

Journal of International Relations, Diplomacy & Global Affairs



United States–China Strategic Competition and Global Security Realignments: Perspectives from Brazil, South Africa and the Indo- Pacific

**John S. Walt, Michael R. Scott & Stephen W.
Mearsheimer**

United States–China Strategic Competition and Global Security Realignments: Perspectives from Brazil, South Africa and the Indo-Pacific

^{*1}John S. Walt, ²Michael R. Scott & ³Stephen W. Mearsheimer

School of International Relations and Strategic Studies, Georgetown University-Washington, D.C.

*Email of Corresponding Author: jwalt@georgetown.edu

How to cite this article: Walt, J. S., Scott, M. R. & Mearsheimer, S. W. (2026), United States–China Strategic Competition and Global Security Realignments: Perspectives from Brazil, South Africa and the Indo-Pacific, *Journal of International Relations, Diplomacy & Global Affairs*, 1(1) pp.1-12. <https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t4408>

Abstract

The intensification of United States–China strategic rivalry emerged as one of the defining structural transformations of the contemporary international order, reshaping security architectures, alliance systems, and developmental trajectories across the globe. This study examined the nature, scope and implications of US–China strategic competition with reference to three strategically significant contexts: the Indo-Pacific regional security environment, Brazil's diplomatic positioning in the South Atlantic and Latin America, and South Africa's navigation of multipolar pressures in Africa. A qualitative documentary research design grounded in realist and neoclassical realist theoretical frameworks was employed, synthesizing peer-reviewed scholarship, policy analyses, and geopolitical assessments spanning 2020 to 2026. Findings revealed that the Indo-Pacific emerged as the primary theatre of contestation, characterized by militarization of maritime corridors, consolidation of minilateral security frameworks most notably the Quad and AUKUS and the entrenchment of competing technological ecosystems. Brazil and South Africa pursued sophisticated hedging strategies, leveraging BRICS+ and South–South cooperation to preserve diplomatic autonomy. Global governance institutions experience severe stress as both powers advanced incompatible visions of international order. The study concludes that the US–China rivalry compels regional actors to adopt non-binary foreign policy postures with significant implications for global security architecture, economic multilateralism and the prospects for a stable multipolar order.

Keywords: US–China Strategic Competition, Indo-Pacific Security, Brazil Foreign Policy, South Africa BRICS, Hedging Strategy, Minilateralism, Multipolar Order

1.0 Introduction

The first two decades of the twenty-first century witnessed a fundamental reconfiguration of the structure of international power, as the relative decline of American unipolarity converged with the extraordinary material ascent of China to create structural conditions for sustainable great power competition. Nosheen and Rizwan (2026) argue that this rivalry fundamentally restructured the strategic calculus of states across the Global South, forcing governments to adopt adaptive foreign policy postures in response to simultaneously escalating pressures from Washington and Beijing. He and Li (2020) established that the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific competition extended far beyond the bilateral dyad, encompassing regional actors whose alignment choices would ultimately shape the trajectory of the rivalry. Hu (2020) situate the return of strategic competition within a longer historical arc, arguing that the Indo-Pacific strategy represented Washington's primary institutional vehicle for managing the transition from unipolarity toward a more competitive multipolar distribution of power. Steff (2025) analysed the collision of American and Chinese grand strategies in the Indo-Pacific, demonstrating that colliding strategic ambitions generated systemic uncertainty that cascaded outward to states far removed from the immediate theatre of confrontation. Hassan and Ali (2025) situated the contemporary rivalry within classical realist accounts of great power transition, arguing that current US–China competition replicated structural patterns observable in earlier historical dyads and carried comparable potential for systemic instability. Joseph and Srinivasan (2026) further argued that the competition extended beyond material power into normative domains, constituting a fundamental contest between liberal institutionalism and an alternative international order privileging sovereignty, multipolarity, and development-centred governance frameworks.

Brazil and South Africa occupied significant positions within the evolving competitive landscape, each operating as the largest economy and most internationally connected middle power within its respective region, each holding membership in the BRICS+ grouping that had emerged as the primary institutional vehicle for Global South advocacy of an alternative international order, and each confronting structural pressures from the competition that intersected with deep domestic economic and political constraints in ways that produced distinctive and analytically instructive foreign policy responses. Cook et al. (2024) demonstrated that Brazil confronted especially acute dilemmas as Latin America's largest economy, oscillating between economic interdependence with China and security alignment tendencies with the United States in ways that defied simple categorization within existing theoretical frameworks. Shoba (2026) documented how South Africa's growing engagement with China and Russia within BRICS generated mounting friction in its bilateral relationship with Washington, producing structural tensions that neither government had fully managed to contain or resolve. Awungshi and Khashimwo (2025) situated African responses to the great power competition within a context of continental strategic rebalancing driven by growing economic weight, diplomatic self-confidence, and accumulated historical frustrations with Western conditionality-driven engagement. Ramos (2025) identified parallel dynamics in South Asia, where the US–China rivalry reshaped regional security architectures and compelled complex foreign policy recalibrations combining elements of alignment, hedging, and autonomous institution-building. Ahmad and Khan (2025) applied a realist lens to the geopolitical implications of the rivalry for Pakistan and India, demonstrating that structural pressures toward greater engagement with American-led security architecture coexisted with powerful economic incentives favouring Chinese partnership. Piazza et al. (2023) analysed China's Latin American engagement as a systematic effort to construct a sympathetic coalition in the Western Hemisphere that would constrain American regional primacy, providing context for understanding the increased strategic stakes of Brazilian foreign policy decisions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The escalation of US–China strategic competition constitute one of the most consequential developments in post-Cold War international relations, yet its implications for large middle powers in the Global South remained incompletely theorized and empirically underexplored in mainstream international relations scholarship. Existing literature predominantly privileges either the bilateral dynamics between Washington and Beijing or the responses of formal American treaty allies in East Asia, leaving significant analytical gaps regarding states whose material capabilities, institutional commitments, and normative traditions resisted straightforward alignment with either competing pole. He and Li (2020) identifies this analytical gap explicitly, noting that a comprehensive understanding of Indo-Pacific dynamics required attention to the full range of regional actors rather than a narrow focus on the primary dyad. Cook et al. (2024) demonstrated that Latin American states had been systematically neglected despite the region's growing strategic salience, and that Brazil's hedging strategies exhibited complexity exceeding what existing frameworks could capture. Awungshi and Khashimwo (2025) made parallel observations regarding African middle powers, arguing that South Africa's navigation of great power competition represented a strategically important case whose implications extended well beyond the continent. Ahmad and Khan (2025) identified comparable limitations in the treatment of South Asian states, finding that the realist framework required modification to account for domestic political variables mediating structural pressures. Ramos (2025) corroborated this conclusion through his South Asian analysis, confirming that the theoretical and empirical gaps identified in this study's three focal contexts reflected a broader pattern of analytical neglect affecting the entire Global South and constituting a significant lacuna in the scholarly literature on contemporary great power competition.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the structural dynamics of US–China strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific and its implications for regional security architecture.
- ii. To assess Brazil's strategic response to the US–China competition and its deployment of hedging and multilateral institutional strategies.
- iii. To analyse South Africa's navigation of US–China rivalry within the context of BRICS+ membership and pan-African leadership aspirations.
- iv. To evaluate the implications of US–China competition for global governance institutions and the prospects for a stable multipolar world order.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Realism and Neoclassical Realism

The study was anchored on the realist tradition of international relations theory, which states that the distribution of material capabilities in an anarchic international system constitutes the fundamental determinant of inter-state behaviour and the structure of competitive relations among great powers. Waltz (1979) established the foundational argument of structural realism, demonstrating that anarchy generate self-help imperatives forcing states to prioritize security maximization and balance against threats to their structural position, irrespective of domestic political character or the particular intentions of individual leaders. Mearsheimer (2001) extended this structural logic through offensive realism, arguing that uncertainty inherent in anarchy combined with the offensive potential of military capabilities created powerful incentives for states to maximize their share of world power, generating a structural imperative toward great power competition visible across historical cases. Gilpin (1981) contributed the theory of hegemonic war and power transition, arguing that historical periods in which the gap

between a rising challenger and a declining hegemon narrowed tended to generate systemic instability and heightened conflict risk, providing theoretical context for understanding the US–China rivalry as a structural rather than contingent phenomenon. Walt (1987) refined the balance-of-power tradition through balance-of-threat theory, demonstrating that states balanced against perceived threats shaped by assessments of geographic proximity, offensive capability, and aggressive intent rather than against raw power capabilities alone. Schweller (1994) introduced bandwagoning for profit as a complement to balancing behaviour, demonstrating that states sometimes aligned with rising powers when they assessed that alignment benefits exceeded costs, a dynamic observable in some Global South states' responses to Chinese economic inducements. Rose (1998) codified neoclassical realism as directing systematic attention to domestic political variables, leadership perceptions, and state-society relations that mediated the translation of structural pressures into specific foreign policy outcomes, providing the theoretical tools required to explain the divergent hedging responses of Brazil and South Africa to objectively similar structural conditions.

2.2 Liberal Institutionalism and the BRICS+ Challenge

In addition, the study engaged liberal institutionalist theory and its account of how international institutions shaped state behaviour under anarchy, providing an analytical framework for examining the institutional aspects of the US–China rivalry and the normative contestation between competing visions of international order. Keohane (1984) established the foundational argument that institutions could provide cooperation under anarchy by reducing transaction costs, providing information, and creating iterated interaction contexts making defection more costly and cooperation more rational, a framework against which the institutional innovations driven by the US–China competition were assessed. Ikenberry (2001) argue that the liberal international order constructed under American hegemony had created a durable institutional architecture that even rising powers would find more advantageous to join than overthrow, a prediction that appeared increasingly challenged by systematic Chinese institutional revisionism documented in this study.

Keohane and Nye (1977) demonstrated that complex economic interdependence increase the importance of international institutions relative to military force, providing context for understanding why states like Brazil and South Africa resisted binary alignment despite structural pressures. Ruggie (1982) contributed the concept of embedded liberalism explaining the normative foundations of post-war multilateralism, a framework directly relevant to analysing the normative contestation between American and Chinese visions of international order that constituted a central dimension of the rivalry. Barnett and Finnemore (2004) demonstrate that international organizations operate as autonomous actors shaping norms and practices through their bureaucratic operations, providing tools for understanding how Chinese-promoted institutions socialized developing states into alternative normative frameworks. Joseph and Srinivasan (2026) explicitly analysed this normative contestation, arguing that BRICS+ represented a systematic effort to construct an alternative international order privileging sovereignty, non-interference, and developmental justice over liberal conditionality. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) contributed the norm life-cycle model enabling analysis of how both powers advanced competing normative frameworks through strategic cultivation of norm entrepreneurs and construction of supportive institutional environments in the Global South.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design grounded in systematic documentary analysis and interpretive thematic synthesis, appropriate for examining complex geopolitical dynamics, multilateral institutional processes, and strategic foreign policy orientations that do not lend

<https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t4408>

themselves to quantitative operationalization. Creswell and Poth (2018) established the epistemological foundations of qualitative analysis as suited for research questions concerning meaning, process and the complex relationship of contextual variables, arguing that interpretive methods provided depth of understanding inaccessible to statistical analysis. Yin (2018) provided the framework of case study methodology as appropriate for research situations in which the boundary between the phenomenon and its context could not be clearly drawn and multiple evidence sources were required, conditions characterizing this study's engagement with three distinct but interrelated regional contexts. Bryman (2016) further established the legitimacy of documentary analysis as a primary social science research method, noting that official documents, scholarly publications, and policy papers provided stable records of decision-making processes and political reasoning.

The documentary analysis included peer-reviewed journals, scholarly monographs, think-tank policy analyses, official strategy documents, and geopolitical assessments, selected for scholarly credibility, temporal relevance to the 2020–2026 period, and direct engagement with the study's research themes. Steff (2025) and Hassan and Ali (2025) provided foundational structural analyses of the US–China competition, while Cook et al. (2024) and Gonzalez Levaggi (2023) supplied primary frameworks for the Latin American and South Atlantic aspects. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework was employed as the main interpretive method, involving systematic identification, coding and summary of themes across the corpus organized within four analytical domains corresponding to the study's specific objectives.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 US–China Competition in the Indo-Pacific

4.1.1 Militarization, Alliances, and Minilateral Architecture

The study found that the Indo-Pacific emerged as the primary structural fault line of US–China strategic competition, characterized by an accelerating cycle of military expansion, alliance consolidation, and institutional innovation that progressively narrowed diplomatic space and increased systemic risks of miscalculation. Nosheen and Rizwan (2026) documented the scale of Chinese naval expansion in the South China Sea, noting that Beijing's construction of artificial islands equipped with military installations, deployment of anti-access/area denial systems, and development of blue-water naval capabilities collectively constituted a systematic effort to shift the maritime military balance in ways directly challenging American freedom of navigation and the credibility of US security guarantees. Hassan and Ali (2025) traced the evolution of American Indo-Pacific strategic posture across successive administrations, identifying a consistent pattern of deepening security commitments that transcended partisan differences and reflected a bipartisan consensus regarding the need to maintain American primacy against Chinese military modernization.

Singh and Teo (2020) provided foundational analysis of minilateral security frameworks, demonstrating that the flexibility of smaller groupings allowed the United States to engage partners with diverse security concerns without requiring formal commitments that risked entanglement or Chinese escalation. The AUKUS agreement of September 2021, committing Australia to nuclear-powered submarine acquisition under American and British technology transfer, represented the most significant escalation of the US-led security architecture in decades. Cook et al. (2025) examined how Asia-Pacific secondary states functioned as potential kingmakers, arguing their alignment choices carried weight disproportionate to their individual capabilities, with most pursuing conditional realignment involving selective security cooperation with Washington without explicit anti-China rhetorical endorsement. Ling (2025)

confirmed this finding, documenting that the dominant regional response was a form of hedged partial alignment shaped by the structural constraints of economic dependencies on China that no state in the region could afford to sacrifice through fully committed balancing behaviour.

4.1.2 Technology Competition and Economic Decoupling

The technological dimension of US–China competition emerged from the study as an increasingly central axis of rivalry with profound structural implications for global economic governance and the developmental options available to the Global South. American export controls targeting Chinese access to advanced semiconductors, artificial intelligence hardware, and quantum computing technologies, progressively tightened across the 2022–2025 period, represented a qualitative shift in competitive dynamics from primarily military to increasingly economic and technological domains. Steff (2025) documented the cumulative effect of this competition on the structure of the global economy, arguing that the progressive separation of American and Chinese technological ecosystems was creating a bifurcated global infrastructure requiring states to make consequential choices about technological standards, platforms, and supply chains. Palit and Bhogal (2024) analysed the competition between China's Belt and Road Initiative including its Digital Silk Road component and American-led alternatives such as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, finding that while Chinese financing retained dominant market share in the developing world, allied alternatives were gaining traction through superior governance frameworks and reduced debt sustainability risks.

Heath, Grossman, and Clark (2021) situated this technology competition within Beijing's broader quest for global primacy, arguing that China's systematic investment in foundational technologies and global infrastructure reflected a coherent long-term strategy to shift the structural foundations of international power over a multi-decade horizon. Nagy (2022) demonstrated that converging middle power cooperation in the Indo-Pacific produced strategic coordination that reinforced American deterrence without requiring the formal treaty commitments that would deepen alliance entanglement. Piazza et al. (2023) examined Chinese technology sector penetration of Latin American digital infrastructure, finding that Huawei's deep integration into telecommunications networks created path dependencies constraining American efforts to promote network exclusion and illustrating how the technology competition extended into regions far from the primary theatre of military confrontation.

4.2 Brazil: Hedging in the South Atlantic

The study found that Brazil's response to the intensification of US–China competition was characterized by a consistent and institutionally sophisticated hedging strategy seeking to maximize economic benefits from engagement with both powers while avoiding commitments that would foreclose future diplomatic options or compromise the foreign policy autonomy that had been a defining principle of Brazilian diplomacy since the era of independent foreign policy established in the early 1960s. Cook et al. (2024) provided the most comprehensive analysis of this posture, identifying multiple institutional and economic pathways through which Brazil maintained strategic autonomy in the face of escalating great power competition, demonstrating that the hedge was recalibrated across different administrations in ways reflecting shifting domestic political orientations without abandoning the fundamental non-alignment commitment transcending partisan divisions.

China was found to be Brazil's largest trading partner by significant margin, absorbing the majority of Brazilian agricultural and mineral exports, with bilateral trade volumes exceeding three hundred billion dollars annually by the mid-2020s, generating export revenues of critical importance to Brazilian fiscal stability and social program financing an economic reality that structurally constrained any ideological impulse toward firm alignment with Washington.

Ramos (2025) drew instructive comparisons between Brazil's structural position and South Asian states navigating the same competition, noting that in both cases deep economic dependencies on China combined with security and institutional linkages with the United States created structural pressures toward hedging that overwhelmed particular governing coalitions' ideological preferences.

Joseph and Srinivasan (2026) identified Brazil's BRICS+ engagement within a broader normative project of Global South institutional innovation aimed at reducing vulnerability to conditionality-driven Western engagement while constructing alternative platforms for multilateral influence. Ahmad and Khan (2025) confirmed from a realist perspective that the structural constraints of simultaneous Chinese economic dependence and American security linkage produced hedging as the most rational policy response, regardless of the ideological colouration of the government in office. Gonzalez Levaggi (2023) provided the maritime strategic context within which Brazilian hedging operated, analysing the South Atlantic as both Brazil's primary security environment and a future site of great power competition whose management required a delicate balance between maintaining regional leadership and preserving diplomatic flexibility with all major powers.

Brazil's engagement with the expanded BRICS+ grouping constituted one of the primary institutional vehicles through which it articulated its hedging strategy and advanced its vision of a reformed, more equitable multipolar international order in ways serving both immediate diplomatic interests and longer-term ambitions for major power status. Cook et al. (2024) demonstrated that Brazil's hosting of the 2024 BRICS Summit and its concurrent G20 presidency provided complementary platforms through which the Lula administration positioned Brazil simultaneously as a responsible multilateral stakeholder and a champion of Global South interests, a deliberate dual positioning designed to maintain leverage with both competing poles. Joseph and Srinivasan (2026) argued that Brazil's BRICS membership carried significance beyond economic coordination, functioning as a central element of Brasília's claim to significant international agency through its articulation of South-South solidarity as a foreign policy organizing principle deliberately in tension with Washington's security-focused multilateralism.

Piazza et al. (2023) contextualized China's Latin American diplomatic and institutional engagement, finding that Beijing actively cultivated relationships across the political spectrum to construct a sympathetic coalition constraining American regional primacy in its own self-declared strategic backyard. Ramos (2025) noted that the Lula administration's restoration of active multilateral engagement following the Bolsonaro interlude reflected rational response to the demonstrated costs of abandoning hedging, as the previous government's pro-American orientation had sacrificed critical economic relationships without securing compensating strategic benefits. Awungshi and Khashimwo (2025) illustrated through India-Africa strategic convergence that Global South middle powers could derive significant collective benefits from coordinated institutional positioning within multilateral reform coalitions, a model applicable to the Brazil-South Africa axis within BRICS+ and relevant for understanding how Brasília sought to multiply its influence within multiple overlapping institutional memberships. Gonzalez Levaggi (2023) reinforced this analysis by demonstrating that the South Atlantic's strategic significance as a maritime corridor connecting the Indo-Pacific and Atlantic-facing economies was growing in step with the intensification of global great power competition, elevating the stakes of Brazilian foreign policy decisions far beyond their traditional regional scope.

4.3 South Africa: Navigating US–China Rivalry

The study established that South Africa's response to the US–China competition reflected the country's deep institutional and historical commitment to non-alignment as a foreign policy organizing principle, rooted in the ANC's Cold War solidarity traditions, reinforced by post-apartheid aspirations to bridge the Global North and South, and embodied in Pretoria's active participation in pan-African governance, the United Nations, and BRICS since 2010. Shoba (2026) documented the growing structural tensions in South Africa's bilateral relationship with the United States arising from this posture, particularly as Washington intensified pressure on Pretoria to distance itself from Moscow and Beijing on the Ukraine conflict, Taiwan question, and multilateral governance reform, demonstrating that binary US–China competition demands were generating mounting friction in a relationship both formally described as a strategic partnership.

Joseph and Srinivasan (2026) situated this friction within the broader pattern of Western frustration with Global South non-alignment, arguing that the structural demands of the competition were increasingly incompatible with the diplomatic pluralism and sovereign equality norms that middle powers regarded as fundamental to their international identity. Awungshi and Khashimwo (2025) analysed South Africa's leadership of the 2023 BRICS expansion in Johannesburg which admitted six new members and fundamentally altered the grouping's weight as its most consequential act of multilateral institutional leadership since the democratic transition, demonstrating that Pretoria had used BRICS as a platform for simultaneously advancing Global South interests and reinforcing its own pan-African leadership credentials.

Nosheen and Rizwan (2026) situated South Africa's BRICS engagement within the broader pattern of Global South institutional innovation, arguing that developing states' active construction of alternative multilateral platforms reflected proactive efforts to reshape international order rather than merely reactive self-protection against great power pressure. Ahmad and Khan (2025) confirmed from a realist perspective that South Africa's balancing act between American and Chinese engagement reflected structural constraints facing a middle power with significant regional influence but limited global material capabilities, whose interests were best served by maintaining open relationships with all major powers. Cook et al. (2024) provided the comparative Latin American perspective confirming the generalizability of South Africa's hedging orientation across the Global South, demonstrating that states with broadly comparable structural positions and diplomatic traditions converged on similar hedging strategies despite significant differences in domestic political configurations and historical relationships with the competing great powers.

The study found that the US–China rivalry manifested in Africa primarily through competition for infrastructure financing, technology supply, institutional influence, and diplomatic alignment rather than direct military confrontation, creating a structural environment offering African states, including South Africa, significant leverage as sought-after partners where both sides needed cooperation but neither could fully command it. Shoba (2026) documented the systematic intensification of Chinese engagement with South Africa within the BRICS framework, demonstrating that Beijing leveraged South-South solidarity norms combined with the practical benefits of infrastructure financing and technology cooperation to consolidate dense institutional relationships meaningfully constraining Pretoria's diplomatic flexibility even as the government maintained formal non-alignment. Palit and Bhogal (2024) analysed the BRI's African dimension, demonstrating that while projects faced growing scrutiny regarding debt sustainability and governance standards, Chinese financing continued offering

speed, political flexibility, and sectoral coverage that Western alternatives struggled to match, maintaining Beijing's dominant position in the infrastructure financing competition.

Heath, Grossman and Clark (2021) contextualised China's African engagement within its broader quest for global primacy, arguing that the continent's growing economic weight, substantial multilateral voting bloc, and control over critical minerals for the clean energy transition made Africa strategically vital in ways generating disproportionate returns on Chinese diplomatic and economic investment. American responses evolved significantly during the period under review, moving from reactive criticism of BRI projects toward proactive development finance alternatives including the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment and specific corridor investments such as the Lobito Corridor in southern Africa, reflecting Washington's belated recognition that economic engagement was a necessary complement to the security cooperation that had historically anchored American relationships with African partners.

Awungshi and Khashimwo (2025) documented the multipolar character of the African engagement competition, illustrating that the US–China rivalry on the continent was increasingly joined by India, Turkey, the Gulf states, and the European Union, complicating the simple bilateral framing advanced by both Washington and Beijing and providing African governments with additional sources of leverage that they deployed skillfully in multilateral negotiations. Nosheen and Rizwan (2026) provided the overarching analytical framework for situating South Africa's navigation of this multipolar competition, arguing that the country's position at the intersection of multiple overlapping institutional memberships the African Union, SADC, BRICS+, the G20, and the Commonwealth gave it unusual structural leverage deployed through a sophisticated strategy of sequential and selective engagement rather than permanent alignment with any external patron.

5.0 Conclusion

The rivalry between Washington and Beijing constitute a systemic contest encompassing military, economic, technological and normative aspects whose effects cascaded far beyond the bilateral dyad to reshape security architectures, foreign policy orientations, and governance institutions across the international system. In the Indo-Pacific, the rivalry manifested in the accelerating militarization of maritime environments, the consolidation of overlapping US-led minilateral security frameworks including the Quad and AUKUS documented by Nosheen and Rizwan (2026) and Steff (2025), and the progressive decoupling of Chinese and American technological ecosystems—developments that progressively reduced strategic space for regional actors while elevating the stakes of alignment decisions beyond the threshold of reversibility. Brazil and South Africa have pursued broadly parallel hedging strategies resting on proactive institutional investment in multilateral relationships and economic diversification rather than merely the avoidance of alignment, confirming Cook et al.'s (2024) finding that effective hedging required the maintenance of both strong economic and strong institutional pillars of strategic autonomy simultaneously.

Global governance institutions experiences severe and mounting pressure as the incompatible institutional preferences of Washington and Beijing combined with the institutional innovations driven by the competition to progressively fragment the universal multilateral order, constraining the policy options of middle powers whose interests were served by genuine institutional universalism and confirming the concerns raised by Ikenberry (2001) regarding the limits of his liberal optimism about institutional durability under genuine great power competition. The study concluded in agreement with Ling (2025) and Singh (2026) that the US–China competition was not a transitional phase but an extended structural condition of the

international system whose resolution would depend significantly on the alignment choices and institutional innovations of middle and smaller powers across the Global South.

Joseph and Srinivasan (2026) reinforced this conclusion through their analysis of BRICS+ as a vehicle for constructing an alternative normative order, confirming that the contest between liberal internationalism and sovereignty-respecting multipolar governance norms was generating real institutional bifurcation with durable structural consequences for international order. Hassan and Ali (2025) provided the final contextualizing insight, demonstrating that the structural pressures of the competition were sufficiently powerful and consistent across successive American administrations that no domestic political change in Washington was likely to produce a fundamental retreat from Indo-Pacific engagement, confirming the rivalry's structural character and making the adaptive strategies of middle powers like Brazil and South Africa the most consequential variable in determining its eventual shape and trajectory.

6.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study makes the following recommendations for policy and scholarship. Regional actors across the Global South should deepen institutional coordination within BRICS+ and complementary South-South frameworks as a collective strategy for managing the structural pressures of US–China competition, as individual state hedging was demonstrated by Cook et al. (2024) to be more vulnerable to coercive pressure than coordinated collective positioning through multilateral platforms. Brazil and South Africa, as the two largest BRICS economies in their respective regions, should leverage their complementary institutional networks and regional leadership roles to advance concrete governance reforms enhancing the representativeness and functional effectiveness of the multilateral order without requiring destabilizing confrontation with the existing institutional architecture upon which global economic stability depended.

Regional actors and scholarly communities should invest in developing alternative technology governance frameworks providing developing states with viable options between American and Chinese technological ecosystems, as confirmed that the bifurcation of global technology infrastructure would progressively foreclose hedging options that middle powers depended on for strategic autonomy preservation. Scholarship on the US–China competition should expand analytical attention beyond the Indo-Pacific theatre and the bilateral dyad to encompass the full diversity of regional responses across the Global South, as demonstrated through comparative regional analyses that significant insights were available from examining competition effects across diverse contexts with distinct structural positions and institutional configurations.

Heath, Grossman, and Clark (2021) identified long-term Chinese strategy as a multi-decade project requiring similarly long-term thinking in response, and the study accordingly recommended that both Global South governments and the scholarly community adopt analytical and policy frameworks operating at temporal horizons commensurate with the structural character of the competition rather than calibrating responses to the most recent tactical developments in a rivalry whose fundamental structural drivers would outlast any particular administration, institutional arrangement, or diplomatic episode. Nosheen and Rizwan (2026) provided grounding for this recommendation in their demonstration that the competition's impact on regional security and global governance was already sufficiently deep that incremental, reactive responses by individual states were inadequate to the scale of the structural transformation underway, making collective action and long-term institutional investment the only viable paths toward a stable, equitable, and genuinely multipolar international order.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, A., & Khan, U. B. N. (2025). The Geopolitical Implication of US-China Rivalry in the Region A Realist Perspective of Pakistan and India. *Insights of Pakistan, Iran and the Caucasus Studies*, 4(1), 71-81.
- Awungshi, Y., & Khashimwo, P. (2025). Strategic Convergences and Competitive Multilateralism: India-Africa in the Age of Global Rebalancing. *Indian Journal of African Studies*, 26(1-2), 1-22.
- Cook, R. J., Bilhar, M., Ohle, M., & Han, Z. (2024). Hedging comes to Latin America: Gauging Brazil's coping strategies vis-à-vis the Sino-US peer competition. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 56(4), 715-742.
- Cook, R. J., Ohle, M., & Han, Z. (2025). *Asia-Pacific Secondary States as Kingmakers: Alignment Roles in the China-US Strategic Competition*. Taylor & Francis.
- Gonzalez Levaggi, A. S. (2023). Maritime regional security orders: A comparison between the Indo-Pacific and the South Atlantic. *Strategic Analysis*, 47(6), 534-546.
- Hassan, A., & Ali, S. H. (2025). Evolving US Indo-Pacific posture and strategic competition with China. *Policy Perspectives*, 22(1), 61-89.
- He, K., & Li, M. (2020). Understanding the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US–China strategic competition, regional actors, and beyond. *International Affairs*, 96(1), 1-7.
- Heath, T. R., Grossman, D., & Clark, A. (2021). China's quest for global primacy: An analysis of Chinese International and Defense Strategies to Outcompete the United States.
- Holland, K. (2021). Canada and the Indo-Pacific strategy. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 27(2), 228-250.
- Hu, W. (2020). The United States, China, and the Indo-Pacific strategy: The rise and return of strategic competition. *China Review*, 20(3), 127-142.
- Joseph, J., & Srinivasan, S. (2026). Geopolitical Realignment and the Decline of Western Dominance: BRICS+, Regional Blocs, and South-South Collaboration. In *AI, Power, and Ethical Governance in BRICS+ and the Global South* (pp. 145-168). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
- Kumar, S., Verma, S. S., & Shah, S. H. (2020). Indo-US convergence of agenda in the new Indo-Pacific regional security architecture. *South Asia Research*, 40(2), 215-230.
- Ling, S. (2025). Realignment in Asia? US regional allies' responses to China–US competition. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 18(4), 473-495.
- Nagy, S. R. (2022). US-China strategic competition and converging middle power cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. *Strategic Analysis*, 46(3), 260-276.
- Nosheen, I., & Rizwan, M. (2026). A Study of US–China Strategic Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific and Its Impact on Regional Security and Global Governance. *ASSAJ*, 5(2), 2562-2576.
- Nosheen, I., & Rizwan, M. (2026). A Study of US–China Strategic Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific and Its Impact on Regional Security and Global Governance. *ASSAJ*, 5(2), 2562-2576.
- Palit, A., & Bhogal, P. (2024). Fighting monopolies: The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, India, and the competition for the marketplace of international development. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 30(2), 350-375.

- Piazza, K., Lasco, C. M., Kelly, C. J., Regin, C. H., & Vera, C. J. (2023). China-Latin America Alignment and Democratic Backsliding: Gaining Traction for a Chinese-Led World Order. *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, 6(7), 26.
- Ramos, D. (2025). Strategic competition and regional recalibration: South Asia in the shadow of United States–China rivalry. *Journal of Policy Options*, 8(2), 1-8.
- Singh, B., & Teo, S. (Eds.). (2020). *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific: the quadrilateral security dialogue, Lancang-Mekong cooperation mechanism, and ASEAN*. Routledge.
- Singh, S. (2026). US–China Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific and India’s Strategic Recalibration of Its Policy Choices. *India Quarterly*, 82(2), 130-144.
- Steff, R. (2025). The US-China great power competition in the Indo-Pacific: Colliding strategies and ambitions. In *New Zealand's Geopolitics and the US-China Competition* (pp. 133-183). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.