

## US-China International Relations Analysis Based on Indo-Pacific Strategy

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**Abstract:** In the context of economic globalization, the economic interdependence in the Asia-Pacific region has deepened. Among them, the Sino-US and Sino-Indian relations are more focused. In the following 20 years, these three countries may greatly affect the development of the Asia-Pacific region. In this context, the three countries compete in a multilateral mechanism to maximize their power and influence. China's rise has a long-standing momentum. The Indo-Pacific strategy proposed by the Trump administration of the United States has targeted the rapid development of China, and has cooperated with the Indo-Pacific mechanism in the economic and security fields to balance and restrict China's Impact in regional affairs. This article analyzes the current development of the Asia-Pacific region from the perspective of checks and balances, the principles of the multilateral mechanism, and finally explores some possible Chinese approaches to the Indo-Pacific strategy.

### 1. Introduction

Since Trump's Asia trip in November 2017, the United States has officially launched its India-Pacific strategy. At the 2017 East Asia Summit, the "Four Countries Security Dialogue Mechanism 2.0", that is, the US, Japan, Australia, and India's security dialogue resumed 10 years later. Although the prospects of the four-nation security dialogue mechanism are not clear, its strategic pressure on China cannot be underestimated. In the National Security Strategy published by the Trump administration at the end of 2017, the concept of "Indo-Pacific" was repeated 12 times, while the "Asia-Pacific" commonly used in the past was hardly mentioned. In early June 2018, the United States renamed Pacific Command to Indo-Pacific Command [1].

In the context of the Trump administration's trade war against China, how to correctly understand and evaluate the US security strategy against China is particularly important. Although the introduction of the Indo-Pacific strategy in the United States has its immature side, it has profoundly affected the security pattern of the entire region. How to fully cope with the new challenges brought about by the US-Indo-Pacific strategy to China's rise while formulating the corresponding countermeasures while China-US trade war has become a question that Chinese international relations scholars and policy researchers must answer [2-3].

The article is divided into three sections. The first part will analyze existing explanation of competitive multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific region. The author believes that the current three theories of international relations are insufficient to explain the concept of Indo-Pacific relations [4], the rise of Indo-Pacific strategies, and their application in strategic fields. In the second part, the author proposes the use of middle-level theory-the theory of institutional checks and balances-in international relations to better understand the Indo-Pacific concept and possible Indo-Pacific strategies, especially to explain the nature of the Indo-Pacific strategy. US-led Indo-Pacific mechanism. The author believes that Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy is an "exclusive check and balance mechanism" against China's rise. Its purpose is to balance and restrict China's regional affairs through cooperation in the economic and security fields of the Indo-Pacific mechanism. influences. In the conclusion, the author suggests that China should design a corresponding

"institutional check and balance" strategy based on the theory of institutional checks and balances to offset the strategic pressure of the US-India Pacific strategy on China's rise [5].

## **2. Existing explanation of competitive multilateralism in the asia-pacific region**

"Multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific region" is not a new topic in world politics. Since the end of the Cold War [6], various multilateral systems in the Asia-Pacific region have proliferated, which marks the formation of "multilateralism 1.0" in the region. Focusing on ASEAN is a prominent feature of "multilateralism 1.0". The ASEAN Regional Forum, which was established in 1994, is the only security forum and dialogue mechanism that includes all major powers in the world (the EU also participated in the ASEAN Regional Forum Annual Meeting as a member of the mechanism). The highest peak of the 1.0 "process. The East Asia Summit is another example of "multilateralism 1.0." The East Asia Summit is considered to be an expanded version of the ASEAN "10 + 3" mechanism, which is also dominated by ASEAN. Both the United States and Russia joined the mechanism in 2011. Although this ASEAN-centered multilateralism has attracted widespread criticism for its inefficiency and lack of results, it has not affected ASEAN's firm position as a "navigator" for more than 20 years [7].

The international financial crisis in 2008 caused a new wave of "multilateralism 2.0" in the Asia-Pacific region [8]. Unlike the "multilateralism 1.0", which was dominated by ASEAN in the 1990s, the second wave of multilateralism was dominated by non- ASEAN countries. The main way was to establish a new system or revitalize the existing system. It has roughly three characteristics: First, "Multilateralism 2.0" is promoted by large countries such as the United States, China, and Japan, or medium-

sized powers such as Australia and South Korea, and the dominant country is no longer ASEAN. Secondly, it is more comprehensive in dealing with traditional and non-traditional security and economic issues, while at the same time geopolitical emphasis is placed on the Asia-Pacific region, especially East Asia, rather than Southeast Asia. Finally, it coexists, competes, and interacts with other forms of security organizations such as "multilateralism 1.0" and other US-led bilateral alliances and small multilateral cooperation to shape the regional order in the Asia-Pacific region [9].

However, the concepts proposed by Morse and Keohane [10] do not fully fit the practice of the region. This inapplicability is manifested in two important ways. First, nation states remain the main players in "competitive multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific region", rather than international institutions, sub-states, or non- state actors. Secondly, the competition in "Multilateralism 2.0" discussed in this article refers to the competition within or between mechanisms of state actors through multilateral means. The concept of "multilateralism 2.0" was put forward to distinguish the second wave of multilateralism from the "multilateralism 1.0" dominated by ASEAN after the Cold War. This article argues that, although non-state actors have indeed significantly increased their importance in international relations, it is still competition and cooperation between nation states that currently dominate world politics [11].

There are many important interpretations of "competitive multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific region". Neorealists and other scholars who support broader realist views believe that institutions are merely a by-product of power politics among big nations. So- called competitive multilateralism is just another form of power politics. For example, Marc Lanteigne pointed out that multilateral systems such as the ASEAN Regional Forum are only diplomatic means for China to pursue the status of a great power after the Cold War. As scholars increasingly focus on China's inevitable rise, the possible decline of the United States, and an increasingly multipolar international security environment, Bates Gill and Michael Green point out that "in Asia In the new wave of multilateralism, a more appropriate view is that institutions should be seen more as extensions and intersections of state power and goals, rather than as an objective force or impetus. " For example, China actively advocated "Asian Asians" and "New Asian Security Concept" at the 2014 Asian Collaboration and Confidence Measures Conference. This measure is widely regarded as a counterattack to the US 'Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy [12] .

Liberalism, especially neoliberalism, believes that the system has a significant role in contemporary world politics, which can reduce transaction costs and promote cooperation between countries. Liberals insist that Asian countries' "multilateralism 2.0" claims are rooted in the functionality and necessity of the system. In the face of increasingly severe regional security challenges, the country must adopt a targeted cooperation model, otherwise the crisis will only escalate or worse. For example, Richard Stubbs believes that ASEAN's "10 + 3" as a new regional system successfully promoted economic cooperation between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia after the Asian economic crisis in 1997, reflecting the system's the function of easing conflicts between countries and promoting cooperation. Similarly, the establishment of the Asian Investment Bank by Chinese leaders in 2015 also aims to solve the problem of insufficient infrastructure investment in developing Asia.

The constructivist school believes that institutions and multilateralism reflect specific ideas, and the norms produced by these ideas shape the world's political landscape[13] As far as the Asia-Pacific region is concerned, the ASEAN-led "multilateralism 1.0" in the 1990s was based on the collective collective cognition among ASEAN members, which is closely related to the construction of regional order[14]. For "multilateralism 2.0", the constructivists believe that the mainstream powers have different views on how to build regional order, and the conflict of ideas eventually leads to this phenomenon. [15] For example, former Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama proposed the East Asian Community, a new mechanism based on the shared culture and civilization of Asian countries. One of the salient features of the methods of order building in Asian countries is the emphasis on unique regional cultures or civilizations. Hatoyama pointed out: "One of the characteristics of Asians is that we do not look at ourselves and others, people and the environment in the way of Western dualism, but we value the consistency between the two ... This will definitely be the starting point of the" cultural community " [16].Unlike Hatoyama 's civilization-based East Asian Community, Rudd tends to build a "Western-centric" Asia- Pacific community that encompasses non-Asian countries such as Australia and the United States, as well as regulatory and Legal principles[17]. It can be said that these different visions and ideas on regional construction have led to the emergence of "multilateralism 2.0" in the Asia-Pacific region.

Although the above three theories have considerable explanatory power in different aspects, they have failed to explain the timing of the phenomenon of "competitive multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific region" after the international financial crisis, the links between actors, and the "multilateralism 2.0" Dynamic changes. Realists believe that multilateralism and multilateral institutions are an extension of the power politics of great powers, which may be correct. However, after the international financial crisis in 2008, why and how did the major actors promote this new wave of multilateralism? Scholars supporting the theory of power transfer have interpreted this development as the result of increasing competition between the United States and China [18]. However, when exploring why other large or medium powers such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea are actively participating in the construction of the system, the explanatory power of this theory is lacking. As neoliberals insist, some of the new institutions established during the period of "Multilateralism 2.0" meet the functional needs of the region. However, the East Asian Community, the Asia-Pacific Community, and China's peripheral destiny communities are direct examples of different countries linking their preferred economic models to broader national strategies to strengthen their regional strategic positions. Therefore, these initiatives seem to go beyond the purely functional significance emphasized by neoliberalism. For constructivists, ideas constitute the basic motivation for international relations actors' behavior choices. However, purely conceptual competition between nations cannot really explain the dynamic changes in state behavior in the context of Asia-Pacific "multilateralism 2.0". Why does the United States continue to support existing mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit, while other major powers have proposed new systems to prevent a possible strategic contraction by the United States in the region? Furthermore, constructivist ideology cannot explain why these major actors are the establishment of a new multilateral mechanism was proposed shortly after the financial crisis, rather than earlier or later. Timing cannot be explained solely on the basis of accidental thoughts by leaders.

### 3. Indo-pacific strategy deep analysis

The main point of the theory of institutional checks and balances is that, in the context of globalization with increasing economic interdependence, countries tend to pursue maximization of their power and influence through competition in multilateral mechanisms. Competition is achieved through "institutional checks and balances." [19-20] The theory of institutional checks and balances, also known as "institutional realism," is a middle-level theory built on the realist theoretical framework. Institutional realism is a theory of realism, emphasizing that competition rather than cooperation is the normal state under the anarchic international system, while emphasizing that institutions can be a tool to help nations compete for power and influence. Like military checks and balances, countries can pursue security and development through institutional checks and balances. After 2008, the author takes institutional competition among countries in the Asia-Pacific region in the fields of security, economy, and diplomacy as the research object, and through a series of case analysis, continues to promote the development and improvement of the theory of institutional checks and balances.

The theory of system checks and balances proposes that there are three types of system checks and balances between countries, which are inclusive system checks and balances, exclusive system checks and balances, and inter-system checks and balances [21]. Inclusive institutional checks and balances refer to the strategy of incorporating target countries of checks and balances into the multilateral system. The rules and norms of this multilateral mechanism will be used to restrict and shape the behavior of target countries. For example, the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum was interpreted as a policy choice for regional countries to restrain and socialize China in the 1990s [22]. Exclusive system checks and balances refer to the strategic choice of excluding target countries from the existing system. The cohesion and cooperation of this mechanism will place pressure on the target country to counterbalance or counteract the threat posed by the target country. After the Asian financial crisis, the ASEAN "10 + 3" mechanism is an example of Asian countries adopting an exclusive system of checks and balances with the United States [23]. Inter-system checks and balances are an expanded form of system checks and balances. Such checks and balances can be inclusive or exclusive. The uniqueness of checks and balances between systems lies not in the goals of the system checks and balances, but in the way the system checks and balances. Countries that adopt a strategy of checks and balances between systems not only support the establishment of a new system, but also try to use this new mechanism to replace the existing old mechanism rather than promote the coexistence of the new and old systems [24-25].

Through the theory of system checks and balances, we can analyze the Indian-Pacific concept and the rise of the Indian-Pacific strategy from three levels. First of all, the Indian-Pacific geopolitical concept advocated by the United States, Japan, Australia, and India and the subsequent Indian-Pacific strategy are the institutional checks and balances strategies adopted by these countries in the context of globalization, and the goal of this system is China. As China's strength in regional affairs continues to grow and rise, doubts about China from surrounding countries have also risen. Although China has always pursued the path of peaceful development, the contradiction between it and the United States and its regional allies is structural, that is, it cannot be changed by a country in China through peaceful foreign policy. because

Therefore, from the perspective of rational choice, it is not difficult to understand why the United States has tightened checks and balances on China's rise after 2008. From Obama to Trump, US policy toward China has gradually shifted from contact to checks and balances, and even to the level of confrontation. This point from Trump in his 2017

It is not difficult to see that China is positioned as a "strategic adversary" in the "National Security Strategy" report. By the same token, Japan's defense against China is far better than that of the United States. The reason is also very simple. As a neighbor of China, Japan will be the first country

affected by China's rise. In 2010, China surpassed Japan in terms of GNP and became the second largest economy in the world. For historical reasons, territorial disputes still exist between China and Japan, which has increased Japanese concerns about China. As an ally of the United States, Australia has always pursued a security strategy of "beauty is foresight." Therefore, its security animosity towards China mainly comes from its allies with the United States. India's attitude towards China is similar to Japan's, because India is also a neighbor of China and there are still unresolved border issues.

Nonetheless, the four countries did not rely on military means to balance China's "potential threat." The main reason is that under the background of globalization, the economic interdependence between China and these countries has deepened. As the world's second largest economy and largest trading country, China is one of the most important trading and economic partners of these four countries. Therefore, any military check and balance and military confrontation will bring huge losses to the economies and trade of these countries. Therefore, these countries rationally chose a system of checks and balances rather than a military check and balance in the traditional sense. However, this is not to say that these countries will abandon military checks and balances against China.

#### **4. Balance measurement of indo- pacific strategy**

In the face of China's continued rapid rise, the United States during the Obama and Trump eras tried to check China's exclusive institutional checks and balances through the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and the Indo-Pacific mechanism, but they have not risen to the point of comprehensive confrontation and military checks and balances. In order to resolve the obstacles caused by this exclusive institutional arrangement to China's rise, this article proposes three policy suggestions based on the theory of institutional checks and balances.

First, adopt a differentiation policy to disrupt the formation and escalation of cooperation within the Indo-Pacific mechanism. At present, there is a view in China that India is the key to Indo- Pacific cooperation. Therefore, as long as India's work is done well, China's strategic pressure from the United States on the Indo-Pacific will be self-defeating. The easing of China-India relations will indeed weaken the pressure of the US-India-Pacific strategy on China. However, China's response policy would be too passive and singular if it only relied on easing Sino-Indian relations. The relaxation of China-India relations not only depends on China's unilateral efforts, but also puts all hope on the change of Indian attitude. China may have to pay unnecessary concessions and costs. Indian leaders also understand its

importance in the U.S.-Indo-Pacific strategy and Indo-Pacific geopolitics, so it is highly likely that

Strategically meets both sides, not only seeking strategic balance between China and the United States.

At the end of October 2018, Abe's successful visit to China and China-Japan relations have improved positively. Abe is an advocate of the Indo-Pacific concept, and the leader of the Four Countries 'Infrastructure Investment Fund and the "Four Nations Security Dialogue". Improving relations with Japan will ease China's pressure in the Indo-Pacific region. In early November 2018, the new Australian Foreign Minister also visited Beijing, hoping to improve bilateral relations with China. Australia will usher in a general election in 2019. If the current opposition Labor Party comes to power, due to economic pressure, it may seek to improve relations with China. This will be the best time for China to divide the pressure on the Indo-Pacific mechanism. China should clearly oppose the further development of the exclusive "Four Nations Security Dialogue". In 2008, Kevin Rudd from the Australian Labor Party once withdrew from the "Four Countries Security Dialogue" advocated by the United States because of China's opposition, which led to the "Four Countries Security Dialogue" mechanism being suspended for 10 years. Although it is not necessary for China to hope that the new Australian government will take the initiative to withdraw from the history of the "Four Nations Security Dialogue" mechanism, it should also take advantage of the Australian

government's eagerness to repair its relations with China and effectively weaken the further development of the "Four Countries Security Dialogue".

The geopolitical concept of Indo-Pacific and its related Indo-Pacific strategy advocated by the United States and its allies have led to major changes in the regional security landscape facing China. Because of the irreconcilable structural conflict between China and the United States, the United States has regarded China as its main "competitor". The trade war launched by Trump is just the beginning of a comprehensive confrontation between China and the United States. The United States will also curb and suppress China's rise in other areas. Because China and the United States still have a high degree of interdependence in terms of economy and trade, the United States and its allies are still hesitant to adopt a military strategy to contain China. Therefore, China needs to actively open its economic sphere and continuously deepen its economic interdependence with the United States and other countries in the world, so as to prevent China and the United States from falling into the "New Cold War" in the form of the United States and the Soviet Union.

However, the deepening of economic interdependence cannot fundamentally resolve the strategic competition between China and the United States. The Indo-Pacific strategy advocated by the United States is actually an exclusive system of checks and balances on the rise of China by the United States and its allies. Its purpose is to balance and limit China's growing regional influence through economic and security cooperation implemented by the United States, Japan, Australia, and India in the Indo-Pacific mechanism. This kind of exclusive system checks and balances may not only put China in a deep isolation in regional diplomacy, but may also create regional joint effects, encouraging some countries that have contradictions and disputes with China to take the initiative to challenge China. Therefore, China should make strategic preparations as early as possible to prevent the negative impact of the US-Indo-Pacific strategy on China's regional security and economic cooperation.

Starting from the theory of institutional competition, China should consider a strategy of mechanism differentiation and improve the bilateral relations with India, Japan, and Australia to achieve the collapse of the Indo-Pacific region of the United States. At the same time, China needs to consider strengthening relations with ASEAN and weakening the US-dominated India-Pacific mechanism by vigorously supporting the establishment of an ASEAN-based multilateral mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region. This is the strategic application of checks and balances between systems in the theory of system checks and balances. In the end, China can implement an inclusive system check and balance strategy. By actively participating in and joining the construction of the Indo-Pacific mechanism, it can weaken the relevance of the Indo-Pacific mechanism to China and resolve hostility. By expanding the Quartet's Security Dialogue, China can positively influence the formulation and implementation of the regional security agenda. If China can link the Belt and Road Initiative with the infrastructure

The combination of construction and construction fund projects can not only promote China's "Belt and Road" projects to gradually become international and multilateral, but also enhance China's status and influence in global governance. Although Sino-US relations are facing structural contradictions, the possibility of direct military conflict is low due to the mutual deterrence of nuclear weapons and the high cost of economic interdependence. Therefore, institutional checks and balances will be the main form of the strategic game between the United States and China, and various forms of institutional checks and balances around Indo-Pacific will be the key to influencing China's peaceful rise in the region and worldwide.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper believes that the order transformation based on institutional checks and balances may be more peaceful than the transformation process currently widely believed in the academic community. Although the purpose of institutional checks and balances is to compete for dominance and power in the multilateral system and the new regional order, the means of institutional checks

and balances is different from traditional hard checks and balances strategies such as allies or arms development. Its main characteristics are rulemaking and agenda setting.

Although exclusive institutional checks and balances may be more hostile than inclusive institutional checks and balances, regional conditions of competitive multilateralism under certain conditions and circumstances can alleviate potential tensions and confrontations between countries through some degree of institutional overlap. Although institutional overlap in the era of multilateralism seems redundant and inefficient in resolving regional disputes, it can be argued that it is the intensification of institutional checks and balances among the major Asia-Pacific powers that makes such overlapping multilateralism inevitable. Therefore, the unintended consequence of such institutional overlap may be the peaceful transformation of regional order. Of course, this result will be more likely if the major powers can achieve a new balance between power, interests, and norms in the new regional architecture, and if the hot issues of security in the Asia-Pacific region are properly controlled.

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