April 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced during a visit to Islamabad that "*Pakistan would be a bridgehead of the Belt and Road Initiative*" (People's Daily, 2015 cited in Sun & Zoubir, 2017: 45). During the visit, Pakistan and China signed 51 different agreements and memorandums on Chinese investments in Pakistan. The total value of these contracts is about \$ 46 billion, and they will enter into force in ten to fifteen years, starting from 2015 (Markey & West, 2016). CPEC projects managed by the Ministry of Planning, Reform and Development of Pakistan with the participation of China's NDRC. The project focuses on four main areas: Gwadar Port, transport infrastructure, energy, and industrial cooperation. CPEC is the largest, most ambitious, and most advanced part of China's BRI. It was hailed by Chinese politicians as the flagship of the BRI project (Safdar & Zabin, 2020) centered on the port of Gwadar. In addition, with the revitalization of the CPEC, which includes rail, road, and energy pipelines, the city-port of Gwadar in Pakistan's Baluchistan province and the Chinese city of Kashgar in Xinjiang province in western China are to be connected (Chaziza, 2016: 149). The project, which is being implemented at a time of China's growing geopolitical ambitions, is raising growing concerns about Pakistan's security and development (Markey & West, 2016).

The port of Gwadar, close to the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman, and the ability to connect by rail to countries such as Afghanistan and Central Asia, has the potential to be a key shipping point that could bring economic development and prosperity to Pakistan (Chaturvedy, 2017). The Strait of Hormuz is a strategic region through which about 16-17 million barrels of oil are transported daily. It is estimated that an average of 20-30 tankers enter the Persian Gulf daily, and during peak hours one tanker leaves the strait every six minutes. With such a location, Gwadar will become a geoeconomic hub in terms of trade,

which could turn Pakistan into an active trade and energy hub between the energy-rich countries of Central and Middle East (Chaturvedy, 2017). Construction and development of this port will continue to develop Pakistani province of Baluchistan, create millions of jobs, Pakistan's economic development and monetary benefits for Islamabad.

Besides Pakistan, due to the geostrategic and geoeconomic importance of Gwadar port, this port also has numerous advantages (economic, military and energy security) for China. The port of Gwadar, with a central position in the joint project of Pakistan and China – CPEC - and being located in the direction of China's BRI project, is supposed to be China's land route to the open waters of the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and European markets, which has a special place in China's economic diplomacy. In addition, recently, China has to use the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca and the coast of Taiwan to transfer about 60% of its energy needs from the Persian Gulf. On all these routes, except the Strait of Hormuz, the Americans have direct control. In this regard, the Pakistani port of Gwadar, together with the CPEC, allows Beijing to bypass the Strait of Malacca and the coast of Taiwan to connect with the strategic waters of the Indian Ocean in general and the sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf in particular.

In addition, the strategic location of Gwadar has other significant advantages for China. The port shortens traveling time and distance between China's trade route and South and West Asia; In addition, the port also facilitates China's access to global markets, particularly access to South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. This particular advantage is due to a reduction in sea distance from 10000 km to 2500 km (Khalid, 2009: 8). In other words, via the Gwadar route, China will have access to the Persian Gulf and the Middle East within 10 days instead of 45 days (Bashir et al., 2018, 58).

Besides foreign trade, the development of the port of Gwadar has other advantages for China's domestic economy. The Chinese government has adopted a “Go West” policy for the economic development of Xinjiang Province (a region where Uyghur Turks live). In this respect, the port of Gwadar is also crucial for the Chinese economy, especially for the economic development of the southwestern province of Xinjiang (Malik, 2012: 62). Thus, it can be said that the country's investment in the port of Gwadar will also play a valuable role in strengthening and growing China's domestic economy. However, the economic interests of the port of Gwadar for China appear to be limited. The Global Times wrote, in this regard, that the proposed Gwadar-Kashghar pipeline is also not viable due to its high cost and difficult geographic conditions (Chaturvedy, 2017).

From a military point of view, the presence of US military bases in the region (especially in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea) poses a serious threat to China's trade interests in the Persian Gulf and

the Indian Ocean. As discussed in Chapter Two, China, as part of the “String of Pearls Strategy”, is trying to establish a security balance in the Indian Ocean against the United States by using the port of Gwadar as a naval base. With this in mind, the military use of the port of Gwadar will allow China to monitor US naval activity in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, as well as the future of US-Indian naval cooperation in the Indian Ocean. It is reported that China has already set up electronic posts to track maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Sea at the port of Gwadar. In addition, since the United States completely controls the Strait of Malacca and the coast of Taiwan, China's military dominance in the port of Gwadar will challenge US presence in the Persian Gulf and its control over the Strait of Malacca (Khan, 2012: 81-82). In other words, the use of Gwadar for military purposes allows China to secure more than half of the 7.6 million barrels of crude oil that China imports daily in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, and to prevent the growing US threats in the region. With regard to the military use of the port of Gwadar, in early 2011, Pakistani Defense Minister Ahmad Mukhtar proposed that China establish a naval base in the port. In 2012, Pakistani former Prime Minister Ali Haidar Gilani made a similar request to China.

Port Gwadar has several extensive sub-structure projects, some of which are East Bay Expressway (\$140 million) connecting Gwadar to Karachi; launching of breakwaters (\$130 million); coal power plant (\$360 million); dredging project for berths (\$27 million); 300-bed hospital (\$100 million); plant for desalination (\$114 million); infrastructure for an SEZ (\$35 million); new international airport project (\$230 million); floating plant for liquefied natural gas; a training college called the Pak-China Technical and Vocational Institute and etc. (Abrar, 2015 cited in Sun & Zoubir, 2017: 45).

In addition, as part of the development of the port of Gwadar, a SEZ with an area of 9.23 square kilometers has been established at a cost of \$ 2 billion, which will significantly increase exports and imports to/from Pakistan (Tanoli, 2016: 4). The projects under development at Gwadar Port are funded by China's Export-Import Bank and the Silk Road Fund (Markey & West, 2016).

Port of Gwadar is administered by the Gwadar Port Authority; however operationally, it has been outsourced to a Chinese COPHC. Currently, the port of Gwadar has three conventional berths 200 meters in length. Under the CPEC project, COPHC will expand the port of Gwadar with the construction of nine new multi-purpose berths and it will also build cargo terminals (Aslan & Rashid, 2020:11).

In 2015, the Pakistani government announced that the port would be rebuilt and developed under the CPEC program at a cost of \$ 1.62 billion. In late 2015, according to media reports, the port was officially leased to COPHC for 43 years, until 2059 (Indian Express, 2015 cited in Sun & Zoubir,

2017:45). COPHC, CMH and COS jointly provided funding and technology to operate in Gwadar, the beginning point of the CPEC (Sun & Zoubir, 2017: 44).

Due to its geostrategic and geoeconomic position, the port of Gwadar will connect Central Asia and South Asia through the CPEC. In this way, Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will be connected to Gwadar in South Asia, crossing China, and connecting to the Gwadar-Khunjerab highway.

Gwadar Port as an economic project, has the potential to become a competitor to Dubai port and other projects in the future. The Asian Development Bank has named the port of Gwadar as an alternative to the global port of Dubai, UAE, because it is located outside the Strait of Hormuz and compared to the port of Dubai, larger "S" ships and larger tonnage ships and more oil tankers can easily anchor in this port (Khan, 2013: 91). With this in mind, it can be said that with the full activation of the port of Gwadar, which is supposed to become Pakistan's new economic hub in 2030 (Prasso, 2020), the trade of other ports will be affected and the countries of the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia will benefit more from this port than before (Hussain, 2016).

Surveys show that five years after China and Pakistan agreed to develop CPEC and the port of Gwadar, a quarter (32 projects) of 122 projects have been completed. But despite promises to turn Pakistan into a higher-value manufacturing hub, the vast majority of SEZs are empty and ICT projects are limited (Hillman, McCalpin & Brock, 2020).

Table 5: Region's major Ports in Comparative Perspective

Name of Ports	Country names	Depth of Sea Ports	Number of Berths	Annual TEU* capacity
Gwadar	Pakistan	17.1M–18.2M	120 (when operational, work in progress few ready to use)	30 million
Karachi	Pakistan	9.4M-10M	33	650 thousand
Jebel Ali	UAE	15.5M-16M	67	22.4 million
Khor Fakkan	UAE	16M		45 thousand
Bandar Abbas	Iran	9.4M-10M	24	8 million
Chabahar	Iran	11M (claimed but not confirm and not operational yet)	10	740 thousand
Salalah	Oman	10M	19	9 million
Damam	Saudi Arabia	9M	39	19 thousand
Doha	Qatar	11.2M-12M	29	6 million

* Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit
Source: (Bashir at al., 2018: 60)

4.3. Great Powers Stances on the Chabahar and Gwadar

The United States, China, and Russia, as major world powers, have significant influence in the region. And there is no doubt that these three countries have different positions in the development of infrastructure projects in the region, including the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar. Therefore, in this section, it is tried to examine the positions of these three powers on the development of the ports of Chabahar and Gwadar.

4.3.1. The US Position on the Chabahar and Gwadar Ports

The US perspective about development programs in South Asia is tied to the organization of the coalition. The loss to the US of almost 18 years of war in Afghanistan was more than \$2 trillion, and more than 2,400 American soldiers were killed (NY Times, 2019). Washington has turned towards a different approach. For Washington, the countries of Afghanistan and Central Asia should be politically and economically linked to the South Asia and should "broaden regional integration and connect economies and markets together." Secretary Clinton addressed the development of Afghanistan into a regional transport, commerce, and energy center connected to Central Asia throughout her visit to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in October 2011 (Nichol, 2014).

India has always sought to win US assurances with the return of US sanctions on Iran, so India has repeatedly repeated its stance on partnerships with Iran towards the US. "We clarified the Indian situation from our side, in specific the need to retain soil access to Afghanistan. We clarified the need for us to provide a connection to the port of Chabahar and a railway line to Afghanistan from there. In specific, this is in the sense of Pakistan refusing us access to the land," Nirmala Sitharaman the minister for Indian finance quoted (Roychoudhury, 2019).

After a series of talks with New Delhi, the US government agreed to exclude the Chabahar project from sanctions against Iran due to its financial value to Afghanistan. After the exemption declaration, John Bass, US former ambassador to Afghanistan, cautioned Afghan officials that sanctions concessions for trade via the Port of Chabahar would survive only if merchants are cautious not to breach anti-trade laws that include those on the list of authorities of the government banned (Salehai, 2018). The Trump administration suggested that this reality is well known to the US as it specifically mentioned the promotion of Afghanistan's trading potential. The new round of Iranian restrictions will not have hampered Afghanistan's economic rehabilitation (Kheel, 2018). In 2012, after a trilateral conference involving Iran, India, and Afghanistan, the spokesperson for the US State Department hoped that the

INSTC would “further embed Afghanistan in a positive, growing region along the lines of the Silk Road initiative that we’ve been supporting” (Daniels, 2013).

As Washington attempts to threaten Tehran, the Chabahar Port provides Iran with economic advantages, a conflicting fact for the Trump administration. With a notice that Washington will withdraw its assistance at any moment, the administration follows each gesture of support. Undoubtedly, the United States is not pleased with the China-Pakistan partnership, especially the CPEC, the core of which is Gwadar Port. It's why America and India are colluding in collaboration with each other to undermine the China-Pakistan joint project. CPEC (Ishfaq, 2019) and both countries are trying to obstruct the growth of the Port of Gwadar. It's why Chabahar is seen by the United States as less bad than the Pakistani Gwadar port.

3.3.2. China’s Position on the Chabahar and Gwadar Ports

Beijing needs to protect its energy requirements and export its goods seamlessly in order to preserve its sustained economic development. China depends heavily on Gulf oil, which supplies it with around 60% of its energy needs (Aslan and Rashid, 2020: 29).

To explain Beijing's strategy with its String of Pearls Strategy along with Chinese national security, certain crucial geographical positions, military sites, and the development of infrastructure are significant. Such areas comprise, among others, the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Straits of Mandeb, Malacca, Lombok, and Hormuz. Gwadar is also a significant part of the "String of Pearls" strategy of China, which envisages strategic airports and seaports along the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean (Daniels, 2013). Building huge port projects in the area is expected to help China to diversify its supply of raw materials and energy.

In addition, the introduction of the Belt and Road Strategy would reinvigorate China's stagnation in output potential through international commerce and foreign investment by China. This policy would also enable more time and energy for China to undertake industrial reform and modernization (Yu, 2017). China's "Go West" policy aims to expand its western regions within this framework and emphasizes on active economic collaboration with neighboring nations (Daniels, 2013). Many Asian countries are excited about attracting foreign investment, while Beijing wants trade ties with its neighbors. The immediate need among Asian countries for investment in infrastructure growth is one of China's reasons for creating the AIIB. In terms of mobility and other vital infrastructure, most Asian countries are very

weak. For starters, to develop deep-water ports and other infrastructure facilities to handle large-scale container ships, Cambodia desperately needs more foreign direct investment (Yu, 2017).

China's BRI entails the development of a host of transport schemes, involving high-speed railways, roads, air and sea terminals, and pipelines. The construction of business estates and economic zones is also included (Blanchard & Flint, 2017). All in all, Beijing needs several targets to be achieved: one aim is to encourage the growth of backward western Chinese provinces. Another aim is to develop transportation systems to help China boost its development sectors and consume its surplus energy. China's additional objective is to mitigate its dependency on sea-based energy transport routes that lead to weak pinch points, such as the Malacca Strait (Blanchard & Flint, 2017).

Asia is given top importance in China's development plans. Asia accounted for more than 50 percent of the overall stock of China's external foreign investment during the last decade (Yu, 2017).

Coordination between China and Pakistan is important for Chinese authorities; Beijing, therefore, is more than pleased to be the largest investor in the Economic growth of Pakistan. Since the introduction of the CPEC and the world's largest deep seaport, Gwadar, Sino-Pak trade, and economic affiliations have become stronger and more established. Under present circumstances, China's freight journeys take 45 days to enter intended markets of Europe via Middle East. It is anticipated that Gwadar Port will provide China with cost-effective transportation of its commodities to buyers and a safer and quicker road. In developing Afghanistan's economy, Beijing is also vying with India. With the \$3.5 billion contract signed between the Afghan government and China's state-owned China Metallurgical Company in September 2010 to establish a copper sector, China has recently become Afghanistan's biggest investor (Daniels, 2013), Aynak copper mine, located in Logar Province, Afghanistan.

India confronts and counters the BRI of China with its own aggressive strategic intentions. India decided to boycott the first international conference of the Belt and Road Network, held in Beijing in May 2017, because of its deep doubts regarding the CPEC and economic and operational issues. India has implemented its very own projects to address China's networking targets (projects of Mausam, Sagarmala, Bharatmala and the Spice Route).

The Indian Navy has a powerful place in Indian internal politics, and Navy officers have repeatedly commented on the need for New Delhi to build a "naval counterweight" to the Chinese military as a whole, especially the private and military activities of China in Gwadar. Indian observers believe that

friction is generated in the sight of Indian elites by the China-Pakistan partnership and their collaboration in the Indian Ocean (Aslan & Rashid, 2020: 30).

4.3.3. Russia's Position on the Chabahar and the Gwadar Ports

Russian position should not be abandoned. Despite the common stance of Russia and China against the US, Russian interests do not always coincide with Chinese priorities in the global power competition, particularly in Asia. Russia is dissatisfied with many Chinese initiatives, including the BRI and, in particular, Beijing's increasing penetration into Central Asia. While Moscow prioritizes the INSTC, the development of the Gwadar Port by Beijing and its alliance with Pakistan has been met with skepticism in Russia; Moscow does not want to be bypassed in the transportation of energy (Kim and Indeo, 2013). The INSTC, initiated by Russia, Iran, and India in 2000, is expected to facilitate the transport of goods from India to Western Europe using the Iranian port of Chabahar and railways. The corridor will connect Iran with Russian ports in the Baltic. Russia expects to benefit from transit fees as well as being a supplier of connectivity to the Persian Gulf and the Indian rail network. INSTC promises to shorten transit times from India to Russia as well as to Europe. Currently, the transportation of the countries of South Asia, especially India, with Europe is operated only through the Suez Canal. Delivery time on the current route is 45-60 days and is expected to be 14-20 days via INSTC (Aslan & Rashid, 2020: 28-29). So, it can be said that Russia prefers the port of Chabahar, because it could play a constructive role in the development of trade and economic relations between Russia and India.

4.4. Implications of US-China Rivalry Over the Strategic Ports of Chabahar and Gwadar

With the diversity of actors and the nature of the competition, the implications of US-China rivalry over the strategic ports of Chabahar and Gwadar are also very complex and diverse. In other words, because these rivalries pose a variety of threats, the implications of US-China rivalry over the ports are complex as well. However, the findings of this study indicate that the rivalry between the United States and China over the strategic ports of Chabahar and Gwadar will have political and security and economic implications. Also, US-China and China-India rivalries will increase trade-transit competitions between two ports and their development process will face cyber threats. The rivalry between the United States and China will have serious implications for Pakistan and Iran, which, all these issues, are discussed in this section.

The rivalry between the world powers over the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar has historical roots. The rivalry over these two ports dates back even to the Cold War and the rivalry between the former Soviet Union and the United States. In the late 1970s, under Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Islamabad and Moscow were reportedly close to signing an agreement allowing Pakistan to permit the former Soviet Union to establish a naval base at the port of Gwadar. In response, the United States, in agreement with the then Iranian government, was to build a naval base near the port of Chabahar; but this plan was canceled after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (Kakar, 2018: 223).

During the occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989), the Soviet Union envisioned connecting the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar to Central Asia via a rail network to facilitate military movement. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing power vacuum in the region, actors also competed on the shores of Makran, increasing the number and type of competition between them. China has replaced the Soviet Union in these competitions, and the competition changed from military to economic and commercial, as well as strategies from geopolitical to geoeconomic.

4.4.1. Political and Security Implications

The ports of Gwadar and Chabahar are one of the clear examples of the politicization of seaports in the world (Sun & Zoubir, 2017: 45). This politicization of the ports has led to growing speculation that the two seaports will one day be used as military bases. In early 2011, Pakistani Defense Minister Ahmed Mukhtar proposed that China establish a naval base in the port. In 2012, Pakistani Prime Minister Ali Haidar Gilani made a similar request to China. In September 2012, the Pakistani government handed over its only deepwater port to a Chinese company (Global Times, 2012 cited in Sun & Zoubir, 2017: 45), raising suspicions that China would use the port as a military base. In addition, China's stake in investment in Gwadar has heightened concerns about Pakistani security. Pakistan and China have clearly demonstrated their interest in economic and strategic relations, and the trade agreement can undoubtedly pave the way for future military cooperation. The United States fears China's interest in establishing a naval post in the Indian Ocean, and this has been cited as one of the reasons for the growing competition between the two countries over ports in South Asia (Bashir and others, 2018: 61). The US fears of Chinese influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean could have dire security consequences. It should be noted that India may one day use the port of Chabahar as a military base against China. The politicization of the ports has led to skepticism about any development measures in those ports.

Security is the most important issue in development. The development of Gwadar and Chabahar ports is also directly related to security. Therefore, another consequence of the US-China rivalry in the

ports of Gwadar and Chabahar is the security consequences of the geopolitical rivalry between the two countries. The activities of terrorist groups (such as Taliban, ISIS, and Al-Qaida) in Afghanistan and the existence of Baloch insurgents in the Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchistan are among the security threats affecting the development of the Chabahar port, as well as its subsidiary projects. In addition, India's infrastructure projects in Afghanistan, which connect a kind of port of Chabahar to that country and thus connect the two countries - India and Afghanistan - pass through the areas where the Taliban terrorist group is based. India and Afghanistan believe Pakistan is supporting these groups in order to damage India-Afghanistan relations. Also, since the port of Chabahar has reduced trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is unlikely that Islamabad will use Afghan opposition groups such as the Taliban to destabilize Afghanistan's trade route with India. If this route becomes unsafe, the importance of Chabahar for Afghanistan will diminish, and as a result, this may reduce the geo-economic importance of the port of Chabahar. These insecurities are also a major obstacle to development projects and have slowed down the implementation of port-related projects.

Regarding the port of Gwadar, the Baloch insurgents and the TTP in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan are among the major security threats and challenges in the development of the port of Gwadar as well as the CPEC corridor (Markey & West, 2016). In this regard, Pakistani authorities accuse India of sabotaging the port of Gwadar and believe that India is actively inciting instability in Baluchistan by aiding the insurgents (Baluchis) and supporting terrorist activities. In this regard, the leaders of the Baloch insurgents in India have publicly mentioned as their supporters. Brahumdag Bugti, head of the banned terrorist organization of the BLA in Pakistan, acknowledged that his organization is receiving aid from Afghanistan and India to achieve its goals. He not only thanked Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi but also said he hoped Modi would "raise the issue in the international community" (Ahmed, 2016). Also, in 2016, a RAW agent named Kulbhushan Yadhav (one of Baloch insurgent) was arrested in Baluchistan, Pakistan. During interrogation, it was revealed that he had been trained in maritime warfare in Chabahar, Iran, to target Pakistani ports (Nisar, 2019: 48). The arrest of a RAW agent has fueled speculation in Pakistan that India is using Iran's Chabahar as a spy base and is training several Pakistani Baluchis in Chabahar to sabotage the port of Gwadar. The reasons for India's support for the Baluchis are the possible Chinese military use of the port.

As Xinjiang plays a pivotal role in the CPEC Corridor, these security threats in this province could affect the Gwadar project, which is to be connected to Xinjiang. In the end, if this instability persists, China's ambitious plans to connect Central Asian countries with South Asia (by crossing China and connecting to the port of Gwadar) will also be affected. In other words, the US-China rivalry will

exacerbate insecurity. The United States and China, with the support of their own groups, may commit acts of sabotage of infrastructure. In addition, the confrontation between the United States and China, although so far has only had an economic dimension, it is not unlikely that it will lead to a military war. In this regard, in addition to the threats posed by the insecurity of Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan and Pakistan's Baluchistan, as well as the insecurity in Afghanistan for the development of the ports of Chabahar and Gwadar, the war between the US and China could also be a potential threat.

In short, given the long-standing enmity between Pakistan and India and the unresolved issues between them, although China and the United States will likely deviate from their logic of avoiding tensions between the two countries given the competition. However, in recent years, both China and the United States, which are mirrored in the South China Sea, must be told that the order of the South Asian region will undergo changes, the least impact of which will be the possibility of activating extremist and terrorist networks as the result of insecurity in the region.

4.4.2. Cyber Threats

In its editorial on November 21, 2020, *The Economist* (2020) acknowledged that “the cold war against China is different from the first cold war (between the United States and the Soviet Union); competition with the Soviet Union focused on ideology and nuclear weapons. However, the battlefield in the new cold war will be information technology: *semiconductors, data, 5G mobile networks, internet standards, artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing*. Therefore, there is no doubt that cyber threats are one of the serious implications of the US-China rivalry in the development of the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar. Cyberattacks are considered actions for geoeconomic purposes. In general, cyberattacks, the perpetrators of which are organized and affiliated with a government, are considered as geoeconomic tools. In order for cyberattacks to be considered as geoeconomic tools, they must have two criteria: first, the agents must be government, and second, the goal of attacks must be an attempt to infiltrate and influence the economy (Blackwill and Harris, 2016: 60).

Geoeconomic cyber attacks are those that seek to impose economic costs as part of a larger geopolitical program, using economic mechanisms or financial markets. Cyber attacks that target a country's important economic and financial infrastructure and, on the other hand, offer potential geopolitical benefits to the attacking country, are geoeconomic in nature. In other words, when it is a cyber tool and economic victims, these attacks are considered geoeconomic. In this regard, the cyberattack on the Iranian Ports and Maritime Organization in October 2020 (BBC Persian), the main purpose of which was to stop the export and import of goods in Iranian ports, can be called a type of

gocioeconomic cyber attack. Although Iran has linked these attacks to the United States and Israel, this could be a good example of targeting strategic ports in cyber-attacks.

Cyberattacks often strategically target finance, energy, information technology, aerospace, and emerging industries (Shauka, 2013). In terms of economic targets, the energy sector is one of the most attractive targets in cyberattacks. In 2012, almost 41% of cyberattacks against energy companies took place in the United States (Clayton, 2013). The famous Night Dragon cyberattack attributed to China was the most destructive attack on US energy facilities, spying on five major US energy companies from around 2008 to 2011. During the attacks, were stolen hundreds of gigabytes of sensitive financial information, as well as information on oil and gas operations (Calyton and Segal, 2013: 2). In 2012, it was reported that Iranian hackers attacked Saudi Aramco, destroying information, and eventually shutting down about 30,000 computers (Nakashima, 2012).

Hence, as Gwadar is supposed to be an energy hub between China and the oil-rich Gulf states, cyberattacks could be a potential threat to the port. In other words, if we base our analysis on the Economist's predictions that the battleground between the United States and China will be information technology, thus, it can be said that it is likely that cyberattacks will be carried out in the context of US-China rivalry in infrastructure projects of related countries (even in a third country). Currently, the United States sees China and Chinese hackers as the biggest threat to its national security.

4.4.3. Economic Implications

Elements such as trade policy, investment policy, economic sanctions, fiscal and monetary policy, energy, and raw materials, etc., are considered as special features of geoeconomics (Jaeger & Brites, 2020). China and the United States, as two major economic powers in the 21st century, have used a variety of geoeconomic elements to achieve their strategic goals. China's use of geoeconomic strategies as an economic tool to advance national interests and generate beneficial geopolitical outcomes has generated great concerns in many countries around the world (especially the United States). Experts accuse China of using “debt-trap diplomacy” as part of its BRI to acquire strategic infrastructure abroad. According to these experts, China has implemented this policy, using informal sanctions to coerce its neighbors to take debt, as well as creating parallel international institutions to weaken other global financial institutions (e.g. AIIB vs. World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) (Ferguson, Moraes & Roberts, 2018). China's debt-trap diplomacy is also said to convince poor and developing countries to take out unacceptable loans to advance their infrastructure projects so that Beijing can seize assets in the

face of financial difficulties, as a result, it will expand China's strategic or military scope (Jones & Hameiri, 2020: 3).

Despite concerns about China, it should be noted that geoeconomic strategies are not limited only to China. The United States has also long used geoeconomic strategies (such as the establishment of international institutions and the imposition of economic sanctions) to pursue its national interests. In other words, the United States uses economic sanctions to achieve its geopolitical and geostrategic goals (Ferguson, Moraes & Roberts, 2018).

Thus, since the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar have important geoeconomic features, economic sanctions can be considered as another implication of US-China rivalry for the growth and development of these ports. Sanctions will disrupt economic and financial transactions in these ports and thus reduce their strategic importance. If reduced to strategic importance, these ports will also be deprived of the required development. Sanctions also delay projects that are important for port development, resulting in the cancellation of these projects. One clear example of the implications of sanctions is India's withdrawal from the Zahedan-Chabahar railway project, which New Delhi was to build within the framework of the Chabahar port development.

During his 2016 visit to Iran, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged to invest \$ 550 million in the port of Chabahar and another \$ 20 million in infrastructure projects in Iran. Some analysts believe that without the Chabahar-Zahedan railway, India's dream of gaining access to Central Asia will be dashed, with China being the main factor (Donya-e Eqtesad, 2020). Although the United States has exempted the port of Chabahar from economic sanctions, it appears that its sanctions against Iran have not been without consequences. As a partner of the United States, India is a country that has suffered from US sanctions. Another example is the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, the implementation of which was postponed due to US sanctions has finally been left out of the executive plan (WD, 2019).

In addition, in August 2020, the United States officially targeted the China BRI, and imposed restrictions on some Chinese companies and their executives, including several subsidiaries of the CCCC, for malign activities in the South China Sea (US Embassy in Cambodia, 2020). Until early 2019, the CCCC was in charge of implementing the planned 300-megawatt coal-fired power plant project for Gwadar under the CPEC. But in 2020, due to investment problems, it was replaced by CCCG by the decision of the ECC (CPEC Info, 2019). In addition, the Trump administration has imposed sanctions on CNOOC, known as the Chinese oil giant (Stone, Alper & Brunnstrom, 2021). The reason for the sanctions, however, is the company's assistance to Beijing to intimidate its neighbors in the South China

Sea. But because the port of Gwadar is set to be one of China's energy hubs in the Indian Ocean, sanctions on China's oil giant will indirectly have adverse effects on the development and use of the port of Gwadar.

As the Cold War continues between Washington and Beijing, it is unlikely that the scope of sanctions will expand and that more Chinese and American companies will be sanctioned by the governments of the two countries. Because the port of Gwadar is of particular economic and military importance to China in competing with the United States and India in South Asia, Chinese companies involved in the development of Gwadar may also be subject to US economic sanctions.

The US State Department threatened sanctions on Chinese companies doing business with Iran in an August 2020 statement, and sanctions may have a direct impact on CPEC itself. Thar Coal Power Project in Sindh, southeast Pakistan, which Islamabad hopes will make the country energy self-sufficient in electricity, is reliant on technology from General Electric of the United States. Sanctions against General Electric's Chinese partners may make the company wary of continuing to supply equipment for Thar growth. When Iran announced its intention to join CPEC, it's safe to say that Saudi Arabia's stated involvement in the project went up in smoke as well (Safdar & Zabin, 2020).

4.4.4. Trade-transit Competitions

Another economic consequence of US-China rivalry over the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar will be increased trade-transit competition between the two ports. In other words, the more a port is developed, the less important a second port becomes. This issue will intensify the trade-transit competition between the two ports of Gwadar and Chabahar and can somehow extend the scope of the trade war between the US and China to this region and trigger a trade war between other countries in the region (India, Pakistan, Iran).

In this regard, a competition to attract countries in the region to use ports for the transit of commercial goods is one of the clear examples of increased competition between Gwadar and Chabahar. India and Uzbekistan, for example, have signed at least nine contracts and cooperation agreements to develop bilateral cooperation, one of which is cooperation with Iran on the Chabahar port project. At a joint meeting held at the level of deputy foreign ministers of Uzbekistan, Iran and India, New Delhi stated that it strongly welcomes Uzbekistan's interest in using the port of Chabahar as a transit port (IRNA, 2020). Efforts to attract other Central Asian countries continue. Both Gwadar Port and Chabahar Port are to connect Central Asia to South Asia; however, the efforts of Iran and India to attract Central Asian

countries to use the port of Chabahar is one of the examples of increasing trade-transit competition between the two ports of Chabahar and Gwadar. In addition, the Khaf-Herat railway project, and its connection with Chabahar is another Iranian project that is being implemented with the aim of developing the Chabahar port and its connection with Central Asia.

On the other hand, in addition to the Gwadar-Kashgar route (CPEC route), Pakistan is to launch the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway project, which is supposed to connect Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan (The Express Tribune, 2020). The project, however, reflects the Pakistani government's efforts to diversify transportation routes between the country and Central Asian countries; However, due to the mountainous nature of Afghanistan and the poor condition of the country, the implementation of this project does not seem possible.

4.4.5. Rivalry with Other Ports

Notably, among the two ports of Gwadar and Chabahar, Gwadar has the potential in terms of depth and logistics to replace Dubai and other ports in the region. Therefore, it is unlikely that the development of this port will increase competition between ports in the region. In this regard, the United States, in cooperation with India, has developed Oman's Duqm ports, an oil dock at Fujairah port in the UAE, and the Iranian port of Chabahar in competition with China (Nisar, 2019: 54). This means that the development of ports in South Asia, especially the port of Gwadar, will upset the balance of international trade in the region and may also lead to increased political and economic tensions.

4.4.6. Implications for Pakistan

It is noteworthy that due to the geostrategic and geoeconomic importance of Gwadar and Chabahar ports for Pakistan and Iran, US-China rivalry over these ports will also affect the economic development of the two countries. As for Pakistan, the geostrategic and geoeconomic rivalries between India (representing the United States) and China in Gwadar and Chabahar will have strategic, economic, political and diplomatic implications for Pakistan. Economic development, energy security and an easy and cheap source of transportation are the needs of an appropriate economic power. These needs reflect the importance of maritime and port policies. The geostrategic and geoeconomic dynamics of India and China in terms of seas and ports will have unfortunate consequences for regional actors, including Pakistan. These competitions, on the one hand, will cause a split between the countries of the region, and on the other, they will exacerbate strategic and economic rivalry between neighboring countries. Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan are three Muslim neighboring countries. In addition to their geographical

proximity, the sources of their linkage are historical, cultural, and religious heritage. Creating competition, instead of fraternal relations and increasing cooperation, will increase enmity and competition between these countries (Rahim & Ali, 2018: 99-100). As a result, increased competition will have a negative impact on the economic growth of these countries.

The aftermath of the US-China rivalry over the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar could have a significant impact on Pakistan's economy. China's focus on Pakistan and Beijing's investment in Pakistan's infrastructure projects could boost Pakistan's crisis-ridden economy. This is one of the positive consequences of the US-China rivalry in the region, which is attracting attention and investing in a third country (e.g. China investing in Pakistan). However, US competition with China and US cooperation with India will isolate Pakistan in the long run. As mentioned above, the United States and India are developing other ports in Oman (Duqm Port), the UAE (Fujairah Port), and Iran (Chabahar Port) because of security-economic concerns and to reduce the strategic importance of the port of Gwadar. The development of these ports in competition with Pakistani ports in the future could have adverse effects for Pakistan in general and for Gwadar port in particular.

In addition, US economic sanctions against China and Chinese companies in Pakistan are another serious consequence for Pakistan and its economy. US sanctions could disrupt the operations of Chinese companies in Pakistan and the region, which could have an impact on Pakistan's economy in a long term.

4.4.7. Implications for Iran

The consequences for Iran will be slightly different from Pakistan. Over the past few years, US sanctions pressure has also grown closer to Iran and China. As part of its "Look East" policy, Tehran is seeking closer ties with Beijing and is trying to fill the gap in foreign direct investment in Iran with Chinese investments. At present, a 25-year document on cooperation between Iran and China, signed in March 2021, is an important step towards making the relations between the two countries strategic. The agreement has political, economic and security dimensions that will have important economic and geopolitical consequences in the future.

The agreement generally includes China's investment of about \$ 400 billion and its entry into the Iranian market in all sectors, from agriculture to energy and communications to transportation. Chinese investment has raised concerns in India and New Delhi's investment in the development of the Chabahar port. Such an agreement, if finalized, could shatter a long-standing Indian dream of investing in the Iranian port of Chabahar in southeastern Iran. Reports indicate that China, in the framework of the 25-

year agreement between Tehran and Beijing, will be invested in the development of Iranian infrastructure, even in the port of Chabahar, where India has invested (Donya-e Eqtesad, 2020).

On the other hand, if China is stationed in the port of Chabahar at the same time as it is in the port of Gwadar, it will seriously endanger US sovereignty and its interests in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman. This could create new tensions between the US and China and the allies of the two superpowers in the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea and will not have good consequences for Iran, both in terms of security and economics. So far, the US Treasury Department has punished companies such as Chinese Huawei for continuing to do business with Iran. Therefore, other Chinese companies intending to participate in Iranian economic projects will probably be prosecuted by the United States for violating Iranian sanctions. Given that sanctions against Iran are still in place, it is unclear whether Chinese companies would prefer to be blacklisted by the US Treasury (Donya-e Eqtesad, 2020). In other words, the proximity of China and Iran, which will increase China's influence in the region, will force the United States to take measures such as a greater military presence in the Persian Gulf, as well as more sanctions on Iran and China.

In addition, India, and Iran, which have long feuds over the use of the port of Chabahar, will escalate with possible Chinese investment in Iran. Iran intends to join the CPEC, China-Pakistan's joint project, while India considers Chabahar to oppose China and Pakistan in general and Gwadar and CPEC in particular (Rahim & Ali, 2018: 90). Iran and Pakistan opened a new trade border in December 2020 (Mehdi, 2020), which will ultimately pave the way for Iran to join the CPEC.

Also, although Chabahar's exemption from US sanctions is an opportunity, in the face of growing US-Chinese rivalry, it could be jeopardized in the long term by China's growing influence in Iranian markets (especially in the port of Chabahar). The exemption of Chabahar port from the US sanctions, which is the only hope for Iran's non-oil exports, will have dire economic consequences for Iran if it is included in the sanctions list.

4.5. Implications for Other Countries: Afghanistan and Central Asia

Kishore Mahbubani (2020: 247) believes that in the ongoing US-China rivalry, the ASEAN (Southeast Asia) region will be the main venue for the US-China competition. This is due to the geographic location (South China Sea), economic potential (as a world growing economy) and human resources that ASEAN countries have. However, due to the strategic location of the Makran coast in the Oman Sea (close to the Strait of Hormuz and connected to the Indian Ocean), this region also has

significant potential to become a place of rivalry between the United States and China. The main reasons and features have been explored in the previous sections.

The geoeconomic and strategic rivalry between the United States and China will affect several countries in the region as it will have far-reaching implications for the development of the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar. In other words, besides ports, the impact of these competitions also affects several countries and governments in the region. In the US-China competition over the strategic and geoeconomic ports of Chabahar and Gwadar, Iran, and Pakistan, as the two host countries, are the most influential countries in this field. In addition to these two countries, Afghanistan, and Central Asian countries, as well as India as third countries, are among the countries affected by the implications of the rivalry between the United States and China over the ports of Chabahar and Gwadar.

The ports of Gwadar in Pakistan and Chabahar in Iran have strengthened the strategic alliance between China, Pakistan, India, and Iran, respectively. Since the US-China rivalry in South Asia is largely in the form of supporting countries in the region, these projects are considered to create an unfavorable balance of power in the region as the US reduces its military presence in the region (Kakar, 2018: 233). By investing in these ports, India is competing with China, China with India and the United States, India with Pakistan, Iran with the United States, and Iran with Pakistan. But it should be noted that because these competitions, with multiple and complex actors, are at the initial level, so the results and effects will be more visible in the future.

4.5.1. Implications for Afghanistan

Afghanistan's approach to the port of Chabahar is obvious. It is one of the main parties to the trilateral agreement between India, Iran, and Afghanistan, signed in May 2016 between the three countries. An agreement that would allow Afghanistan to be connected to India's western ports, including the port of Mumbai, through Iran's Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman. The signing of this agreement is a major strategic achievement for Afghanistan. Because as a result of this agreement, the country has access to the Indian Ocean and markets around the world through the port of Chabahar. The port of Chabahar not only connects Afghanistan to Iran and India in the short term, but also provides access to Central Asian energy resources in the future. The results of the Chabahar agreement are crucial for Afghanistan's foreign trade, as the project will connect the cities of Zaranj, Herat, Qandahar, Kabul, and Mazar-e-Sharif to Central Asian economies as well as the markets of Iran and India (Mutfi, Amirahmadian & Sachedva, 2018: 8).

New Delhi and Kabul have historically enjoyed good relations. The two countries do not have a common border, and this separation has caused difficulties in trade between them. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, India has embarked on major infrastructure development programs in Afghanistan. One of these projects is the 135-mile Zaranj-Delaram highway project connecting Zaranj (southwestern Nimroz province) with Delaram (western Farah province) and then with the 1,300-mile Kandahar-Herat highway. The project connects 16 provinces of Afghanistan, including Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kandahar, Ghazni, Kabul and the provinces of Gorno and Badakhshan in Tajikistan. The highway is part of a north-south transit corridor connecting the Indian subcontinent to Central Asian countries. It is reported that between 2005 and 2009, India spent \$ 100 million building the Zaranj-Delaram highway on the Iran-Afghanistan border (Falak, Muneer, Riaz, 2016: 20).

It is noteworthy that India's investments in Afghanistan have different goals. Afghanistan has a strategic turning point in the competition between India and China, as well as India and Pakistan. Through Afghanistan, India is striving to achieve key goals such as countering the China BRI in general and China-Pakistan Strategic and Economic Cooperation (CPEC) in particular (Rahim & Ali, 2018: 98).

Afghanistan's foreign trade depends on major transit routes through Pakistan, and Pakistan's presence has always been a major obstacle to Afghan foreign trade. Thus, the implementation of the Chabahar port project provides an important trade route between Afghanistan, India, and other countries. This is also a strategic step for Afghanistan to maintain its independence, bypassing Pakistan (Mutfi, Amirahmadian & Sachedva, 2018: 12).

In November 2017, following the first shipment of India's wheat through the Iranian port of Chabahar to Kabul, the Afghan government explicitly stated that Afghanistan was not more dependent on Pakistani ports for its trade with India (Rahim & Ali, 2018: 99). In addition, as Afghan trade through Chabahar increases, there is a risk that the importance of Torkham customs between Afghanistan and Pakistan being declined, with dire consequences for Pakistan (Mutfi, Amirahmadian & Sachedva, 2018: 51).

The port of Chabahar is a vital project for Afghanistan as a whole, enabling the transportation of Afghan goods to the Middle East and Europe and the import of vital goods to Afghanistan. This port is strategically located in a good position for Afghanistan's imports and exports. Iran is building a railway system (Chabahar-Zahedan railway) to connect the port to Afghanistan. Iran's trade route is very close and cost-effective for Afghanistan compared to Pakistan, as well as it is less risky and very reliable for Kabul (Mutfi, Amirahmadian & Sachedva, 2018: 26). In addition, in accordance with the trilateral

agreement of Chabahar, Iran allocated 50 hectares of land to Afghanistan in the fChabahar Free Trade-Industrial Zone. And about 200 Afghan companies, including a private Afghan bank (Ghazanfar Bank), are already operating in Chabahar (IRNA, 2020).

The withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan will create a security vacuum in the region, especially in Afghanistan. The withdrawal of these forces and the unstable security situation in Afghanistan will negatively affect most infrastructure projects, including the development of the ports of Chabahar and Gwadar. Because security is the most basic component of investments in infrastructure projects, in the absence of which there may be a possibility of cancellation or suspension of many projects.

Chabahar, with all its benefits for Afghanistan, also faces many challenges domestically. The roads connecting the strategic regions of Afghanistan with the port of Chabahar are fragile for security reasons. Most of the territories are under Taliban control. Certainly, the Taliban will become stronger with the withdrawal of American and NATO forces. Therefore, the chances of achieving the project goal are fragile due to security challenges. In other words, the safety of Indian trade convoys depends largely on Pakistan's integrity and credibility not to use its influence over the tribal leaders (Pashtun tribes) in Afghanistan to attack them. However, the unsettled state of law and order in Afghanistan is no less dangerous for the CPEC route in Afghanistan, which is prone to Indian plans to sabotage the CPEC (Ahmad, 2017: 73). In addition to the Chabahar agreement, Afghanistan's foreign trade is conducted through Pakistan (using its ports). The APTTA entered into force in June 2011 between the governments of the two countries. The agreement allows Afghanistan to export its products to the main markets of India, China, and other parts of the world through the ports of Karachi, Qasim and Gwadar. Although this agreement has numerous benefits for Afghanistan, because the political relations between Islamabad and Kabul are tense, the trade route between the two countries is not significantly stable due to political events. From time to time, there are unrest on the trade and transit routes, which is mostly related to political relations between the two countries.

In addition, Afghanistan is among 86 countries that have signed an MoU with China under the BRI but have not yet joined China's ambitious initiative. Through the BRI initiative, China views Afghanistan as a strategic location for expanding ties between East, South and Central Asia. The BRI is also significant for Afghanistan, as joining the initiative could help Afghanistan establish its historical position as an "*Asian transit and trade roundabout*" that connects South Asia to Central Asia and East Asia to West Asia (Haider, 2019: 20).

In addition, China is committed to expanding infrastructure relations with Afghanistan. In September 2019, Islamabad hosted the third round of the meeting of the foreign ministers of China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, at which the three countries reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthen relations in various areas, including cooperation within the BRI. The three sides also agreed to pursue the CAPPCC strategy, including the construction of the Peshawar-Kabul highway as part of the cooperation (Haider, 2019: 20). This route could lead to the connection of Afghanistan to the strategic port of Gwadar and ultimately lead to Afghanistan's formal participation in the CPEC. In 2017, China first invited Afghanistan to join the CPEC, but Kabul was reluctant. In 2018, Beijing reiterated its request in the second "China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Dialogue", but the Afghan government did not respond. However, under the Peshawar-Kabul highway agreement, Kabul now appears to be seeking to join the CPEC corridor (Haider, 2019: 20). "Kabul supports CPEC," said Janan Mosazai, Afghanistan's former ambassador to Pakistan and current Afghan ambassador to China. "We want to connect to it. And Kabul is ready to facilitate the connection of the Central Asian countries to the CPEC through Afghanistan," said J. Mosazai (cited in The Diplomat, 2017). China is also currently one of Afghanistan's main trading partners. Trade between Beijing and Kabul is also mostly done through APTTA (Ahmad, 2017: 7).

Given the complexity of relations between Afghanistan and the United States, China, India, Pakistan and Iran, it can be said that Afghanistan is the only third country that is strongly affected by US and Chinese rivalry over the ports of Chabahar and Gwadar. Afghanistan is politically and economically dependent on the United States, but China is also the largest foreign investor in Afghanistan and Kabul's trading partner. India is Afghanistan's strategic partner, but at the same time, Afghanistan has major weaknesses against Pakistan as well as Iran in terms of refugees and transport routes. Therefore, in the rivalry between the United States and China, particularly over the ports of Chabahar and Gwadar, Afghanistan will be more affected than any other country and will be in a fragile situation.

It should be noted, however, that the simultaneous development of the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar is also a "significant advantage" for Afghanistan's foreign trade. The development of these two ports creates many alternatives for connecting Afghanistan to open waters. While offering advantages, however, the simultaneous development of both ports also paints a bleak future for Afghanistan. Afghanistan maintains tense political relations with Pakistan and at the same time suffers from a fragile relationship with Iran. So, if at the moment we consider the port of Chabahar as an opportunity/advantage to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan, then in the future Iran may become the same problem for Afghanistan as Pakistan. Iran and Afghanistan have disputes with each other on various issues such as water and refugees.

4.5.2. Implications for Central Asian countries

Central Asian countries with huge reserves of energy resources (oil and gas) in both the Chabahar and Gwadar projects are the destination and source of exports for/to India and China. India seeks to connect South Asia to Central Asia through INSTC and China through CPEC. India and China have long been competing for Central Asia. The Central Asian region is of strategic importance to both Beijing and New Delhi.

Central Asia plays a strategic role in China's BRI, where its Belt part (SREB) runs through this region. Central Asia plays the role of the main transit region in this project. The main goal of SREB is for China to expand economic and security cooperation with neighboring countries and to develop good relations with them. China pursues three major goals in Central Asia as part of SREB. These goals are: (1) ensuring regional stability in Central Asia; (2) expanding political and economic relations with Central Asian countries; and (3) maintaining control over Central Asian energy resources (Amighini, 2017: 36-37). The SREB initiative is to establish a comprehensive transport network consisting of railways, highways, airlines, energy supply pipelines, and digital communications and infrastructure (the so-called "Digital Silk Road") that crosses Central Asia and connects China with Western Asia and Europe. The SREB is also to create an Eurasian economic corridor using transport infrastructure diplomacy. The development of transport infrastructure, trade liberalization and monetary cooperation will eventually lead to the economic development of Central Asian countries and their integration into European and Asian markets (Amighini, 2017: 38).

In the context of the SREB, the transit importance of Central Asia is strategically raised. There are currently eight railways connecting China and Europe, six of which cross through Central Asia (Kazakhstan). Six routes start at the Chinese Xinjiang Alataw Pass, pass through Kazakhstan and Russia, and connect to the Baku International Sea Trade Port through Aktau port in Kazakhstan and Turkmenbashi port in Turkmenistan, and then to Turkey and Europe (Amighini, 2017: 40). Istanbul (Turkey) to Xi'an (China) train route, which was inaugurated in December 2020, is a visible example of this transport corridor.

In addition, another SREB route (Southern Rail Corridor) starts in China and ends in Iran and the Persian Gulf via Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Diversifying transportation routes will increase China's exports as well as open up new markets for exports from Central Asia (Amighini, 2017: 40). China has also invested in the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway (connecting the ports of Turkmenbashi and Baku), starting at Kashgar in Xinjiang and ending at Andijan in Uzbekistan through Torogart and Kara-Su

in Kyrgyzstan. This route eventually leads to Europe via Afghanistan, Iran, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, and Turkey (Amighini, 2017: 43).

China also intends to connect Central Asian countries to the South Asian port of Gwadar, using the CPEC and the Kashgar Free Trade Zone in Xinjiang. In this regard, a quadripartite agreement on trade and transit signed between Pakistan, China, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan has been in force since 2004. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan also intend to join the agreement (Nisar, 2019:54-55).

As a result, China seeks to maintain its energy and trade interests in Central Asia through the SREB project. SREB project is helping China further strengthen its economic integration with the Western countries. The importance of Central Asia in the SREB is significant since the project was announced and unveiled in Central Asia (in Kazakhstan). Notably, despite the potential benefits for China, the SREB is also of strategic importance for the countries of Central Asia (Amighini, 2017: 13-35).

China is also using pre-BRI platforms (such as TRACECA) to achieve its goals and expand its influence in Eurasia. The TRACECA project, later upgraded to TRACECA organization, is an infrastructure project aimed at the development of trade, economic and transport relations between Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Baltic countries (Yalçinkaya, 2011: 40). The EU-sponsored project was first launched in 1993, involves the development of infrastructure, including highways, railways, highways, sea and land ports. Its ultimate goal was to connect the two regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus with Europe (Yalçinkaya, 2011: 39 & Yalçinkaya, 2021).

TRACECA, which includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, in addition to being a platform for transit cooperation, has international political performance. As a multinational transport organization, TRACECA is of particular geopolitical importance in the Eurasian region (Yalçinkaya, 2011: 39).

TRACECA is also referred to as a project to revive the ancient Silk Road. However, with the announcement of BRI in 2013, the TRACECA was pushed to the margins, and the Chinese BRI practically replaced it. In other words, China has officially overshadowed this major Eurasian project with its BRI, and Beijing was able to use the TRACECA infrastructure to benefit the BRI. In recent years, the Chinese government has also signed agreements with almost all the TRACECA member countries and has been using most of the highways and railways built under the TRACECA. The replacement of TRACECA by China has become a controversial issue and has provoked reactions against the China-controlled route and trade (Yalçinkaya, 2021).

On the other side, for New Delhi, the Chabahar Port Agreement and the transformation of Chabahar Port into one of India's economic hubs in Eurasia and the Indian Ocean is a strategic decision. In the future, if India has any plans to compete with the Chinese BRI, the Chabahar port and INSTC will be the main pillars of this strategy. Some experts argue that the Chabahar project lacks a clear economic logic and consider the project as a dangerous deviation from other important projects for India. For India, although these statements call into question the strategic value of Chabahar, the Chabahar project, along with the INSTC, will not only have the potential to develop economic relations with Iran, Central Asia and Afghanistan, but will also transform Indian trade (Mutfi, Amirahmadian, Sachedva, 2018: 75).

Access to the natural gas reserves of the Central Asian countries is one of the main objectives of India's strategy to reach this region. Kazakhstan has 30 billion barrels of oil and Turkmenistan 265 trillion cubic feet of gas; In addition, Kazakhstan has 679,600 tons of uranium and over 37,000 million tons of coal reserves. In short, the project will provide India with access to oil and gas resources in Central Asia (Mutfi, Amirahmadian, Sachedva, 2018: 10).

In addition to oil and gas, India has military security agreements with several Central Asian states. India is investing heavily in the energy sector of Uzbekistan as well as in the military sector. Uzbekistan, on the other hand, repairs and manufactures MAR78-11 transport aircraft for the Indian Army. As part of security agreements with Central Asian countries, India invested \$ 70 million in the reconstruction of Ayni airbase in Tajikistan (Kucera, 2017) and signed an anti-terrorism agreement with Kazakhstan (Nisar, 2019: 53).

In Central Asia, India competes with both China and Pakistan. India has been looking for ways to gain access to Central Asia's energy resources for years, but Pakistan, with its geographic location, is a major obstacle to India's access to Iran and Central Asia. The former Indian ambassador to Kazakhstan, in this regard, believed that Pakistan will not allow any cargo from India to pass through Pakistani territory to Central Asia. Beijing has also supported Pakistan's strategy as Beijing and Delhi compete as two major Asian developing economies in many areas. The former Indian ambassador to Kazakhstan also said that "China has always incited Pakistan to prevent India from gaining access to Central Asia. If China wanted to, it could open Indian access to Central Asia through Xinjiang, but Beijing is trying to reduce India's access to the region." (Donya-e Eqtesad, 2020).

Pakistan is still keen to use the port of Gwadar for trade and energy transports with China, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The necessary infrastructure in this area, including the development of the port of Gwadar and the Gwadar-Karakorum highway, which connects this port with the Kashgar free

trade zone, has been created. China also agreed to provide \$ 350 million in assistance to Pakistan to upgrade the Gwadar-Karakorum highway. According to an MoU signed between Beijing and Islamabad, China also intends to connect the Karakorum highway to the Russian highway network, which will eventually connect Central Asia to the Karakorum Highway in China. The regional highway network will connect Gwadar directly to Xinjiang and the Central Asian countries (Khan, 2012: 86).

India, China, and the United States also have potential energy competition in Central Asia. China and Central Asian countries are cooperating in the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline and China-Kazakhstan crude oil pipeline projects. China's CNPC is actively involved in the extraction and production of crude oil in Kazakhstan's oil fields, such as Aktobe and Shymkent Refinery (Bin, 2014: 601). The United States, on the other hand, has an effective presence in Central Asia, where US oil companies compete with Chinese oil companies in Kazakhstan for energy. For example, since 1993, US oil companies such as Chevron, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips have been operating in Kazakh oil fields such as Tengiz, Kashagan and Karachaganak (Energy Charter Secretariat, 2013: 77-79). India, in cooperation with Afghanistan and Pakistan, has launched a project to import natural gas from Turkmenistan (TAPI pipeline), which is one of the multinational energy megaprojects in the region.

As can be seen, the Central Asian region is of strategic importance both in the Indian project (Chabahar and the INSTC) and in the Chinese project (BRI-CPEC, Gwadar). New Delhi and Beijing are both seeking to expand their influence in Central Asia and reduce each other influence in the region.

The simultaneous development of the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar, as well as the US and Chinese rivalry over these ports, will have significant implications for Central Asian countries. However, the countries of Central Asia, on the one hand, depend on China and its investments in its infrastructure projects, and on the other hand, seek to cooperate with the United States and India to create a balance of power in the region. In 2015, the United States and five Central Asian countries launched the C5 + 1 Dialogue Platform. The C5 + 1 platform was established during a meeting of former US Secretary of State John Kerry with the foreign ministers of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on September 27, 2015, in New York. The main purpose of establishing this platform is to maintain common interests and expand political and economic relations, as well as coordination and close cooperation between the countries of Central Asia and the United States (Tolipov, 2015).

Another move by Washington to prevent China's influence in Central and South Asia is the US "New Silk Road" initiative. The US NSR Initiative was announced by the US former Secretary of State

Hillary Clinton in July 2011 in India. The main goal of the initiative was the trade and economic integration of Central and South Asia. As part of this initiative, the United States, through India, has tried to direct its regional policy against China in the region. The United States has sought to cite India as a role model for Central and South Asian countries, as a leading country in the field of democracy and its development (Yalçinkaya, 2021).

Under the NSR Initiative, the United States has invested in nearly 40 projects, including infrastructure, transportation, communications, energy (oil and gas pipelines), electricity, trade, and border security. US-India cooperation in Afghanistan can also be considered as an important part of this initiative. In this regard, the United States has spent over \$ 2 billion to build more than 3,000 kilometers of roads in Afghanistan. The United States has also spent more than \$ 3 billion by April 2015 to rebuild Afghanistan's ring road that connects key cities. In addition, the US has provided political and diplomatic support to the Hairatan-Mazar-e-Sharif and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway projects (Sennot, 2015, cited in Yalçinkaya, 2021).

It can be seen that by implementing this initiative, the United States has essentially sought to prevent the emergence of a new power (a new hegemony such as China) in the region, and gain access to Central Asia's rich energy resources (Yalçinkaya, 2021). However, studies in 2020 show that the US NSR projects have not met the US and Indian targeted goals. The main reason for this failure can be attributed to changing US policy under Trump and the expansion of China's influence in the region. China, within the BRI, has succeeded in expanding its political and economic relations with many countries in the region.

As mentioned earlier, the nature and actors of US-China rivalry in the region are complex. This complexity has made it difficult to discern the consequences of US-China, China-India, India-Pakistan rivalries in the region. But what is obvious is that the rivalry between the United States and China in the region will turn the countries of the region into friends and enemies (Friend or enemy of the US/China). The division of the countries of the region into an enemy and a friend in the form of support from the United States and China can cause many crises and unrest in the region. The impact of this issue in the long run will have a significant impact on the security order of the region. In particular, these competitions will intensify the spread of extremism in the region. Furthermore, competition between the United States and China will make it difficult for Central Asian countries to "choose or prefer," which could ultimately lead to gaps between countries in the region. The results of gaps between countries in the region can lead to economic rivalries between neighboring countries.

However, it should be noted that the infrastructure development of both ports (Chabahar and Gwadar) will also have significant economic benefits for Central Asian countries. The construction of the port of Chabahar in Iran, as well as the progress of the port of Gwadar in Pakistan and the establishment of trade and transit corridors, could provide the basis for the export of untouched mineral resources and energy from Central Asia to South Asia and other parts of the world. Ultimately, this trend will lead to an increase in trade, exports, and imports in the region. The growth of foreign trade can have important consequences, such as economic growth in the region. This is one of the pleasant implications of US-China rivalry in the development of strategic ports in South Asia - for Central Asian countries.



CONCLUSION

In the last two decades, China's economic growth has increased Beijing's political, economic, and military power and influence and has caused the emergence of the Beijing Consensus as opposed to the Washington Consensus. It means the establishment of a Chinese order of international political economy, with Beijing's axis. The United States is concerned that China's expanding power may allow it to eventually supplant the United States.

Despite the intense competition between the United States and China in various economic, political, military, and technological fields, the geoeconomic area has been one of the main areas of competition between the United States and China in recent years. The BRI is a clear example of geoeconomics that has intensified the strategic rivalries between the two countries.

As part of the BRI, Beijing has sought to present a new model of Chinese-style economic development (development without democracy). Chinese leaders have sought to prove to other countries that economic development is possible without democracy. In short, the project offers a new development model that is incompatible with the required standards in the US and in the West.

Opposing US policies in the region and increasing Beijing's influence are among the strategic objectives of the BRI. The BRI has performed successfully in expanding China's economic and political influence. Within the framework of this program, China has been able to create alternative routes for its trade and economic relations with other countries. The membership of more than 60 countries in the BRI is also an example of the expansion of China's political influence, which has been achieved through investment in the infrastructure of participant countries in the BRI. Eventually, China has been able to expand its sphere of influence in regions that have traditionally been under US influence.

Changing international trade routes through the BRI is a major concern for the United States and its allies. Under the BRI, land corridors play a key role in international trade. Changing the network of international trade routes will have profound implications for the geopolitical relations between China and Europe, Central Asia, Russia, and the Eurasian region as a whole.

The rivalry between China and the United States impacts almost 7.7 billion people around the world. Regions affected by US-China rivalry are also vast and wide. South Asia is one of these regions. The US-China rivalry in South Asia is a rivalry to extend more control over the Indian Ocean and

maintain maritime order. Washington is concerned that China's growing maritime activities might jeopardize the US-led international maritime order, particularly in the Indian Ocean.

China's military-security and geoeconomic strategies in the region are interrelated and have been launched with extensive studies. These strategies have the necessary deployment, such as economic ability and sustainable policies, to achieve strategic objectives. In contrast, US strategies towards China have been influenced by major international developments, such as the 9/11 incident and the 2008 financial crisis, as well as rapid changes in the US's domestic and foreign policies.

By comparing China's strategies in the IOR and South Asia, White Papers, Two Oceans, String of Pearls and MSR, ports play a central role in all Beijing's strategies. Ports that China has invested in South Asia, Gwadar in Pakistan, Kyaukpyu in Myanmar, Chittagong in Bangladesh, and Hambantota in Sri Lanka are of transit importance in terms of foreign trade, energy transition, maritime monitoring as well as the security of Chinese merchant ships and energy vessels. These ports, with their strategic locations, reduce China's vulnerabilities in the Indian Ocean and allow Beijing to bypass the Strait of Malacca, known as the Malacca Dilemma in China's energy imports. Although China has not yet used any ports in South Asia for military purposes, there are concerns that China may one day use these ports as a military base for the PLA Navy, as it is currently using the port of Djibouti in East Africa.

China's military-security strategies ensure the security of Beijing's ambitious geoeconomic programs, such as MSR/BRI. Each of these strategies fills a strategic gap in China's long-term visions. For example, White Papers characterize China's defense programs, the String of Pearls proposes solutions to reduce China's maritime vulnerabilities, and the Two Ocean strategy simultaneous with the BRI formally recognizes China as a power, which helped China to challenge US, military and economically.

The MSR is one of the most successful China's geoeconomic strategies in South and Southeast Asia. MSR has strengthened China's political and economic ties with the countries of the region, as well as increased its military and political influence. For example, Chinese investment in Pakistan has led to the signing of the "All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership" between Beijing and Islamabad. All-weather cooperation means that China-Pakistan relations will continue regardless of whether the political situation changes or not. Such closer ties between Beijing and Islamabad have raised concerns in the US and India.

China's investments under the MSR have led to the development of infrastructure (ports, roads, and railways) in South Asian countries. China's role in developing the infrastructure of these countries has led

most of these countries to establish closer relations with China than with the United States. These countries see China as a counterbalance to the United States. However, many countries that host Chinese investments have faced the implications of debt traps. Sri Lanka is a prime example.

China's growing rise has prompted the United States to launch a series of strategies to counter Beijing: Pivot to Asia, TPP, FOIP, and 2017 NSS. Among these strategies, Pivot to Asia and the TPP are presented in the face of China's growth after the 2008 financial crisis and in opposition to Beijing's string of pearls strategy. While the 2017 NSS identified China as a revisionist threat and the FOIP presented a practical strategy to counter China. The FOIP, known as Quad, can be considered as a new type of rim surrounding China: Japan in the east, India in the south, Australia in the southeast. However, due to different interpretations and different interests of relations with China (economic and security), Quad countries have not had a single approach to dealing with China.

China and the United States have different views on forming alliances with countries in the region. The US allies in the region are mainly developed countries such as Japan and Australia. India is also a country with high economic growth. China, on the other hand, has closer ties with developing or less developed countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Pakistan.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing power vacuum in the region, the number of actors and the type of competition between them in South Asia has been diversified. China has replaced the Soviet Union in competitions, and the rivalry changed from military to economic, as well as strategies from geopolitical to geoeconomic. By investing in the ports of Chabahar and Gwadar, India is competing with China, China with India and the United States, India with Pakistan, Iran with the United States, and Iran with Pakistan. Due to the diversity of actors and competition, the implications of rivalry between the United States and China over infrastructure projects in South Asia (such as the strategic ports of Chabahar and Gwadar) are also very complex and varied.

Among security implications, existing non-state armed groups and cyber threats are the most important challenge in the development of the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar. While economic sanctions and the increased trade-transit competition between two ports can be considered as the serious economic implications of the United States and China over the strategic ports of Chabahar and Gwadar.

In the competition between the United States and China over the strategic ports of Chabahar and Gwadar, Iran and Pakistan, as the two host countries of these ports, are the most affected countries in this competition. China's focus on Pakistan and Beijing's investment in Pakistan's infrastructure projects could

boost Pakistan's crisis-ridden economy. This is one of the positive consequences of the US-China rivalry in the region, which is attracting attention and investing in a third country (e.g. China investing in Pakistan). However, in opposition to China, the US and India may increase pressure on Pakistan which ultimately could isolate Islamabad in the long run. In the case of Iran, although Chabahar's exemption from US sanctions is an opportunity for Iran, with the proximity of Beijing and Tehran and China's growing influence in Iranian markets, the port's exemption could be jeopardized in the long run in the future. The exemption of Chabahar port from the US sanctions, which is the only hope for Iran's non-oil exports, will have dire economic consequences for Iran if it is included in the sanctions list.

Afghanistan is the only third country that is strongly affected by the US-China rivalry over the ports of Chabahar and Gwadar. Afghanistan is politically and economically dependent on the United States, but China is also the largest foreign investor in Afghanistan and Kabul's trading partner. India is Afghanistan's strategic partner, but at the same time, Afghanistan has major weaknesses against Pakistan as well as Iran in terms of refugees and transit routes. So, in the rivalry between the United States and China, particularly over the ports of Chabahar and Gwadar, Afghanistan will be more affected than any other country in the region. Afghanistan maintains tense political relations with Pakistan and at the same time suffers from a fragile relationship with Iran. If at the moment we consider the port of Chabahar as an opportunity/advantage to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan, then in the future Iran may become the same challenge for Afghanistan as Pakistan.

The Central Asian region is of strategic importance both in the Indian project (Chabahar and the INSTC) and in the Chinese project (BRI-CPEC, Gwadar). The simultaneous development of the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar, as well as the US and Chinese rivalry over these ports, will have significant implications for Central Asian countries. The countries of Central Asia, on the one hand, depend on China and its investments in its infrastructure projects, and on the other hand, seek to cooperate with the United States and India to create a balance of power in the region. So, it can be said that competition between the United States and China will make it difficult for Central Asian countries to “choose or prefer” between Washington and Beijing. Because these countries are well aware that without the United States, ensuring security is impossible, and without China, their economies will not prosper. Eventually, the rivalry between the United States and China in the region will turn the countries of the region into friends and enemies of the US or China. The division of the countries of the region into an enemy and a friend in the form of support from the United States and China can cause many crises and unrest in the region. The impact of this issue, in the long run, will have a significant impact on the security order of the region.

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