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**A Critical Analysis of the United States-China Geopolitical Contest in the  
Indo-Pacific Region: Implications for Africa's Regional Inclusion**

by

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## DECLARATION

I, Mmamashilo Herminah Mmako, declare that this dissertation titled: A Critical Analysis of the United States-China Geopolitical Contest in the Indo-Pacific Region: Implications for Africa's Regional Inclusion submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in International Relations at the University of Pretoria (UP) is my work, and I am the sole author thereof. This dissertation has not been submitted for a degree by me at any institution outside of UP. All sources of materials for this dissertation have been duly acknowledged using a comprehensive list of references.

Signature  \_\_\_\_\_

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## ABSTRACT

The Indo-Pacific region holds significant and strategic geopolitical importance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is in the region that the US-China strategic contest is prevalent, driven by economic, security, and geopolitical interests. This strategic contest implicates Africa, fostering strategic synergies in the broader Indo-Pacific. Although the US-China rivalry is the centrepiece of the geopolitical discourses of the Indo-Pacific, other major powers such as Australia, India, Japan, and ASEAN also influence regional dynamics. It is for this reason that the strategic US-China rivalry implicates regional members who also contest for power and influence in the broader Indo-Pacific with the extension of synergies with the African littoral nations in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This study provides a critical analysis of the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region and its implications for Africa's regional inclusion. It argues that African littoral nations of the IOR are largely excluded in the regional framework and discourses of the Indo-Pacific. Also, the continent is marginalized in the Indo-Pacific strategic visions and conceptions of key stakeholders such as the United States and Australia whose regional construct excludes the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region while the Association of Southeast Asia (ASEAN) has an ambiguous construct of the Indo-Pacific.

This geopolitical exclusion implies that Africa is left out of the strategic forums and initiatives of the Indo-Pacific such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ASEAN-ARF) and the United States Indo-Pacific Command (US-INDOPACOM). Through the use of a qualitative methodology and content analysis technique, the study examined this geopolitical exclusion and explored strategic opportunities for Africa's regional inclusion. This is done within tenets of the theory of new regionalism which the study adopted as a theoretical framework of its critical analysis to explain Africa's geopolitical exclusion in the Indo-Pacific region. New regionalism theory argues for regional multilateralism and aims to create non-hegemonic regions while supporting international cooperation.

The analysis of the study, however, shows that Africa lacks a clear policy focus and a common position in response to the growing significance and synergies within the broader Indo-Pacific. Secondly, the US-China strategic contest in the Indo-Pacific region and Africa serves as a strategic pathway for the inclusion of the continent in the region; regional members such as India and Japan also play a crucial role in Africa's inclusion in the region. Concluding that Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific presents economic, security, and geopolitical opportunities for the continent that cannot be ignored, the study recommends, amongst others, that Africa develops an Indo-Pacific Outlook/Strategy guided by the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)-Indo-Pacific Outlook (IPO) which includes the Eastern and Southern African littoral nations as geographic parts of the Indo-Pacific. The IPO should also guide the revision of America and Australia's Indo-Pacific visions to include Africa to the fore.

**Keywords:** Africa, China, Geopolitics, Indian Ocean, Indo-Pacific, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Maritime Security, Regionalism, United States

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the University of Pretoria's African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS-UP). May we continue to foster knowledge-driven engagement between Africa and the United States.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AAGC	Asia-Africa Growth Corridor
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
AOIP	ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
AUDTS	African Union’s Digital Transformation Strategy
AUKUS	Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States
B3W	Bring Back Better World
BUILD	Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development Act
BE	Blue Economy
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
DTA	Digital Transformation with Africa
EAC	East African Community
EAS	East Asia Summit
EU	European Union

EXIM	Export-Import
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GDP	Gross domestic product
IBSA	India, Brazil, and South Africa
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework
IPO	Indo-Pacific Outlook
INDOPACOM	Indo-Pacific Command
IONS	Indian Ocean Naval Symposium
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IPMDA	Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain
IPS	Indo-Pacific Strategy
IR	International relations
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
ORF	Observer Research Foundation
PACOM	Pacific Command

PGII	Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SCMP	South China Morning Post
SCS	South China Sea
TICAD	Tokyo International Conference on African Development
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UN	United Nations
UOW	University of Wollongong
US	United States
USPACOM	United States Pacific Command
WIO	Western Indian Ocean
WIP	Western Indo-Pacific
ZTE	Zhongxing Telecom Ltd



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## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 Introduction: Identification of the research theme

The Indo-Pacific region is a geographical/geopolitical and ideational/ideological construct comprising the Pacific and Indian Oceans into a regional unison (Khurana, 2017). Consequently, the Indo-Pacific region emerged as a strategic battleground in the geopolitical contest between the two world's major economic powers—the United States (US) and China (Hu, 2020). Pioneered by Japan's then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the Indo-Pacific region was reiterated as that of 'freedom' and 'openness' following Asia's global economic rise (Kuo, 2018). Abe's geopolitical stance was that the previous Asia-Pacific disregarded India and the broader Indian Ocean, therefore, the conceptual understanding of the newly adopted Indo-Pacific includes the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Haruko, 2020; Nath & Klingebiel, 2023). According to Kuo (2018), the coinage of the Indo-Pacific was owed to China's increasing assertiveness and expansion such as the US-coined 'Strings of Pearls' strategy, sparking regional agitation. Constructed by Booz Allen Hamilton in his 2005 study "Energy Futures in Asia", the Strings of Pearls was believed to be China's grand plan to expand its economic, security, and diplomatic influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) (Ashraf, 2017). Japan would later promote the Indo-Pacific concept to India and the US followed suit by promoting India into the architecture of the Indo-Pacific as a regional contender to China (Kuo, 2018).

Emerging US-China regional competition in the Indo-Pacific is a product of collapsed economic, geostrategic, and multilateral cooperation, becoming an ongoing rivalry (NATO, 2022). The Obama administration's 'Pivot to Asia' policy aimed to regain US leadership, with a hedging strategy against a rising China in mind (Hu, 2020). Although the pivot meant competing with China for strategic influence, the US still competed while cooperating with China on regional and global matters (Hu, 2020). Conversely, the Trump administration unveiled its Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision, with China identified as an arch-rival of the US and a threat to its national security in the Indo-Pacific (Hu & Meng, 2022). In retaliation, Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi echoed:

"The Indo-Pacific Strategy concocted by the United States is keen on creating various sorts of small cliques by ganging up on others under the banner of 'freedom and openness' while claiming to change China's surrounding environment. The strategy aims to contain China and attempts to make Asia-Pacific countries 'pawns'

of US hegemony.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2022b).

Questions surrounding the ‘actual intentions’ of the competing regional powers become apparent because of the US-China contest in the Indo-Pacific region. The legitimate question arising regards the authenticity of America’s policy towards the Indo-Pacific region; or is it about keeping China away from forming important partners and alliances in the region, fearing this making China even more powerful? Or is it about China aiming for regional and wider global dominance in propagating economic strategies, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as a weapon of exerting and attaining power and influence? Africa will also be a legitimate questioner should it be included in the Indo-Pacific framework and discourses for various strategic reasons to benefit the continent. The African littoral nations of Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, South Africa, Mozambique, Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles, Comoros, and the French Island of Réunion structure the strategic Western Indian Ocean (WIO), encompassing the Western Indo-Pacific (WIP) region (Mishra, 2019).

The WIO’s geostrategic importance has developed over the years—not just because of its energy transits and natural resources but also owing to the strategic US-China contest and growing geopolitical attraction to rising powers, such as India, Japan, and France (Gurjar, 2019; Nkala, 2021). Several of the Indo-Pacific players are emerging as major investors in Africa, with the emergence of India, Singapore, and Malaysia as some of the strategic investors on the continent (Fujita, 2021); however, less integration of the WIO nations with the Indo-Pacific nations exists despite their geoeconomic linkages and cooperation (Fujita, 2021).

This research centres on the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region and its Africa nexus. A geopolitical study analyses the influences of geography on power relations in global politics (Deudney, 2023).

“It is concerned with how geographical factors—natural resource endowments, population, strategic location and territory—as modified by economics and technology, affect relations between states and the struggle for world domination.”  
(Saxena, 2010:31).

Some studies assert that the Indo-Pacific’s geographical boundaries remain subject to interpretation dependent on each nation’s conception of its regional construct and how it projects its shifting interests (Schoeman & Wu, 2022). China rejects the conceptual use of the Indo-Pacific in its policies while engaging intensely within the Indo-Pacific framework

(Jaknanihan, 2022). Geographically, China is “located in the Indo-Pacific waters and is surrounded by the South China Sea (SCS), the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean ...” (Singh, 2023:26). Beijing favours "community of common destiny and shared future" concepts for its regional-led order, rejecting those associated with a peripheral China like the Indo-Pacific (Jaknanihan, 2022:40). The study however aims to base its argument on a Chinese-led regional inclusion for Africa founded on its regional engagements and rising geopolitical influence in the Indo-Pacific. This study focuses on the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical construct. Against the background, the study seeks to assemble a critical analysis of the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific while determining its implications for Africa’s regional inclusion.

## 1.2 Research Problem

The research problem of the study regards Africa's exclusion in the regional/geopolitical construct and debates of the Indo-Pacific region. Geographically/geopolitically, Africa is a part of the Indo-Pacific region through the Indian Ocean, crossing East and Southern Africa and, the representation of nine African littoral nations as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) members (Bohler-Muller, 2020; Nkala, 2021; Burah *et al.*, 2023). However, Africa is unequally accounted for among the geopolitical construct of some of the major powers of the Indo-Pacific. These powers include the US and Australia whose Indo-Pacific strategies exclude the African nations of the Indian Ocean region (Choong, 2019; Haruko, 2020; He & Feng, 2020; Henwood & Wu, 2022; Schoeman & Wu, 2022). Africa’s regional position in the Indo-Pacific region is, therefore, ambiguous also owing to the lack of institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific region (Beeson, 2018; Wu, 2022). Africa’s marginalization from Indo-Pacific discussions is partly because of the lack of scholarly attention on synergies between the two regions. Although several publications exist on this strategic nexus (Nkala, 2021; Henwood & Wu, 2022; Schoeman & Wu, 2022; Wu & Alden, 2022); their analyses are inadequate on Africa's regional exclusion within the Indo-Pacific region's geopolitical construct and regional structures.

Limited literature, including Henwood and Wu (2022), Schoeman and Wu (2022), and Wu (2022), provide a holistic background to the regional Indo-Pacific visions, which exclude Africa; however, a more in-depth analysis is required to critique Africa’s regional exclusion despite geopolitical linkages to the Indo-Pacific region. Further research is necessitated to shed light on the Africa-Indo-Pacific geopolitical nexus as a consolidation of Africa’s legitimacy in the membership framework of the Indo-Pacific. By analysing regional dynamics of the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region, the study attempts to regulate scholarly



divergence on the former and its influence on Africa's regional inclusion. Therefore, the study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Africa's geopolitical exclusion while promoting its geopolitical integration in the Indo-Pacific region. Significant research on the strategic competition between the US and China in the Indo-Pacific region is centred on devising countermeasures to guide China's assertiveness, presenting a threat to the regional order (Saeed, 2017; Medcalf, 2019; Lin *et al.*, 2020; Nagy, 2022; Randev, 2022; Upadhyaya, 2022; Cuong *et al.*, 2023); however, less scholarly attention focuses on the implications of the US-China Indo-Pacific geopolitical contest for regional influence to include strategic partners, such as Africa, in their framework, discourses, and fora. The study seeks to bridge these scholarly gaps.

### **1.3 Research aim(s) and Objectives**

The aim of the study is to analyse the geopolitical contest between the US and China in the Indo-Pacific region and its implications for Africa's regional inclusion. The specific research objectives are:

1. To examine the US and China's interests in the Indo-Pacific region.
2. To analyse Africa's geopolitical exclusion in the Indo-Pacific region.
3. To analyse the impact of the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region and Africa and its implications for the Africa-Indo-Pacific nexus.
4. To investigate how Africa can benefit from its inclusion in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The main research question is as follows:

What are the implications of the United States-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region for Africa's regional inclusion?

Answering this question requires answering more specific questions. The following are the research sub-questions:

1. How do the strategic interests of the US and China affect regional dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region?
2. To what extent is Africa excluded from the Indo-Pacific region, and how does it respond to this exclusion?

3. What are the implications of the geopolitical competition between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific region, and how do they influence the relationship between Africa and the Indo-Pacific?
4. How can Africa benefit from being part of the Indo-Pacific region?

## **1.5 Conceptual Clarification**

The present study is a critical analysis of the geopolitical contest between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific region and its implications for Africa's regional inclusion. A critical analysis connects new knowledge with existing knowledge, involves extensive reading, engaging theoretical concepts, and exploring implications on issues to reveal "how and why that is" (Barker, 2000; UOW, n.d.). According to Singh (2021:1), a critical analysis aims to "engage with a text instead of reading it over and accepting everything it says without questioning it". A critical analysis varies from a critique, it does not necessarily find fault with a body of work but helps to better understand a phenomenon, although it can have elements of a critique (Saint Mary's University Handout, 2018). Under a critical analysis, this study critiques Africa's exclusion from the United States and Australia's Indo-Pacific Strategies. The goal of the study is to establish regional pathways for Africa's geopolitical inclusion in the Indo-Pacific's framework and discourses, focusing on the US-China regional contest while observing it through a critical lens.

## **1.6 Research methodology**

### **1.6.1 Research design**

This study adopted a qualitative research design as an analysis method. A qualitative design is a type of research providing in-depth insights into a phenomenon or reality (Tenny *et al.*, 2017). This design is suitable because of its flexibility in developing critical analysis. According to Mohajan (2018:24), qualitative research "... is exploratory and seeks to explain 'how?' and 'why?' a social phenomenon, or programme, operates as it does in a context". The study aimed to analyse the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region. Opportunities were explored for Africa's regional inclusion by examining 'how?' and 'why?' the US and China's geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region may benefit the force for Africa's regional inclusion. This study utilized a qualitative approach due to its empirical nature, rather than a numerical-focused quantitative approach (McLeod, 2023). A more rigorous research design was necessitated because of the nature of the study and, such a design (qualitative) has guided the researcher to respond to the research questions adequately.

### **1.6.2 Data collection technique**

A desktop method was employed to collect the research data. The investigation relied on secondary data sources. These data sources include academic journal articles, books, chapters, eBooks, academic blogs, online newspapers, and magazines. Data were also collected from sources, such as government and institutional documents, mainly from ASEAN, AU, DIRCO, IORA, US Department of State, the White House, SADC, and the American, Chinese, Australian, and Japanese Foreign Ministries. The sources enabled the collection of data specific to the study objectives and questions. The study acquired the data set from sources, such as the Internet—including government and institutional websites, Google Scholar, Sabinet, JSTOR, the University of Pretoria library portal, and Academic Search Premier. The study only used materials relevant to the research.

### **1.6.3 Data analysis**

This study employed content analysis to analyse the collected data. Content analysis is a qualitative data analysis technique that analyses meanings, contexts, and intentions in passages or texts (Prasad, 2008). This study used content analysis to develop its critical analysis. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1278), content analysis aims to “... provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study”. According to Lindgren *et al.* (2020:2), content analysis “... offers the opportunities to analyse manifest and descriptive content, resulting in categories, as well as latent and interpretative content, resulting in themes”. The study divided the data sources into themes related to the research objectives.

### **1.6.4 Limitations of the study**

The research analysis followed the developments in the Indo-Pacific and its African connection. An analysis of the IORA Indo-Pacific Outlook (IORA-IPO) was included within a specific period that the researcher concluded her analysis on 31 January 2024. Regional developments after the analysis are omitted in the research owing to the submission deadline. Developments of the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific and Africa, regional dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, and Indo-Pacific-Africa cooperation after the analysis date, are excluded from the study. The study focuses on the African littoral nations belonging to the WIO region; motivations for the African continental integration derive from the discussion of the US-led and China-led WIO/WIP regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific’s geopolitical framework and discourses.

### **1.6.5 Ethical considerations**

The University of Pretoria's ethical code for research guided this research. The research used no confidential information without the permission of the relevant parties. All data sources are acknowledged.

### **1.7 Chapter outline**

Chapter 1 and 2 comprise the introduction, research theme, research problem, aim(s), objectives, questions, and methodology. The limitations, ethical considerations, and clarification of concepts of the study are also presented alongside the literature review and the theoretical framework guiding the study.

Chapter 3 examines the US and China's interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The chapter analyses the findings of their interests and implications on regional dynamics.

Chapter 4 highlights and critiques Africa's geopolitical exclusion in the Indo-Pacific region. It explores the findings and queries of Africa's regional exclusion in the Indo-Pacific, examines Africa's position in response to its regional exclusion and accentuates the geopolitical divergences that contribute to Africa's exclusion.

Chapter 5 explores three areas. First, it explores the implications of the US-China geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region and how it affects the regional stakeholders. Second, it evaluates the significance of the US-China competition in Africa as a strategic push for Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific. Last, it analyses the effects of the US-China geopolitical contest on Africa's relationship with the Indo-Pacific region.

Chapter 6 investigates the potential strategic benefits of Africa's inclusion in the Indo-Pacific framework and discussions. It then concludes with remarks on promoting Africa's regional inclusion.

Chapter 7 summarises the scope and chapters of the study, concludes the study, and presents recommendations and suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

This section reviews the literature on the geopolitical facets of the Indo-Pacific and Africa and the theoretical framework guiding the study. A literature review is important owing to its objective of providing a comprehensive summary and a critical synthesis of “... relevant available research and non-research literature on the topic being studied” (Dlamini, 2019:10). For this study, a critical literature review is the focal point of the relevant debates. Because of the complexity of the Indo-Pacific and the African factor, this section is divided into seven interrelated parts:

1. The geopolitical construct of the Indo-Pacific
2. Regional membership
3. Regional institutions
4. US-China geoeconomic and geopolitical rivalry in Africa
5. US-China strategic rivalry in Africa and Africa-Indo-Pacific security linkages
6. Africa’s maritime policy focus
7. The regional dynamics of the Indo-Pacific

The theoretical framework explores new regionalism to establish an understanding of the Indo-Pacific region, its various regional players, and its Africa connection.

#### 2.2 The geopolitical construct of the Indo-Pacific region: Africa and perspectives from the Quad

Over recent years, several debates regarded the Indo-Pacific as a new regional construct, particularly concerning Africa. For instance, Ha (2019) contends that there is no uniform understanding of the construct of the Indo-Pacific. Chacko (2016) agrees, asserting that the regional construct of the Indo-Pacific is heavily disputed among global players. Wu (2022:2) saliently remarks that it is primarily the African littoral nations that “are uneven, if at all, included by the Quad members”. Debates surrounding the Indo-Pacific regional construct are reflected among members of the Quadrilateral alliance comprised of the US, Japan, India, and Australia (the “Quad”) (O’Neil & West, 2020).

The US vaguely defined the Indo-Pacific region in its 2018 release of its Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) as stretching across the “Pacific coastline to the Indian Ocean ...” (the Whitehouse, 2022f). Cannon (2018:197) provides a clearer depth to such a definition, remarking that America’s geopolitical span of the Indo-Pacific region “... stretches from San Francisco westward to Mumbai on the west coast of India”. Choong (2019:417) further remarks that “... Australia’s regional construct of the Indo-Pacific region from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, connected by Southeast Asia, including India, North Asia, and the United States”. He and Feng (2020) agree, stating that the regional construct of the Indo-Pacific region by the US and Australia includes India only as part of the ‘Indo’.

The Indo-Pacific as an ideational, geopolitical, and geostrategic construct emerged in 2007 when former Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Shinzo Abe announced a ‘FOIP’ notion when approaching the Indian Parliament (Rossiter, 2018; Khurana, 2019; Koga, 2019; Li, 2022). Burah (2020) asserts that the necessity to link Asia and Africa through the Indian Ocean served as the geopolitical and strategic alliance between Japan and India, therefore, the emergence of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). Although often observed as a counter to the Chinese BRI (Beri, 2017; Rana & Ji, 2018; Taniguchi, 2020), the AAGC emphasises the importance of Africa in Japan and India’s regional vision. Prakash (2018b) explains that the AAGC is a strategic result of Japan’s FOIP vision and India’s Act East Policy for establishing a rules-based international order while strengthening relations between Asia and Africa.

According to Choong (2019), the Trump administration initially defined the Indo-Pacific region similarly to Japan and India, incorporating Africa into its Indo-Pacific construct. Choong remarks that shortly afterwards, the WIO (and the Middle East) was excluded from the release of the US National Security Strategy. Consequently, Australia, a dedicated ally of the United States, follows the lead of the US-Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) (He & Li, 2020). Abbondanza (2022) suggests that Australia applies a strategic alignment with the US and follows a US-led Indo-Pacific vision.

Japan and India, in opposition to their Quad counterparts, broadened the geopolitical construct of the Indo-Pacific region to include Africa, creating a broader and more inclusive region (Roy-Chaudhury & Estrada, 2018; Sneyd, 2022). East and Southern Africa’s strategic importance in the Indian Ocean and Africa’s socioeconomic potential spurred Japan to incorporate Africa into its Indo-Pacific regional framework (Agastia, 2020). Abe’s 2016 ‘Confluence of the two Seas’ (unification of the Indian and Pacific oceans) policy speech was announced in Kenya during

the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (Hu, 2020). Moreover, Wei (2020) explains that India's regional construct of the Indo-Pacific intersects South Africa, expanding to Australia and the Persian Gulf. Rajagopalan (2020:78) delineates India's Indo-Pacific construct as "... from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas". Consequently, Cannon (2018:196) remarks that Japan defines its Indo-Pacific construct as including "... India and states bordering the Indian Ocean, to include those in eastern Africa and the Middle East"; therefore, from a geopolitical perspective, Africa's position in the Indo-Pacific among the Quad members is disparately accounted for (Schoeman & Wu, 2022).

### **2.3 Regional membership in the Indo-Pacific: A glance at the US and Africa**

Tracing the origin of the Indo-Pacific region, German scholar Karl Haushofer's Indo-Pacific 'geopolitical' construct excluded the US as a member of the region because it belongs to the Atlantic Oceanic space (Li, 2022). Instead, Haushofer's expansion of the Indo-Pacific intersects the South African coast to the islands of Fiji, Samoa, and Tahiti, with China and India as the main regional members (Li, 2022). Limaye (2012:4) remarks that upon his inauguration as President of the United States in 2009, former US president Barack Obama regarded himself as "America's first Pacific president"; he emphasised America as a "Pacific nation". Shambaugh (2013:11) remarks that "... the United States has long been an Asia-Pacific nation under geography, ethnicity, commerce, culture, diplomacy, and security engagements"; however, Vaughn (2007) eludes that most policymakers and analysts in Asia criticised America for focusing on the Middle East and neglecting the 'Asia-Pacific' at a vital moment—the beginning of Asia's ascent.

However, Turner and Parmar (2020) suggest that Obama's "Pivot to Asia", as Washington's primary foreign policy, resulted in a more active US involvement in the Indo-Pacific. Southgate (2017:6) asserts that Obama's presence at the 2011 East Asia Summit and comments by former US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton that "... the United States is back in Southeast Asia", strengthened Washington's role as an Indo-Pacific actor. For Turner (2016:933), Washington's geography remains political and, therefore, cannot be separated from its hegemonic capabilities to exercise power beyond its boundaries as part of its 'internationalist duty'— "... US duties, necessitated by its universal values, legitimately extend to wherever it chooses".

According to Nkala (2021), Africa is part of the Indo-Pacific region based on its geography in the Indian Ocean. Gurjar (2021b) contends that Kenya connects the mainland continent to the Indian Ocean and that Africa belongs to the WIO region, including Eastern and Southern



African littoral states. Wu (2022) asserts that the represented African littoral nations in the IORA comprise 40% of the institution—the key architecture of the Indian Ocean; however, Sneyd (2022) contends that “... neither the African Union (AU) nor the individual African countries have established an Indo-Pacific Strategy or shown any indication of a desire to engage in intra-regional dialogues”. Similarly, Mishra (2021:6) adds, “... Unless these countries [African littoral nations] can articulate their interests proactively and stake a claim in the Indo-Pacific, they will miss out on participating in the decision-making processes on maritime issues”.

#### **2.4 Institutions and fora of the Indo-Pacific region: Institutional membership channels**

Park and Lee (2009) remark that the US wa(s) among the founding members of the Asia-Pacific’s structural architecture—the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), joined by China in 1991. Kodama (1996) asserts that APEC and the ASEAN were the key regional institutions of the Asia-Pacific; however, under the ideational and geopolitical construct of the Indo-Pacific, Singh (2014) considers ASEAN as the centre of the Indo-Pacific region. This claim is also supported by the 2018 Quad alliance consultations on the Indo-Pacific region. This resulted in the agreement of ASEAN’s centrality and its structures—the East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as the drivers of the Indo-Pacific region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2018). Yet, ASEAN’s membership criteria is limited to Southeast Asia nations with external dialogue partners (Thuzar, 2017). The ARF is the only ASEAN-security body of the Indo-Pacific; however, Park (2011) critiques the ARF as a loosely arranged architecture and a dialogue grouping open to “non-traditional” regional security concerns; it cannot approach pressing security matters, such as territorial conflicts in the SCS.

The APEC-centred study of Killian and Aminuddin (2022:125) concludes that “... APEC was meant to be an exclusive economic partnership”. The authors further emphasise that APEC is ineffective in approaching the region’s dynamics as it remains outdated and lacks responsiveness to regional concerns. Kushbu (2022) established that India has been excluded from the APEC membership because it does not form part of the Pacific region; therefore, the ‘outdated’ Asia-Pacific structure of APEC becomes irrelevant in the Indo-Pacific framework. Regarding the absence of a central structure in the Indo-Pacific, Peter-Varghese et al. (2019:5) remark, “... [t]he Indo-Pacific is not an institution, nor a piece of the regional architecture”. Rather, it is a geostrategic framework aids in understanding the evolving economic and



strategic currents of the world; however, Beeson (2018) and Wu (2022) contend that one of the critical factors that will determine the success of the Indo-Pacific region is its institutionalization.

## **2.5 US-China strategic contest in Africa: Geoeconomic and Geopolitical rivalry**

Part of China's rise is attributed to its expansion beyond the Asian region. The BRI is in the wider geoeconomic and geopolitical contest between the US and China in Africa. Studies indicate that forty-nine of the fifty-four African states endorsed the BRI Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to become official recipients (Venkateswaran, 2020; Gu *et al.*, 2022). Kim (2019) and Akimoto (2021) remark that the BRI is China's 'grand' Indo-Pacific primary strategy to reshape regional and world order through infrastructural connections from East Africa to the Eurasian region. Yalew and Changgang (2020) reveal that China, with the AU, signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) in 2015 supporting Chinese infrastructural developments in Africa. They also remark that the MoA was a linkage between the Chinese BRI and the AU's 'blueprint', the AU Agenda 2063, in promoting mutual economic and regional consolidation; however, in these glorious and ambitious embarks, Nkala (2021) and Mthembu *et al.* (2022) warn that Africa needs to be cautious of being used as a pawn.

US President Joe Biden, with the Group7, (G7) partners (comprising Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom (UK) and the US, announced the launch of the Bring Back Better World Initiative (B3W), observed as a counter to the BRI. According to Crabtree (2021:82), the B3W is a global infrastructure initiative launched by major democracies to help narrow the \$40+ trillion infrastructure need in the developing world, including Africa. However, Khumancha (2021) criticises the B3W as a mere 'rebranding' of Trump's infamous 'Make America Great Again' policy drive that promoted American centralism and an 'America-first' policy approach. Zhu (2022:207) asserts that the B3W "... failed to take off and has since deadlocked in the US Congress, which refused to approve the billions Biden promised". Wu (2022) contends that initiatives, such as the B3W, should demonstrate substantial outcomes that display linkages to Africa's interests.

Furthermore, Smith (2019) and Maseko (2020) contend that Africa became the least of the Trump administration's priorities. Schraeder (2018) contends that Trump's burgeoning 'Make America Great Again' pursuit severely tainted US-Africa relations, as Africa was marginalised in US foreign policy. Although the Biden administration attempts to rebuild African relations, Xin (2022) contends that the US still merely observes Africa as a strategic field where it

competes with China; therefore, Sun and Thornton (2012) remark that if the US is serious about winning Africa back, it should be more active and introduce strategies effective in spearheading the development of the continent.

China's African engagements have been also marred with suspicions and accusations mostly from Western observations. Power and Mohan (2010) emphasise criticisms of China's questionable motives in Africa—most notably China's 'neo-colonial' way of exploiting Africa's resources by importing African raw materials, manufacturing and re-selling them back to Africa as Chinese goods. Beijing further ignores aspects of ethics, transparency, and human rights in its engagement with Africa—an approach that does more harm than good (Condon, 2012; Osondu-Oti, 2016). Owing to its “non-interference policy” and “unconditional aid” in Africa, China ignored issues of human rights abuses in countries, such as Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Angola (Osondu-Oti, 2016).

## **2.6 US-China geopolitical contest in Africa: Indo-Pacific security nexus**

The US-China geopolitical rivalry in Africa extends beyond economic wrestles to include security factors. Four Indo-Pacific powers, including the US, China, Japan, and France, maintain military outposts in the strategically positioned country of Djibouti (Gurjar 2021a). Scholars agree that Djibouti plays a significant role in the strategic US-China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region. For instance, Mishra (2021), Wilhelm (2021), Nkala (2021) and Gurjar (2022a) emphasise the significance of Djibouti in the developing geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific as a rising actor in maritime security and the global supply chain. According to Melvin (2019), the Horn of Africa (also called the Somali Peninsula) is considered a maritime transit for the Indo-Pacific through strategic maritime routes and constrictions, such as the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Ploch *et al.* (2011) remark that China, with the US, willingly conducted a naval patrol in the strategic Horn of Africa, particularly over the Gulf of Aden.

In 2012, the Chinese PLAN frigate *Yi Yang* and the United States guided-missile destroyer *USS Winston S. Churchill* took part in an anti-piracy exercise in the Gulf of Aden and later in 2013, the two collaborated on large-scale maritime exercises; however, strategic contest amongst the two has since escalated (Cheng, 2017). According to Singh (2014), Thakker and Sahgal (2019) and Khan and Mohammad (2022), the US-India maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean centres on fears of China's growing naval presence in the IOR; the Malabar exercises comprising India, the US, and Japan aim to counter China's growing navy. Growing

fears and perceived threats of interest, primarily from the US, India, Japan, and France, have also surfaced about China's expansions of military bases in Africa, provided its growing activism in Djibouti (Cabestan, 2021).

## **2.7 Africa and maritime policy: Regional maritime policy focus**

The oceans play an important role in sustainable growth for African littoral nations. Of the fifty-four nations, thirty-eight are coastal states, while 90% of Africa's trade relies on the seas (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2016). The AU emphasises the sustainable use of ocean resources as essential to Africa's development in its Agenda 2063 (Nagi & Nene, 2021). The Blue Economy (BE) concept becomes much apparent in Africa, influencing the emergence of maritime policies that relate to "... sustainable use of in-land water and marine resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, jobs creation and ecosystem health" (Kitenge, 2021; Hapres, 2022:4). Such policies include the AU Agenda 2063, AU 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy, and the 2019 AU Africa BE Strategy (Kitenge, 2021).

However, Walker (2015) suggests a factor of sea blindness to Africa's lack of attention to the oceans, observing delayed progression in tapping into the oceans for development. Similarly, Walker (2015) contends that "... Africa's oceans, although envisioned for economic prosperity, often is the case of stolen resources, drowning refugees and missed opportunities". Walker (2021a) further denounces the lack of focus by AU structures on the prioritisation of maritime security. Walker (2021b) contends that the key institutions and mechanisms designed to respond to instabilities in the continent, such as the African Peace and Security Architecture, the African Standby Force, and the Continental Early Warning System, hardly mention maritime security in their discourses. African nations, such as South Africa, developed considerable bilaterally maritime diplomacy for defence and security in the Indian Ocean. It engages in various maritime diplomacy projects and operations, including Operation Copper along the Mozambican Channel, as part of its naval diplomacy (Van Nieuwkerk & Manganyi, 2019); however, the scholar's critique South Africa's lack of a national security plan, which should serve as the foundation for a maritime security strategy. Similarly, Hamad (2016a) asserts that the East African Community (EAC) is affected by several maritime security threats, including theft of ships, piracy, and maritime terrorism; however, neither the EAC, as a regional bloc nor its members, have comprehensive long-term maritime security strategies.

## 2.8 Regional dynamics of the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region

According to Kim (2019), the US-China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific is the outcome of China's ascent as a significant rival to America's enduring global hegemony. In a tit-for-tat, both contesting powers, imposed trade tariffs against each other (Itakura, 2020). Kaushiva and Singh (2014) and Ghosh *et al.* (2022) approach the reasons behind the Indo-Pacific region's prominence as the centre of the US-China rivalry. They assert that the Indo-Pacific region is the epicentre of global trade and commerce, accounting for 63% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 46% of the global merchandise trade. Gunawardena (2020) adds that the region is rich in vast natural resources and important sea lines of communication. Owing to the strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific region, Duc (2022) contends that "... control over this region is synonymous with control over the world".

Duc (2022) also regards the Indo-Pacific as highly volatile and a 'ticking time bomb'. This is attributed to issues of territorial disputes over the SCS, North Korea's nuclear development, China-Taiwan sovereignty tensions, piracy and maritime terrorism, and climate change (Kaushiva & Singh, 2014; Balasubramaniam & Murugesan, 2020; Dipua *et al.*, 2020; Saunders & McGuinness, 2020; Tow, 2020; Greenwood, 2022; Chung, 2023). Paskal (2021) however, asserts that the Indo-Pacific is an important strategic geopolitical centrepiece in the twenty-first century. Randev (2022), Upadhyaya (2022), and Cuong *et al.* (2023) agree that US-led alliances in the Indo-Pacific region, such as the Quad and Australia, the UK, and the US (AUKUS) alliance, share the same mandate of acting as counterbalance mechanisms against China. Raja (2019) asserts that the US renamed its combat from Pacific Command (PACOM) to Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) to target China in the IOR, especially its heavy reliance on energy supply from the region. Despite its centrality in the Indo-Pacific region, Tan (2020) asserts that ASEAN is neither pro-US nor pro-China as the association hedges or remains neutral rather than pick sides; however, Pang (2017) remarks that Laos and Cambodia are China's great allies in Southeast Asia. Lin *et al.* (2020) suggest that ASEAN nations prioritise economic development over security, which makes China more leveraged than the US. Ultimately, Medcalf (2022) asserts that the Indo-Pacific region remains any nation's game and that, it is the regional middle powers that could shape the future of the region.

## 2.9 Theoretical framework

### 2.9.1 New regionalism theory

The nature of regions increasingly changes and adapts to the twenty-first-century global system. Several theoretical developments in the discipline of International Relations (IR) attempt to understand and explain the global shifts observed today. From the existing IR theoretical approaches, the study applied the new regionalism theory to evaluate the expansion of the Indo-Pacific region to include Africa in its membership framework.

According to MacLeod (2001) and Harrison (2007), the new regionalism theory is relevant in today's global political dynamics because, in the age of globalisation, state relations transcended geographical boundaries to shared economic and security connections. Such is the case of the BRI, linking Asia, Africa and the wider Eurasia (Gong, 2020). New regionalism encompasses global-level governance and economic-driven regions involved in the global economy. This is unlike old regionalism, which has its roots embedded in European inter-state wars, World War Two and integrating Europe into a unipolar region such as the European Union (EU) (Zimmerbauer & Paasi, 2013; Söderbaum, 2015). Warleigh-Lack *et al.* (2011) remark that the new regionalism theory concerns economic and security objectives. Wang (2020:253) summarises that:

“... new regionalism is more systemic because it proposes a new cooperation model where economic, cultural, political, and military cooperation interacts effectively and can serve as a package solution to not only trade and investment issues but also security and environmental concerns”.

According to Söderbaum (2015), new regionalism is a multifaceted approach, emphasising trade, trade agreements, and regional plurality and aiming to create non-hegemonic regions. Although the hegemonic quest seems to drive the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region (Koo, 2020), the region is diverse and multifaceted and has sub-structures such as ASEAN and the IORA grounded on principles of sovereign equality, regional cooperation, facilitation of dialogue and regional peace and security (IORA Charter, 2018; Ha, 2019). Schuls *et al.* (2001:22) assert that “... new regionalism can be seen as an emerging ‘building block’ in the transformation of the global system, leading up to a ‘new multilateralism’ or...regional multilateralism”. According to Teo and Sea (2023), as regional middle powers expand their influence in the Indo-Pacific, more minilateral and multilateral groups are expected, compelled

by shared political values, suggesting a growing number of regional players with unique ideals for the Indo-Pacific multilateral architecture vision.

For instance, in the IOR, the IORA vision was championed by South Africa's former president Nelson Mandela in 1995 and currently, this multilateral structure comprises twenty-three member states and eleven dialogue partners (the US and China are IORA dialogue partners) extending from Southern and East African coast to include South and Southeast Asia and Australia (IORA, 2023c). Regional powers such as India and Japan support a multilateral Indo-Pacific whilst India remains committed to supporting African nations in their pursuit of peace, security, stability, progress, and prosperity (Hui & Hussain, 2020; Singh, 2023). Hettene and Söderbaum (1998) remark that new regionalism will probably support, rather than obstruct, regional and international cooperation.

New regionalism applies well to this study as Söderbaum (2003) explains, one of the strongest tenets of new regionalism theory is its ability to expand to other regions, creating substantial external connections. This is indeed true for Japan's Asia-Africa view accorded by the confluence of the two seas notion. Although new regionalism has been widely accepted among IR scholars, the theory has shortcomings. Critics of new regionalism, such as Larner and Walters (2002), contend that the new regionalism theory is too state-centric because it neglects other actors, such as multinational corporations and the 'private sector'. Schoeman and Wu (2022:15) critique that "... [t]he Indo-Pacific as a geographical and now increasingly political/politicized region does not easily fit into traditional conceptions of regionalism and regionalization or 'new regionalism'".

Şahin (2022:28) contends that although the Indo-Pacific fits in some aspects of new regionalism, "... it lacks a regional agenda and has blurred boundaries"; for instance, ASEAN nations have mixed reactions to Japan's FOIP concept, with some embracing it while others reject it, leaving the extent of the FOIP uncertain. Nonetheless, Söderbaum (2015) and Schuls *et al.* (2002)'s theoretical tenets for multilateralism, regional plurality, and non-hegemonic regions serve for a broader analysis in this study, provided the heterogeneity of the Indo-Pacific and debates of its Africa nexus.

## 2.10 Conclusion

Africa's representation among the regional players in the Indo-Pacific is disproportionate. This ambiguity implicates implementing a unified African agency concerning a clear policy vision towards the Indo-Pacific. Africa's integrated maritime policies are not fully implemented yet at regional and national levels. This conveys a sense of being unprepared for the developing regional dynamics of the Indo-Pacific regarding the continent concerning geopolitics, economics, and security. Africa's geopolitical relations with the Indo-Pacific are poorly explored, with unclear membership pathways. The literature is primarily characterised by sparse data, often overlooking the exclusion of Africa from the Indo-Pacific construct, discussions, and initiatives.

Throughout the literature review, what has stood out most is the engagement between African nations in the IOR and the Indo-Pacific players with economic and security nexus; however, the linkages between these engagements and Africa's inclusion in the Indo-Pacific framework and discussions are minimally explored. The literature extensively captured the US-China geopolitical contest in Africa and its economic and security implications for Africa. A significant divergence exists in exploring US-led and China-led initiatives as a strategic means to the impetus to include Africa in the Indo-Pacific construct and discourses. Instead, these initiatives are explored from an economic perspective, neglecting their geopolitical aspects in creating strategic opportunities for Africa's regional inclusion.

The new regionalism theory's perspective of regional plurality, non-hegemonic regions, and promoting multilateral cooperation served as the main guide for this study. This is because, the Indo-Pacific is a multilateral region embodied by various regional players who hold strategic interests; therefore, remarked in the literature is that the Indo-Pacific is an interest-driven region shaped by territorial, economic, and security interests, defining the geopolitical nature of the region whilst embracing cooperation and partnerships. According to the literature, a central Indo-Pacific architecture is absent, constituting a challenge in understanding and articulating regional membership. This raises questions about whether Africa is an Indo-Pacific regional member or an external strategic partner as the Indo-Pacific framework is underexplored.



## CHAPTER 3

### US-CHINA INTERESTS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

#### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 presents the findings and a critical analysis of the US-China interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The research question emphasises a critical component of the study in understanding the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific to the US and China. This significantly aids in understanding the fundamentals behind their geopolitical rivalry. The chapter also elucidates the implication of their strategic rivalry motivated by their interests in regional members and how it shapes and influences the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. This section presents the findings and analysis of Research Question 1 (RQ1):

- How do the strategic interests of the US and China affect regional dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region?

A presentation of findings on US-China interests in the Indo-Pacific region follows.

#### 3.1.1 US-China strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific

Security concerns over the Indo-Pacific region have informed America's regional interests. Such concerns include "... North Korea's nuclear threat, China's disputes in the SCS and its claims over Taiwan, maritime terrorism, and climate change" (Pant & Mann, 2023:4). According to Cliff (2020), the Indo-Pacific is gradually evolving from a dormant region, accommodating the benefits of the US to a region that could become a threat to its interests; therefore, the study finds that over time, China may become "... militarily, economically and politically" dominant in the Indo-Pacific region (Cliff, 2020:5).

The central interests of the US are primarily on the Pacific Ocean (Ford, 2020); therefore, "... the Pacific Ocean remains a conduit for American ideas and goods to flow westward, and not for threats to flow eastward toward the homeland" (Ford, 2020:3). The study further finds that America's interests in the Indo-Pacific region are embedded in the Trump-inspired Indo-Pacific vision of a broader Indo-Pacific, compelled by multilateralism (Ford, 2020). America observes the Indo-Pacific countries as crucial in defining and redefining the international order while recognising the vital function of its friends and partners globally in having a stake in the result of such an international order (Gurjar, 2022b).



For China, the Indo-Pacific holds key interests partly because China is the region's largest trading partner and a significant investor, notably in infrastructure (Australian Government, 2017b). This study finds that one of China's strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific pertains to diplomatic influence. Zhang (2022b) underscores that Beijing pursues to sway diplomatic influence over the Pacific Islands to acquire their voting support in the United Nations (UN), more so over issues that directly implicate it, such as human rights violations and, predominantly, territorial disputes in the SCS. Second, Zhang (2022b) asserts that China has a growing mistrust of America and its Western allies and, therefore, garner support from the developing nations, particularly the Pacific Islands in the Indo-Pacific region, as strategic partners.

Findings also reveal that the Indo-Pacific is important to Chinese interests, with the SCS alone generating one-third of global shipping (Gurjar, 2022b). While Beijing asserts its ownership of the sea, the study established that Washington observes such a claim as a challenge related to its maritime interests and the concern for its regional allies. These associates are concerned about China's expanding regional influence (O'Rourke, 2020). The Indo-Pacific region is significant to Chinese interests in becoming a global leader, particularly in the maritime domain.

Comparable is the maritime significance of the broader Indo-Pacific region to US security interests; therefore, this study finds that such interests are reflected by renaming the Hawaii-based United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) to the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) with an operational jurisdiction of the command spanning to the Pacific and Indian Oceans (Scott, 2018; Raja, 2019). The Indo-Pacific region is crucial for the US because it can obtain significant backing to limit China in the region (Hu & Meng, 2020). Findings suggest its possible through the presence of the major regional players not only against China's coerciveness in the region but also treaty allies to the US (Goswami, 2022).

### **3.2 A critical analysis of findings**

#### **3.2.1 The United States and China's interests in the Indo-Pacific region: Implications for regional dynamics**

According to the aforementioned findings, both the US and China hold strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region, forming the main domain of their regional contest. Hu (2020) emphasises that China shapes the US' interests in the Indo-Pacific as a strategic power rival in the twenty-first century. He and Li (2020) delineate that the US considers China a revisionist

state and a threat to its hegemony and interests. Findings revealed that the US uses alliance-building with Indo-Pacific players to secure interests and contain China. Promoting the FOIP vision is observed as a means where the US promotes ‘collective security’ in the Indo-Pacific region (Ford, 2020). This notion coincides with the observations of the new regionalism theory, emphasising the emergence of regions motivated by shared political values, suggesting a growing number of regional players with unique ideals for the Indo-Pacific multilateral architecture vision (Teo & Sea, 2023).

In 2018, the Trump administration launched the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act intending to bolster US economic and security relations in the Indo-Pacific region. This initiative was designed to foster a regional order that is free, open, and governed by rules (Szechenyi & Hosoya, 2019); however, the US’ firm commitment to the Indo-Pacific region has been repeatedly clouded with uncertainty. Trump’s non-attendance at the 2018 EAS and APEC forum sparked doubts about America’s dedication to a shared regional vision, particularly its commitment to shaping such a vision through Indo-Pacific frameworks (Szechenyi & Hosoya, 2019). The Biden administration also encountered criticism for lacking urgency in the Indo-Pacific region, considering its regional interests are embedded in its strategic contest with China for regional influence and domination (Townshend *et al.*, 2021). Wei (2022) asserts that Biden is encountered with re-gaining trust in the Indo-Pacific following Trump’s ‘America-first’ policy approach.

Biden has since ‘vowed’ to backtrack from Trump’s controversial foreign policy; however, he has preserved Trump’s approach to China (Wei & Zhang, 2021). Biden has strengthened Trump’s ‘trade war’ against China by implementing more sanctions on China’s high-tech products and strengthening ‘anti-China alliances’ (Huang, 2021). According to Grossman (2021), growing regional tensions have surfaced regarding the US-led Quad alliance. This is largely because of the Quad’s democratic values in maintaining a rules-based order—this threatens non-democratic regimes, such as Vietnam and semi-democratic regimes, such as Singapore. They are less likely to be invited for Quad dialogues or even themselves to indicate interest (Grossman, 2021). ASEAN is also growing cautious of the Quad; however, it hardly has a unified conception of the Indo-Pacific let alone a shared view of regional issues; therefore, Quad’s role in the SCS dispute might ‘overshadow’ its capabilities (Saha, 2018).

The Indo-Pacific region is a power-play arena not just between the US and China but among several other regional players competing for influence with their individual interests. This

notion coincides with new regionalism's support for non-hegemonic regions as balance of power forces are at play. Liu (2020) and Ford (2020) agree that although America holds interests in the Indo-Pacific region, it cannot dominate and influence the Indo-Pacific as an individual nation; therefore, it attempts to restore its former glory through alliances, such as the Quad and AUKUS. This study acknowledges AUKUS as Washington's commitment to Indo-Pacific security during Biden's term. According to Patton *et al.* (2021:1): "... The AUKUS launch was the first time in Biden's presidency that he has been clear about the importance of the deteriorating strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific to the United States and its interests". Novita (2022:6) agrees with the latter by remarking that [AUKUS] "... represents the desire of the new administration (Biden administration) to create new security mechanisms to shape the governance of the wider (Indo-Pacific) region".

The study also contends that the military focus of AUKUS could disrupt regional stability, resulting in more detrimental effects than benefits. Julienne (2021) confirms this observation, expressing concern that AUKUS could trigger a nuclear arms race and escalate tensions in East Asia. Yet, the research also considers the isolated country of North Korea's escalating nuclear activities and unpredictable behaviour as a threat to the already precarious East Asia region. Therefore, the study asserts that it is the rationality of the AUKUS members that will deter confrontation, provided their belief that they hold a mandate to maintain a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.

According to the US National Security Strategy, "... the United States has a vital interest in realizing a region (Indo-Pacific) that is open, interconnected, prosperous, secure, and resilient" (The White House, 2022g:37). However, this study concedes that although America's military strength may provide a sense of security, it has not proven to be a reliable and committed leader in the economic landscape of the Indo-Pacific. It has lacked in meeting the economic expectations of its regional allies and partners. Since the Trump administration, it has been evident that Washington's vague strategy towards the Indo-Pacific fostered distrust and led to a decrease in its regional influence. For example, Choong (2021) and Li and Whalley (2021) suggest that the US's decision to withdraw from the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in 2018 led to its exclusion from a significant trade agreement while weakening its leadership position. The remaining Indo-Pacific members of the partnership proceeded with the CPTPP without the US and, China was eager to fill the void left by the US withdrawal by indicating its willingness to join the CPTPP (Choong, 2021).

According to Hansen (2022), the Biden administration has substituted Trump's CPTPP with its own Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) to fill the divergence left by Trump's withdrawal from the CPTTP. Singh (2022) and Zongyou (2022) agree that the framework incorporates newly set US economic interests in the Indo-Pacific region under the Biden administration in contributing towards regional development through trade and investment, and partnership and alliances among the regional players. Goodman and Arasasingham (2022) approached the regional response to the framework. They validate the apprehensions of members in the Indo-Pacific region regarding the authenticity of the IEPF and its potential to allow unrestricted access to US markets as it were under the CPTTP. This study contends that the framework could be sufficiently flexible to sustain the regional needs in the Indo-Pacific, provided that the US will restructure the IPEF to allow open market access; and in the worst-case scenario, the framework might not live up to what the BRI already provides to the members of the Indo-Pacific region.

Unlike the Pacific region, the US hold less influence over the IOR; however, the US and India observe China as threat in the wider IOR (Ashraf, 2021). The US mainly sponsors high seas protection in the IOR (Amin, 2020). However, Samaranayake (2023) critiques that Washington's critical policy documents, such as the US National Security Strategy, National Defence Strategy and IPS, only mention the Indian Ocean once. At a policy level, the US lacks an unobstructed vision regarding its interests in the Indian Ocean; its focus is mainly on the Pacific region. The study asserts that the US must maintain a strong presence in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans to establish a genuine leadership position in the Indo-Pacific region.

The study findings suggest that Chinese interests in the Indo-Pacific are more economically motivated. This motivation stems from China's mega projects, such as the BRI; however, the BRI has been questioned for its sincerity. For instance, it has been criticised for being a hegemonic framework China uses to acquire soft power dominance in the wider Indo-Pacific (Singh & Sahgal, 2018; Shahriar, 2019). Despite the controversies encountered since its launch in 2013, this research contends that the BRI successfully outlined China's interests and ambitions in the wider Indo-Pacific. The BRI has been a success, as evidenced by the 147 state signatories it has received, reflecting a favourable response from the international community (McBride *et al.*, 2023).

China has been advancing its economic agenda in the Indo-Pacific over the years, positioning itself as an attractive investor. According to the findings, China increasingly attempts to

establish relations with the Pacific Islands for strategic goals in the Indo-Pacific. It attempted to entice the Pacific Island states economically, offering financial aid as loans and incentives for developing those countries with over 100 Chinese-funded projects in the Pacific region (Zhang, 2022a). China's Pacific engagements extend beyond economic interests, incorporating security interests in this region. For instance, a security agreement was entered between China and the Solomon Islands government just before Washington's official state visit (Ligaiula, 2022b). The agreement permits deploying the Chinese navy in the Solomon Islands, raising Western concerns about the possibility of a Chinese military base there (Harding & Pohle-Anderson, 2022).

The study findings further suggested that one of China's strategic interests is to develop diplomatic influence on the Pacific countries to win their support in the UN. According to Poling and Larsen (2012), eleven of the Pacific Islands hold a vote in the UN but often show little to no interest in several conflict discussions on the UN's agenda owing to their geographical isolation. Poling and Larsen (2012) add that with an excess of "unused" votes, a market where the service of voting at the UN is swapped for financial support has emerged. The Solomon Island voted in favour of Beijing in the UN's Human Rights Council on human rights violations against Uyghur people in Beijing's Xinjiang region (Sade, 2021).

In the IOR, China has long-standing economic and security interests, with much of its maritime expansion in the region. These expansions include port construction, establishing a military base in Djibouti, increasing naval presence, and partaking in anti-piracy initiatives in the Gulf of Aden, the Maritime Silk Road, and the BRI (Odhiambo, 2020). However, alike the Pacific, the Quad members caution against Chinese actions in the Indian Ocean. For example, in 2022, the Communist Party of China's International Development Cooperation Agency launched Beijing's first IOR Forum, which regional members were invited—excluding India (Krishnan, 2022b); however, Australia and the Maldives refused any official participation in the launch (Krishnan, 2022a). Beijing's unilateral actions in the IOR and wider Indo-Pacific have also been lamented by India and Japan (Neagle, 2020). Similarly, Australia alongside India, have continuously raised concerns over China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean (Hai-Dang *et al.*, 2022).

This study contends that China's expansion in the Indian Ocean is attributable to its increasing demand for energy supply and other natural resources shipped through the Indian Ocean, supporting its fast-paced growth; however, the study agrees that while China attempts to

expand its interests to suit its demands, it should consider the multipolarity of the IOR. Accordingly, China's unilateral approach in the Indo-Pacific through the Indian Ocean may factor in the hostility and destabilisation of the wider Indian Ocean, especially in maintaining a rules-based order. Hong and Ciyuan (2018) and Hai-Dang (2022) contend that China's actions and intentions in the Indian Ocean concern Australia and India as they view China's expeditions in the Indian Ocean as undermining the IORA as a functional institution of the Indian Ocean. Hong and Ciyuan (2018) continue that it should be in the best interest of Beijing to foster cooperation and closer relations with the IORA in conducting its strategic ambitions in the Indian Ocean.

According to Bukhari (2022), China's core interest in the wider Indo-Pacific is the securitisation of the SCS waters connecting its mainland, necessitating the need to expand its navy; however, regional responses to China's rise have been met with conflicting observations. ASEAN-China relations were most affected by the SCS dispute, which this study contends is not in the best interest of China to lose the support of ASEAN considering its regional centrality. According to Simões (2022), the SCS is a lifeline for some of the ASEAN nations, particularly Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia, as they heavily rely on the SCS waters. The Philippines and China tensions escalated in a legal case against China in the SCS. The Hauge tribunal ruled in favour of the Philippines, but China rejected it, arguing it undermined its long-standing territorial sovereignty over the SCS (Pemmaraju, 2016; Phillips *et al.*, 2016; Whomersley, 2016). Therefore, the study argues that Beijing's growing dominance in the Indo-Pacific region is worrisome and alarming as it continues to assert its power over its neighbours.

### 3.3 Conclusion

This chapter assessed the US and China's interests in the Indo-Pacific region. To improve the understanding of its importance in influencing their strategic interests, this chapter commences with an introduction to the Indo-Pacific's geostrategic significance. It is reiterated that the US and China embrace strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific with implications for their economic, security, and diplomatic interests. Regional members were also implicated in the US-China geostrategic contest, shaping their regional interests. Likewise, the major concern regarding the disruption of a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific is the Quad's caution of an assertive China. The US and China embrace strategic interests in the Indian Ocean; however, China outweighs the US concerning influence; the US seems to still lag in clearly articulating its interests in the broader Indian Ocean. Both rivals hold strategic interests in the Pacific region. This has been an intriguing revelation because China is known to focus on the Indian Ocean owing to its strategic role in oil and trade facilitation. China re-directed its attention to the larger Pacific region, increasing its political, economic, and security influence. Crucial to the study was the revelation of the Pacific's exchange of UN votes for Chinese aid.

The US prioritises security in the Indo-Pacific, strongly supported by regional members; however, economic opportunities are also valued, with China embracing an advantage; however, China's assertiveness over the SCS created a sense of hostility with its neighbours, implicating its ASEAN support. Beijing's unilateral behaviour in the Indian Ocean undermines IORA cooperation as the Indian Ocean's regional architecture. Neither the US nor China has absolute dominance over the Indo-Pacific as the multipolarity of the region presents counterbalances from the burgeoning middle powers, such as Australia, India, Japan, and ASEAN. The middle powers also counterbalance to militarily oriented for AUKUS, helping to prevent physical conflict provided regional hostility.

The research question enabled an in-depth analysis of the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the Indo-Pacific as the epicentre of the US-China geopolitical rivalry and their regional interests. This aided in examining their strategic interests in shaping and influencing the regional dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. The subsequent chapter emphasises Africa's geopolitical exclusion from the Indo-Pacific region and its position in response.



## CHAPTER 4

# AFRICA'S GEOPOLITICAL EXCLUSION IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and a critical analysis of Africa's exclusion in the Indo-Pacific region. This analysis includes the Indo-Pacific framework while discoursing and examining Africa's position in response to its regional isolation; this is conducted by emphasising the divergent perspectives on the Indo-Pacific geopolitical construct among regional powers. In summary, this chapter examines the extent of Africa's exclusion in the Indo-Pacific. It emphasises the geopolitical divergences accentuating Africa's geopolitical exclusion in the Indo-Pacific; its regional position in response to the varying geopolitical constructs is examined. South Africa's Minister of IR and Cooperation, Naledi Pandor, in response to Africa's exclusion in the Indo-Pacific, echoed:

“We would like ... that the Indo-Pacific should be a zone of peace and development ... what is wonderful about IORA is that it includes African countries with the Indian Ocean as part of their territorial waters ... I am concerned when I see discussions about the Indo-Pacific region that excludes the African continent ...”  
(Sibal, 2023).

This section presents findings on the subsequent Research Question 2 (RQ2).

- To what extent is Africa excluded from the Indo-Pacific region, and how does it respond to this exclusion?

### 4.2 Presentation of findings on Africa's geopolitical exclusion in the Indo-Pacific region

#### 4.2.1 Africa's geopolitical exclusion in the Indo-Pacific and its stand in response to its regional exclusion

Geopolitically, the Indo-Pacific includes Africa's Eastern and Southern shores (Singh, 2019; Nkala, 2021; Schoeman & Wu, 2022); however, this study finds contradictory geopolitical observations on Africa's position in the Indo-Pacific among the Quad's Indo-Pacific strategies.



The Quad’s four founding members—the US, Japan, Australia, and India—embrace conflicting Indo-Pacific strategies regarding the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical construct. The study finds that Africa was omitted in the US-IPS, it was neither mentioned as a partner nor a regional member, whilst the US-IPS reiterates America as an Indo-Pacific power (the White House, 2022f).

According to the findings, US-IPS recognises Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), ASEAN, India, and China as its strategic competition (the White House, 2022f:4-5). The strategy includes, “... we will focus on every corner of the region (Indo-Pacific), from Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia to South Asia and Oceania, including the Pacific Islands” (the White House, 2022f:5). Africa is, therefore, disregarded as a component of America’s Indo-Pacific regional construct. According to the findings, Australia recognises Africa as its external strategic partner in the globalised world (Australian Government, 2017a). In the Indo-Pacific, findings indicate that Australia recognises China, India, the Republic of South Korea, the US, Japan, North Korea, ASEAN, and the Pacific Islands (Australian Government, 2017a:4;7;44). Australia and the US share a similar construct of the Indo-Pacific region—which excludes African nations of the WIO.

Japan’s IPS recognises any nation with a FOIP vision (Ministry of Japan, 2023). For Japan, the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical construct includes “... India and states bordering the Indian Ocean, to include those in Eastern Africa and the Middle East” (Cannon, 2018:196). Similarly, findings suggest that India’s geopolitical description of its Indo-Pacific construct “... stretches from the Western coast of North America to the Eastern shores of Africa” (Bhaskar, 2021). Wei (2020) adds that India’s construct of the Indo-Pacific traverses South Africa, expanding to Australia and the Persian Gulf. Considering the inclusion of Africa in their regional constructs, the findings establish that Japan and India have a comparable geopolitical perspective of the Indo-Pacific region, incorporating Africa in their regional construct.

According to the study findings, ASEAN embraces an established IPS, emphasising ASEAN as the centre of the Indo-Pacific, and members of the Indo-Pacific region agree on this centrality (Saha, 2019). ASEAN’s perspective confirms that it welcomes any country to its Indo-Pacific construct, leaving no nation behind (Ishikawa, 2022); however, as opposed to India and Japan’s Indo-Pacific visions, ASEAN’s inclusiveness was specifically remarked for the inclusion and welcoming of China in its Indo-Pacific framework and cooperation (Ishikawa, 2022). ‘ASEAN-centrality’ means that ASEAN will be the main motivator of the Indo-Pacific

cooperation as the region's main architecture, closing the divergence of emerging similar structures (which may adhere to a broader membership) (Saha, 2019; Pulipaka & Mussadi, 2022). Findings further reveal that the US-led Indo-Pacific combat, such as the INDOPACOM, includes the maritime areas of the Indo-Pacific, excluding the WIO, where African littoral nations are present (Cannon, 2021; Bisen, 2022). According to Bhatia (2022), the Island nations of the Indian Ocean with the eastern and southern littoral nations of Africa have been excluded in the geopolitical debates of the Indo-Pacific region despite forming part of the Western Indo-Pacific through their linkages with the Indian Ocean. To such blatant exclusion, findings indicate mixed responses and geopolitical positions among African littoral nations of the IOR to the Indo-Pacific dynamics.

According to Schoeman and Wu (2022:23), some policymakers in African nations, such as South Africa, expressed that "... the concept is in essence a construct of the South, and there is therefore no need to 're-engage' something already part of it". This perception has moulded its geopolitical understanding of the Indo-Pacific construct—already encompassing Africa. The study findings reveal that African nations in the Indian Ocean were invited to attend the first Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, hosted by France and the EU (Fabricius, 2022). South Africa declined the invitation owing to its perception that the event was anti-Chinese and its concern about becoming embroiled in the Indo-Pacific region's great power rivalries. Djibouti made a few comments on the Indo-Pacific issues despite hosting numerous foreign military bases, including those of Indo-Pacific powers (Fabricius, 2022). Fabricius also remarks that Africa's only active participants were from the Island nations of Mauritius, Madagascar, and Seychelles, although their presence was primarily motivated by concerns over the AU's security neglect.

The study findings reveal that Kenya acknowledges its linkages to the Indo-Pacific region and does not observe itself as external to the Indo-Pacific framework. Kenya and Japan co-chaired the TICAD with important debates on the BE, considering that Japan is a member of the Quad and of the Group 7 countries (Kagwanja, 2023). India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's three-day bilateral visit to Kenya in 2021 resulted in bilateral talks of security concerns in the Indo-Pacific and the Horn of Africa (Chaudhury, 2021). During the bilateral discussions, India and Kenya agreed on a partnership on cooperation for peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region (Luthra, 2021). Therefore, a general perception of Africa is that it has legitimate standing in the Indo-Pacific; however, according to the findings, its role is unclear as it is hardly part of the regional debates in the Indo-Pacific (Bhatia, 2022). Apart from

Kenya's efforts to engage with other Indo-Pacific participants, the study finds that there has been little alleged or substantive action taken by other members of the EAC and the broader WIO in addressing the Indo-Pacific regional dynamics.

Despite military bases for four Indo-Pacific major powers (US, China, Japan, and France) (Gurjar, 2021a), findings indicate that Djibouti's ambiguous policy stand on the Indo-Pacific region risks becoming what Mishra (2021:37) coins a "... proxy-turf and geopolitical chessboard for extra-regional competition". Similarly, findings suggest that the SADC lacks a clear policy vision in response to the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. The study finds that the implementation of SADC maritime policies is hindered by weaknesses such as a lack of political will, social dynamics, insufficient coordination, and overall ineffectiveness (Mkhonto, 2022). Similarly, the EAC also lacks implementation of maritime policies, their hindrance is mostly affected by sovereignty and ideological clash between Kenya and Tanzania, the only littoral nations of the EAC, impeding regional maritime cooperation (Hamad, 2016b).

At the core of the study findings is the adoption of the IORA Indo-Pacific Outlook (IPO), where its geographical and geopolitical understanding of the Indo-Pacific "... spreads across the Pacific Rim, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and Eastern and Southern Africa" (IORA, 2022:1b). Findings indicate that IORA acknowledges that its member states will find opportunities to "collaborate with other countries and organisations in the Indo-Pacific region with major stakes and interests in promoting peace, development, openness, and inclusivity in the Indo-Pacific region to achieve IORA's objectives as enshrined in the IORA Charter" (IORA, 2022:4b). Therefore, the IORA observation for the Indo-Pacific presents African nations with a sense of legitimacy for their agency and representation in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **4.3 A critical analysis of findings**

- Questioning Africa's geopolitical exclusion in the Indo-Pacific region.

#### **4.3.1 Examining Africa's position in response to its regional exclusion in the Indo-Pacific region**

##### **4.3.1.1 The United States and Australia's Indo-Pacific Construct: A critique of Africa's exclusion**

According to the findings, the United States excludes Africa in its IPS and therefore, its regional fora and initiatives. Amid regional concerns over maritime security in the Indian Ocean, the

largest global combat, such as the US-INDOPACOM, excludes the Western Indo-Pacific, where African nations of the Indian Ocean are present. Such an exclusion ignores Africa's strategic connections to the Indian Ocean's maritime peace and security. For instance, the Horn of Africa is critical to international trade across the Indian Ocean with strategic sea lines of communication, including the Gulf of Aden and the Suez Canal (Potgieter, 2008). The study argues that separation of Africa from the geographical span of the INDOPACOM renders Africa external to the Indo-Pacific framework. The United States delegated Africa's security matters to its led Africa Command (AFRICOM) and in 2008, it signed a Unified Command Plan, transferring all African Indian Ocean nations previously assigned to USPACOM to AFRICOM after several members of Congress called for a "separation of geographic combatant command for Africa" (Feickert, 2013:7; US Embassy and Consulates in the United Kingdom, 2021). Therefore, Miller (2023) contends that the separation of US commands makes it challenging to establish a clear strategy in the IOR.

Rumley (2021) also contends the separation of the WIO from the INDOPACOM and raises concerns over geographical legitimacy in the Indo-Pacific. The INDOPACOM is an Indo-Pacific-centred combat, aligning with the national security objectives and interests of the US in the Indo-Pacific and a reflection of its regional vision and ambitions (USINDOPACOM, 2022). However, Miller (2023) contends that the US largely neglects the Indian Ocean, with a clear favourability of the Pacific. According to Miller (2023), the US has poor diplomatic relations with most nations in the Indian Ocean, except for India. Miller further argues that although the US is a dialogue partner of the IORA, it hardly engages in its mandates. The study contends that excluding the WIO maritime area in the INDOPACOM reflects America's Indo-Pacific vision, already excluding Africa from its geopolitical framework.

According to Bateman and Bergin (2010), despite Australia's membership in the IORA, it has a more unified policy towards the Pacific while lacking such policy in the Indian Ocean. Brewster (2019) remarks that Canberra considers it unnecessary to expand its Indo-Pacific construct to span the entire Indian Ocean, contending that such expansion as a concept and construct would not provide meaning or strategic purpose in practical and policy terms. Brewster (2019:15) further asserts that the "... recognition of Australia's Indo-Pacific 'strategic arc' does not mean that Australia should advocate that Indian Ocean governance arrangements should be subsumed into broader 'Indo-Pacific' arrangements". While no Indo-Pacific player is compelled to lead Africa's regional inclusion, it is in the interest of both America and Australia to incorporate the Western Indo-Pacific into their IPS. The WIO is already implicated

in the regional dynamics of the wider IOR and the broader Indo-Pacific, the spill-over effects of the maritime security threats of the WIO to the wider IOR reflects such implication. Hence, Brewster (2019:15) also contends that Australia’s “Indian Ocean strategy must be consistent with and contribute towards an overall Indo-Pacific strategy...”.

Medcalf (2014:473) argues that the Indo-Pacific is Asia-centric and thus questions whether “outer geographic boundaries” such as East African littoral nations are ‘strictly’ Indo-Pacific. The idea of Africa as external to the Indo-Pacific raises legitimate concerns. The WIO can potentially affect Canberra’s strategic interests and any Indo-Pacific visions that exclude it. Australia has the longest coastline and maritime territorial jurisdiction of the Indian Ocean nations (Brewster, 2019). Growing maritime security challenges in the WIO implicate Canberra’s strategic interests. For instance, Bateman and Bergin (2011:3) remark that “... Australia has extensive offshore interests in the Indian Ocean with strategically important Island territories, vital sea lines of communication (SLOCs), and hugely valuable offshore oil and gas reserves off the northwest coast”.

Furthermore, growing Chinese influence in the WIO has strengthened Washington’s alliance with Canberra (Samaranayake, n.d.). The scholar further asserts that as the US seeks greater influence in the Indian Ocean and protection of its interests, such as its military base in the WIO’s Island nation of Diego Garcia, Canberra provides a strategic vehicle for guardianship through its permanent membership status in IORA and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). He and Feng (2020) further note that India plays a greater role in the US and Australia vision for the ‘Indo’ region. Interestingly, India is most interested in expanding its regional influence, including in Africa and the Gulf states. Speaking at the joint Indian Ocean Dialogue and Delhi dialogue, India’s Minister of External Affairs noted “while the nations of the Eastern Indian Ocean and States on the connecting seas leading to the Pacific are defining their vision of the Indo-Pacific, there is room for the Western Indian Ocean of this concept too” (Bagchi, 2019). Mentioned in the literature review and findings is also India and Japan’s inclusion of the WIO in their Indo-Pacific visions, for these reasons, the study questions the exclusion of the WIO in the US and Australia’s regional vision.

#### 4.3.1.2 ASEAN Centrality in the Indo-Pacific: Implications for Africa

According to Schoeman and Wu (2022:18), ASEAN's IPO emphasises "... Southeast Asia and its surrounding regions". ASEAN supports a regional-based order, foreseeing the Indo-Pacific as a peaceful, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific guided under its centrality and regional forums. The study weighs in on the notion of ASEAN centrality, directing questions about what it means while considering the implications of its centrality on the WIO. According to Wu (2022), the larger debates of the Indo-Pacific centres on who is included and who is not. With ASEAN, Anwar (2020) contends that unlike the Quad members whose Indo-Pacific visions are clear on who constitutes regional membership, ASEAN's geopolitical construct of the Indo-Pacific "... avoids mentioning any countries by name or identifying any specific challenges to regional security". Anwar (2020:128) contends that one of the key elements of ASEAN centrality is that it observes the Indo-Pacific construct "... not as contiguous territorial spaces but as a closely integrated and interconnected region, in which ASEAN plays a central and strategic role". The argument of this analysis is not to challenge ASEAN centrality but to examine Africa's position in its centrality framework; therefore, based on Anwar's latter argument, this analysis argues that ASEAN should champion a unified Indo-Pacific, establishing a clear meaning of the Indo-Pacific as a concept and geopolitical construct.

ASEAN plays a greater role in the Indo-Pacific and has informed IORA's regional approach in the IOR and the wider Indo-Pacific. The guidelines and policy position of the IORA-IPO development were discussed during the first IORA Summit meeting in Jakarta in 2017, resulting in the adoption of the Jakarta Concord (Febriana, 2021). The Concord is premised on IORA's regional commitment to foster cooperation and ensure a "peaceful, stable, and prosperous Indian Ocean" (Jakarta Concord, 2017). Indonesia had handed its IORA chairmanship to South Africa in 2017 and had expressed continued regional cooperation alongside South Africa's leadership (Radja, 2017). The IORA constitutes the ASEAN nations of Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, implying closer regional ties; however, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is yet to include the African IORA members in regional dialogue and consultations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019; Schoeman & Wu, 2022).

This exclusion emphasises the argument by Bhatia (2022) that African nations in the WIO are left out of the Indo-Pacific discussions; therefore, the study raises a legitimate concern over ASEAN centrality, what it means for the WIO and wider IOR, how it should be interpreted,



and how it should inform strategic policies of the WIO whose members lack a clear policy vision towards the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN prefers institutional engagement in the IOR, its focus is on the IORA; most likely, it regards the WIO engagement within the IORA framework, exemplified by Indonesia's support for South Africa as IORA chair. ASEAN engagement with the African nations of the WIO would likely occur via the AU or regional communities such as SADC and EAC. Dlamini (2019:5) supports that "ASEAN and the AU or African regional communities have great potential for cooperation through various South-South cooperation mechanisms". However, it is unclear how ASEAN views Africa in the context of the Indo-Pacific; it tends to view the Indo-Pacific concept as 'anti-China', a contradiction to its 'inclusivity' approach (Bomassi, 2023) and its members have yet to agree on a 'coherent' Indo-Pacific view (Ha, 2021).

#### **4.4 Africa and the Indo-Pacific: Geopolitical oversight**

Scholars such as Rana (2021) and Reva (2021) raise concerns over the sidelining of Africa in the Indo-Pacific. Discussions of the Quad's expansion to a Quad Plus have been predominantly centred on the inclusion of "New Zealand, South Korea, Brazil, Israel, and Vietnam" as new members (Panda, 2020:7). Africa is yet to be included in the discussions of the expansion. To further support its analysis of Africa's exclusion in the Indo-Pacific, the study presents the following argument: Geographically, the EU is often observed as external to the Indo-Pacific (Basu *et al.*, 2021). Yet, the EU is better integrated into the Indo-Pacific than Africa despite geostrategic synergies. France (an Indo-Pacific power and IOR resident according to its IPS) supported the justification of the EU in the Indo-Pacific framework, while Germany's frigate Bayern was deployed in the Indo-Pacific in joint navy exercises with the US, Australia, Japan, and Singapore (Heiduk & Sulejmanović, 2021; Haldar, 2022; Odgaard, 2022). With Africa, demonstrations of the support of its regional integration by the Indo-Pacific actors must still appear, as the argument has been that the Western Indo-Pacific remains omitted in the regional debates of the Indo-Pacific (Bhatia, 2022). The study, however, considers that the EU adopted its IPS as a response to the evolving geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific, while Africa still needs to demonstrate indications of adopting one.

Beeson (2018) and Wu (2022) agree on the institutionalisation of the Indo-Pacific. The review of literature emphasised close-knitted regional architectures, such as ASEAN and APEC, whose membership criteria are influenced by geographical factors as in the case of India's exclusion from APEC based on its geographical proximity external to the Pacific region. The

study presents that the informality of the Indo-Pacific makes it challenging to understand its regional membership base. According to Mattheis and Diaz (2022), regions are subjected to interpretations and re-interpretations, negotiations, and contestations. Regional members must demonstrate a sense of unity in the conceptual and constructive understanding of the Indo-Pacific (He & Feng, 2020). As it stands, the Indo-Pacific is subjected to various interpretations defined by the interests and policy objectives of the regional players (Chapter 2, Chapter 3, and Chapter 4).

According to He and Feng (2020), the formalisation of the Indo-Pacific will largely depend on regional willingness to develop institutional mechanisms; however, as demonstrated in Chapter 3 (and discussed in 5), the complexities of the US-China geopolitical contest and its implications on regional members are less likely to lead to a consensus on regional institutionalisation. The literature asserts the conflicting geopolitical constructs of the Indo-Pacific among regional players, implicating Africa's geopolitical standing in the Indo-Pacific (Henwood & Wu, 2022; Schoeman & Wu, 2022; Wu & Alden, 2022). The study contends that integrating the existing institutions, such as ASEAN, IORA (which includes African nations), and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), is more likely to garner regional support than developing a central structure. This view is based on the general understanding of the Indo-Pacific i.e., the unison of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as accorded by Japan's 'confluence of the two seas' (Anwar 2020, Heiduk & Wacker 2020). The PIF is institutionally composed of Australia, New Zealand, the French territories of Polynesia and New Caledonia, and fourteen Pacific Island States; the US is an observer partner (Searight *et al.*, 2019).

#### **4.5 Africa's response to its regional and geopolitical exclusion in the Indo-Pacific: Examining Africa's position in the Indo-Pacific**

Contradicting geopolitical observations of the Indo-Pacific among the Quad members cause uncertainty in Africa's regional position in the Indo-Pacific. Isike (2022) observed that African nations must take the initiative in articulating their common interests, while Reva (2021) contends that Africa must establish a clear policy position on the Indo-Pacific; therefore, Isike (2022) contends that "... Africa must step it up". Mishra (2021) also asserts that Africa needs to enforce collective agency by partaking in various (Indo-Pacific) minilateral and multilateral fora. Mixed responses and reactions among African nations were established regarding their geopolitical position in the Indo-Pacific and regional exclusion.



South Africa declined an invitation to attend the France-EU Indo-Pacific forum (the aforementioned findings); therefore, this study contends that while South Africa (and other African nations) may fear being caught between the big power rivalry (between the US and China), it forfeits its inclusion of the regional framework and discourses of the Indo-Pacific. South Africa is not only a maritime nation, boarded by the Atlantic and Indian Oceans (Vreÿ, 2017); it has embedded strategic interests in the Indian Ocean through its ocean's economy project, such as Operation Phakisa aimed at accelerating economic growth by tapping into the oceans (Loureiro *et al.*, 2022). It is also an active member of the IONS and has conducted various joint maritime exercises (Vreÿ, 2017; Van Nieuwkerk & Manganyi, 2019).

Hettene and Söderbaum (1998) emphasise the theory of new regionalism is likely to support, rather than obstruct regional and international cooperation. South Africa, alongside India, is a member of India, Brazil, and South Africa (IBSA) trilateral partnership founded on the hopes for "... policy coordination on trade and security issues in the global arena" (Vieira & Alden, 2011:507). Geopolitically, IBSA allows its members to "sustain a higher strategic profile beyond their immediate regional boundaries through a shared willingness to work together to enhance their positioning within the international status quo, individually and as a grouping" (Vaz, 2015:175). South Africa and India are also members of the IORA, while India is also a member of the Quad, as emphasised in the literature review; however, South Africa and the broader WIO region are yet to harness the geopolitical potentials realised by these strategic partnerships. This exploitation should facilitate its (and the broader WIO) inclusion in the Indo-Pacific by leveraging the multilateral partnerships connecting it to the broader Indo-Pacific. Hence, Reva (2021) contends that Africa's under-preparedness for the unfolding developments in the Indo-Pacific region will only lead to disruption in its cooperation efforts in the Indian Ocean and the wider Indo-Pacific.

The study findings further indicate a lack of coordination and a clear understanding of Africa's position in the Indo-Pacific region at continental and regional levels. The study emphasises the AU Agenda 2063 and AU 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy. One of the action plans of the AU Agenda 2063 is to create strategies that respond to the African blue ocean in recognising the role of the ocean economy in Africa's transformative development and industrialisation agenda (AU, 2015). The AU Maritime Strategy carries a vision to "... foster increased wealth creation from Africa's oceans and seas by developing a sustainable, thriving BE in a secure and environmentally sustainable manner" (AU, 2012:11). Yet, the AU has no existing IPS that

outlines its maritime aspirations, provided the importance of the Indian Ocean to Africa's trade and commerce (Wu & Schoeman, 2022).

Kenya was found to be the most proactive African nation in addressing the regional dynamics of the Indo-Pacific; however, this research contends that Kenya's engagements with the Indo-Pacific players, including China, India, and Japan, are bilateral, while regional integration lags. Reva (2021) remarks that African nations' bilateral engagements in the Indo-Pacific should align with existing AU policies, such as the AU Agenda 2063 and the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy. This research concedes that the former will ensure the integration of Africa's interests and agency in the bilateral Indo-Pacific engagements, especially since findings indicated that Nairobi observes itself as an Indo-Pacific nation; however, Cannon and Mogakga (2023) contend that Kenya's regional consolidation in the Indo-Pacific will be determined by developing a clear policy outlook.

Although the SADC has drafted its Maritime Strategy, Walker and Reva (2020) explain that such a critical document has not been published for public access; the strategy was agreed upon by the SADC Standing Maritime Committee to undergo revision to "meet the current and possible future maritime threats", however, progress for the review and re-evaluation of the strategy has since been slow (Walker, 2019:61). According to the Ministry of Defence and Military Veterans (n.d.), the conceptualisation of the SADC Maritime Strategy was drafted to respond to piracy in the SADC Indian Ocean space:

"The benefits derived from this Strategy and the subsequent signing of the Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between South Africa, Mozambique, and Tanzania, signalled an end to 'sea blindness' within the SADC east coast, and engaging in discussions surrounding maritime security and the 'blue economy'." (Ministry of Defence and Military Veterans, n.d.:2).

Tanzania is both an EAC and SADC member, connecting the two regional economic blocs. Therefore, the research contends that Tanzania, with the backing of its regional bloc partners, could lead a common EAC-SADC Indian Ocean maritime perspective and an integrated Indo-Pacific vision. France and India cooperate in patrolling the Mozambique channel while the literature review indicated US-China naval cooperation in the Horn of Africa; therefore, the second point raised by the study is the argument that the interests of the larger Indo-Pacific community and the SADC members depend on the maritime security in the EAC and SADC's Indian Oceanic zone. The study presents that a coordinated and united EAC-SADC would be

better incorporated into the security efforts of the larger Indo-Pacific through the combined collaboration of Indo-Pacific players and may serve as a strategic steppingstone into the force for expanding the INDOPACOM to include the WIO.

A better coordinated AU would permit the integration of its Maritime Strategy, its regional economic blocs, AU Agenda 2063, Maritime Strategy, and the AfCFTA with the IORA-IPO. As it is, Africa lacks the agency to better respond to the Indo-Pacific and its regional dynamics. Reva (2021) contends that the continent is marginalised in the Indo-Pacific regional developments. He also emphasises that Africa has no clear and direct foreign policy towards the existing Indo-Pacific strategies and, therefore, needs to drive its narrative of the Indo-Pacific region. It was established in the findings that IORA recognises East and Southern Africa as part of the Indo-Pacific region. The research observes this geopolitical construct as a game-changer, as African countries represented in IORA membership are provided institutional legitimacy as part of the Indo-Pacific region.

The IORA-IPO guides IORA's engagements in the Indo-Pacific region. The IORA and ASEAN had an exchange of observations meeting to learn about regional practices in ASEAN cooperation (IRSEA, 2022). Such cooperation coincides with the new regionalism theory, supporting regional pluralism and multilateral cooperation; therefore, the IORA-ASEAN cooperation provides the IORA with greater representation and strengthened regional cooperation with ASEAN. Such cooperation may guide Africa's regional inclusion in ASEAN forums. South Africa's deputy minister of IR and Cooperation, Candith Mashego-Dlamini, released an official statement during the 2022 IORA Council of Ministers meeting where she reiterated in response to the approved IORA-IPO, "... [w]e must ensure that IORA's outlook on the Indo-Pacific must be a platform focused on cooperation and collaboration and addressing the development challenges of member states as one of its key focus areas". She further welcomed the IORA 2022-2027 Action Plan and acknowledged the importance of the Indian Ocean for collective growth and development (DIRCO, 2022).

According to Sooklal (2022:31), South Africa has "... noted that in some of the [strategies and visions] of the Indo-Pacific, Africa is excluded, specifically the littoral states of the Western Indian Ocean comprising the Southeast, Eastern and reflecting Northeast coast of Africa". Sooklal (2022:31) further remarks that South Africa hopes that "... this exclusion of the Western Indian Ocean will be addressed by the concerned entities reflecting Africa as an integral part of the Indo-Pacific". Like South Africa, Kenya also participated in the IORA Council of

Ministers meeting held in Bangladesh (IORA chair), where its ambassador, Josphat Maikara, was part of the discussion and approval of the IORA-IPO; he reiterated, “... Kenya is committed to continue offering her support to sustainable development and management of the Indian Ocean” (Ministry of Foreign Diaspora Affairs, 2022). Sooklal (2022) however, contends that Africa's lack of a clear foreign policy focus in the evolving Indo-Pacific could lead to further marginalization in its foresight. He argues that policymakers in the continent must champion an Indo-Pacific vision to which this study concedes.

The exclusion of Africa in the US and Australian Indo-Pacific strategies remains a concern. The US is an Indo-Pacific power (the White House, 2022f) with embedded interests and active engagements and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region (Chapter 3). The Biden-led IPEF was launched to inspire economic transformation by attracting foreign investment and promoting sustainability throughout the Indo-Pacific region (US Department of State, 2023a). According to the US Department of State (2023a), the IPEF accounts for 40% of the global GDP and 28% of global trade in goods and services; therefore, Africa’s geopolitical exclusion implies that it is omitted from the strategic fora and initiatives, such as the IPEF. While the IORA-IPO grants Africa legitimacy in the Indo-Pacific, it is its inclusion in the US-IPS that will enable its integration into US-led regional initiatives and platforms; the US strategy does not recognise Africa as a component of the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, future discussions will still pertain to the debates on Africa’s position in the Indo-Pacific concerning its asymmetrical representation (Schoeman & Wu, 2022).

Africa cannot afford to remain on the sidelines while the Indo-Pacific regional dynamics evolve. According to Cannon and Mogaka (2023), nations such as Kenya are already entangled in big power rivalries with political, economic, and geostrategic implications. As emphasised above, nations, such as South Africa, are coming up to par in recognising the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific; therefore, a clear articulation of their positions in the Indo-Pacific is necessitated. Following the release of the US-IPS in 2022, the Biden administration has bolstered regional security through the AUKUS security alliance, pledging over \$2 billion in financial assistance to the Indo-Pacific region, provided nearly \$620 million in security efforts, and a further \$13.4 million supporting climate-smart infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific (US Department of State, 2022). Africa, however, remains a missing puzzle, lacking in these economic and security initiatives that benefit the wider IOR and the broader Indo-Pacific.

Akin to the US-IPS, Australia's geopolitical construct excludes Africa (findings above). Similarly, Australia is also the most active in the Indo-Pacific with efforts that the study contends would benefit Africa from its inclusion in its IPS. Further, Australia and the US are most active in the security activities of the Indo-Pacific region, with security cooperation through the AUKUS (Chapter 3); therefore, it is the argument of the study that because of a lack of a clear policy focus in response to the growing significance and synergies with the broader Indo-Pacific, Africa lacks a common and consistent voice in articulating its position of its exclusion in the Indo-Pacific visions that disregard it — only a few WIO nations have strived to respond to Africa's exclusion in the Indo-Pacific while their position remains uncertain due to fears of being embroiled in the US-China rivalry.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter provides findings on Africa's geopolitical exclusion from the Indo-Pacific region and its position in response to its regional exclusion with a critical analysis of the findings. Most African countries do not want to become embroiled in the great power rivalry between the US and China; however, Africa misses promoting its agency by leveraging the geostrategic opportunities, such as the IORA-IPO and Indo-Pacific regional engagements. Africa's geopolitical position in the Indo-Pacific remains uncertain. Most interactions between the two regions occur bilaterally, with little attention to regional and continental integration. The uncertainty presented by ASEAN centrality raises questions and concerns for the WIP, which remains regionally disregarded. Similarly, the geopolitical exclusion of the WIP by the US and Australia raises more questions as they hold strategic regional interests while the WIP is implicated in the regional dynamics of the broader Indian Ocean; therefore, despite geographical/geopolitical links to the Indo-Pacific, Africa remains marginalised in its regional framework and debates.

Unlike global partners, such as the EU, which adopted an IPS as a response to the evolving developments of the Indo-Pacific, Africa has yet to adopt its own IPS. The continent needs to better respond to the regional construct that excludes its linkages. It needs a common and well-articulated stance on consolidating the IORA-IPO, recognising the Eastern and Southern African regions as part of its Indo-Pacific framework to push back against its regional and geopolitical exclusion. The subsequent chapter critically analyses the implications of the US-China geopolitical contest in Africa, focusing on Africa and Indo-Pacific synergies.

## CHAPTER 5

# THE SYNERGISTICAL IMPLICATION OF US-CHINA GEOPOLITICAL CONTEST ON AFRICA IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and a critical analysis of research question three of the study. It focuses on the implications of the US-China geopolitical contest between the Indo-Pacific and Africa with such implications for Africa and the Indo-Pacific nexus. The analysis of the chapter is categorised into three themes. The first theme emphasises the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region on regional members. The second theme focuses on the implications of the US-China geopolitical contest in Africa in the push for Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific. The third theme focuses on the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific with specific reference to Africa and Indo-Pacific synergies.

The main research question is as follows:

- What are the implications of the United States-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region for Africa's regional inclusion?

Presentation of findings on the implications of the US-China contest in the Indo-Pacific region and Africa, including such implications for Africa in the Indo-Pacific nexus. Sub-question 3 is:

- What are the implications of the geopolitical competition between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific region, and how do they influence the relationship between Africa and the Indo-Pacific?

#### 5.1.1 A critical analysis

#### 5.2.1 Implications of the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific and Africa

According to Tellis et al. (2020:3), the US-China strategic rivalry involves five elements: "... control over the Indo-Pacific rimland, trade and economy, China's quest for alternative technical standards, technological dominance, and military advancement". Tan (2020) and Ye (2020) suggest that China's behaviour towards the US-IPS suggests a hedging strategy, adhering to a non-alliance pattern while enhancing its Russia-China strategic partnership as a

security measure against the US-led Indo-Pacific. Contrary to the latter, the study finds that China is also building strategic coalitions by forging closer relations with the Pacific nations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022a). Findings further indicate that ASEAN nations prefer neutrality in the US-China regional contest rather than taking sides with either nation (Stromseth, 2019); however, maintaining strategic neutrality in the US-China regional contest is challenging for ASEAN and other Indo-Pacific regional actors. He and Li (2020:8) contend that "... most players have tried to avoid publicly antagonizing China by not siding with the US". The study findings reveal that Australia and India will likely encounter a dilemma in choosing between the US and China in the Indo-Pacific (Medcalf & Mohan 2014).

The study findings reveal that China observes the Quad as an anti-Chinese grouping, aiming to counter or contain its influence and rise (Kuznetsov, 2021); however, the Quad members insist that the alliance maintains a rules-based order in the region (Hanada, 2019; Koga, 2021). According to Casarini (2022), the Biden administration has expanded its network with the EU to counter China, creating a stronger alliance. The EU-IPS was released after the official announcement of AUKUS (Pandey, 2021). The US and EU have released joint statements in their Indo-Pacific cooperation, supporting a regional order grounded on the FOIP vision (US Department of State, 2021).

The study finds that US-China strategic competition in Africa is compelled by three factors: resources, influence, and emerging opportunities. Both competing nations observe Africa as an abundant continent, more so China. China's heavy investments are motivated by Africa's abundant mineral resources and a growing youthful population, offering strategic commercial opportunities (Sany & Sheehy, 2021). China has emerged as a formidable African contender, providing inducements, such as hospitals, stadiums, and roads, to secure access to vital resources (Conteh-Morgan, 2018). It has been Africa's largest trading partner since 2009, surpassing the US. China also became the largest foreign direct investment (FDI) provider in Africa, supporting thousands of African jobs (Ighobor, 2013; Feffer, 2021; Sheehy, 2022).

A telecommunication rivalry also accompanies the US-China competition in Africa; therefore, the United States and China's telecommunication companies are racing to control millions of Africans' digital consumption and technology (Tugendhat, 2021). Findings further indicate that East Africa has been a focus of Chinese projects, including railways, power plants, seaports, and Kenya's mega railway project, connecting Nairobi and Mombasa (Carmody et al., 2022).



Furthermore, shared challenges exist between Africa and Indo-Pacific players. For example, Sneyd (2022) asserts that Africa and Indo-Pacific nations share maritime security concerns and the US-China geostrategic contest.

The study finds that the Horn of Africa and the Middle East connect strategic maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Malacca, Hormuz, and the Bab el-Mandab which are the three busiest and most strategic maritime constrictions. They are predicted to experience a rise in maritime traffic owing to the increase in oil demand in the Indo-Pacific (Fatima & Jamshed, 2020). Egypt's Suez Canal allows vessels carrying goods and oil from the Middle East to Europe and North America (Watanabe, 2019); therefore, the cardinal importance of the Indian Ocean fosters strategic linkages between Africa and the broader Indo-Pacific, attracting growing strategic interests and power projections (Lee, 2018; Gurjar, 2021b).

## **5.2 A critical analysis of findings**

The implications of the US-China contest in the Indo-Pacific region and its implications for Africa in the Indo-Pacific.

### **5.2.1 Implications of the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region on regional members**

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a highly contested region in the modern-day era. Medcalf (2019) identifies the Indo-Pacific as a large, multipolar region with numerous emerging competing nations. Consequently, the US-IPS emphasises cooperation rather than dominance, using the terms “alliances” and “partners” to describe its regional approach (the White House, 2022f). The US has formed alliances with like-minded nations, including the Quad, AUKUS, and Five Eyes alliances, to compete with China. However, Tsuruoka (2021) contends that AUKUS is an extended umbrella of the long-standing Five Eyes security structure (comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the US). According to Ahmad (2021), the Quad and AUKUS are important in Biden's US-China rivalry, aiming to counter Beijing's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region and reaffirm the US global leadership in reshaping the world order.

According to the findings, some debates centered on the notion that China has adopted a hedging and a non-alliance approach to the US-led Indo-Pacific vision; however, recent Chinese advances indicate that China is establishing its own alliance with the Pacific and some of the ASEAN nations. For example, China and Cambodia conducted naval exercises in



Cambodian waters; however, the US is wary of their cooperation owing to concerns about China's intentions to establish a naval facility in Cambodia to secure its SCS interests (Dangwal, 2023). The study contends that China's 'pivot' to the Pacific and rising influence in ASEAN is partly a response to the US-FOIP vision, demonstrating Beijing's capabilities against a US-led Indo-Pacific vision.

The US prioritises a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, as agreed by Hall and Heazle (2017), Anwar (2020), and Bush *et al.* (2022); however, the study emphasises the importance of respect for state sovereignty—regional members should not be pressured to explain their decisions to cooperate with China in national and regional matters unless such cooperation threatens regional peace and security in the Indo-Pacific. The China-Solomon Islands security deal concerned the West, prompting the US to deploy a special delegation to hold a direct dialogue with the Island's Prime Minister (Castagnone, 2022); the US criticised the deal for lack of transparency. The Solomon Islands officials defended the deal, asserting the right to choose allies (Kekea, 2022). Similarly, Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne expressed disappointment with the China-Solomon Island military cooperation and expressed Canberra's intentions to pursue clarity in the signed agreement (Ligaiula, 2022a). At the pressure of 'picking sides' amid the great power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, the Cambodian government also issued an official statement that 'clarified' its policy position, that, the country attempts to become "friends" with all nations and is not interested in choosing sides between the US and China (Men, 2022).

According to Stromseth (2019), regional members, such as Australia and ASEAN, clarified that they want to be excluded from having to pick 'sides' in the growing US-China tensions. Kuik (2022) and Zhang (2023) agree that ASEAN maintains a hedging strategy against the US and China, promoting multilateralism and ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific. Recently, Indonesia, the ASEAN chair, advised against becoming a 'proxy' for any power during a press conference with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang (Yuniar, 2023). Similarly, Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull strongly condemned having to pick sides in the new 'cold war' between Washington and Beijing, stating "... [t]he idea that Australia has to choose between China and the United States is not correct" (McGuirk, 2021).

However, Varrall (2021) argues that Australia continues to grow weary of China in the Indo-Pacific, as it perceives China as a national, regional, and global threat. Öney (2022) contends that Australia banned Chinese-based Huawei from establishing 5G network infrastructure, a

countermeasure to ‘prevent’ foreign influence in its domestic policies, as it sided with the US against China. Similarly, although Indonesia has often reiterated its neutrality maintenance in the US-China geopolitical rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, Dwi (2020) asserts it was among the Indo-Pacific nations that promoted the Indo-Pacific concept (against China’s support for the Asia-Pacific concept) and anti-Chinese regional strategies. Cracks in ASEAN also implicated its ‘neutrality’ policy, with Cambodia abandoning its non-alignment policy by fostering closer relations with Beijing and shifting away from the West (Marston, 2023).

### **5.2.2 Implications of the US-China geopolitical contest in Africa: A push for Africa’s regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific**

Akin to the Indo-Pacific, Africa has emerged as a contested region where the US-China geopolitical contestation is prevalent (Sany & Sheehy, 2021). A rising China in Africa stems from Africa’s abundance of natural resources. Alden and Alves (2009) remark that Africa accounts for the world’s third-largest oil reserves, with countries, such as Libya, Nigeria, Algeria, and Angola as the continent’s largest oil exporters. They also mention South Africa, Gabon, the DRC, Zambia, and Zimbabwe as nestled on mineral resources, including the abundance of platinum, gold, diamonds, cobalt, and manganese. Some of the African oil nations are members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), responsible for nearly 70% of China’s energy required for its continued industrialization (Emikönel, 2022).

The Biden administration opposed China’s emergence in the Indo-Pacific region (Wei & Zhang, 2021); however, a rising China in Africa directed similar threats to Washington’s influence on the continent. Biden has ‘assured’ Africa of his aim to rebuild relations after much neglect during the Trump administration (Askar, 2021); however, this study contends that an already-emerged China has observed high-end investments in Africa—investments that drive Africa’s economic growth and development and strengthen Sino-Africa relations. China invested much in Africa’s infrastructure, agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and telecommunication—crucial sectors for Africa’s development (Mlambo, 2019; Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2021).

According to Ayodele and Sotola (2014) and Wang and Elliot (2014), China’s engagements in Africa hold less political implications than the West. Chinese corporations are eager to invest in areas that the West is often less tempted to invest in, such as infrastructure, agriculture, and industry. Following the 2018 FOCAC summit in Beijing, China pledged \$60 billion for Africa’s

development finance in 2021 (Lokanathan, 2020). Through the BRI, China has attempted multiple projects in Africa, including ports, railway lines, roads, telecommunication infrastructure and energy installations (Ndzendze & Monyae, 2019; Xiaodong, 2023). However, some of the African nations hold a different view to China relations. For instance, Eswatini maintains relations with Taiwan and has for years severed relations with China; it is one of the few African nations that has not signed a BRI MoU (Lokanathan, 2020).

Chinese tendencies have drawn significant criticism from the West. The US sub-Saharan Africa Strategy explicitly remarks that China's presence in Africa challenges a rules-based order. The strategy includes that China observes Africa as a commercial and geopolitical destination to pursue its own interests and agendas, ignoring transparency and openness while attempting to deteriorate US-Africa relations (the White House, 2022h). An assertive China has agitated the US in the Indo-Pacific region and in Africa. Already, "... China accounts for 17 percent of Ethiopia's foreign debt, 33 percent of Kenya's, and 70 percent of Djibouti's" (Lynch, 2023:116). African nations have grown weary of overreliance on China. This is exemplified by Hook (2012), explaining that although South Africa is a member of the BRICS alliance with China, speaking at the 2012 FOCAC summit, South Africa's then-president Jacob Zuma warned that Africa's trade with China is unsustainable in the long-term as it has primarily relied on its raw material exports.

Therefore, this research contends that in their strategic rivalry in Africa, neither China nor America presents a total win-win outcome for Africa. Conteh-Morgan (2018) argues that China uses Africa to neutralise US power and influence on the continent, hoping to create a divide among great power relations with African nations. According to Isaksson and Kotsadam (2018), the Chinese-dominated infrastructural sector in Africa is widely known for corrupt practices and questionable implementation. For example, Namibia investigated thirty Chinese firms for two years over alleged unlawful revenues, and the investigation's conclusion pinned four Chinese businesspeople allegedly involved in a \$300 million illegal tax fraud (Meservey, 2018; Liu, 2019).

Similarly, Africa-China relations have been severely discouraged by the clamour in the West about a growing China in Africa. For instance, the US has been playing the debt diplomacy card against strengthened China-Africa ties; however, compared to the 35% of the debt owed to Western lenders, China only makes up 12% of Africa's total debt (Benson, 2022). Benson further remarks that a report by the Department of Justice, a global advocacy organisation,

revealed a 5% interest Western rate charge compared to a 2.7% interest Chinese rate charge; therefore, Western lenders charge Africa twice the interest rates of Chinese lenders.

The study substantiates that Africa has an opportunity to steer the unfolding US-China rivalry to its advantage, more so in advancing its regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific. Yang (2022) encourages Africa to leverage the US-China geopolitical rivalry to advance its own interests; however, the key query from the latter relates to approaching how Africa can benefit from the US-China geopolitical contest. Yang (2022) asserts that Africa is in a position where it can present requests to the US that suit its developmental aspirations, especially in encountering a much more powerful China in the continent; therefore, as Biden assures to restore relations with Africa, the study contends that Africa is better positioned to push for its recognition in the US Indo-Pacific construct.

Soulé (2021) contends that Africa can leverage the strategic rivalry in two ways: by playing one player against the other and implementing strategic policies, prioritising its national and continental interests. The US and China individually hold comparative advantage of some aspects crucial to Africa's future and has comparative advantages on issues of democracy, significant governance, and peace and security; the US also backs the AfCFTA through enhancing trade and investments with the continent (Signé, 2021). Karlsson (2020) contends that China holds a comparative advantage in areas of trade and investments, non-interference, and developmental assistance. It is, therefore, why the study concedes that Africa should engage both rivals to its own advantage and push for its geopolitical inclusion in the Indo-Pacific, more so in integrating its key policies and structures, such as the AU Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA in the broader Indo-Pacific.

A revised and realistic Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) (a revised B3W) stands to benefit Africa through a G7-supported \$600 billion infrastructural investment for developing nations, including accessible health and telecommunications by 2027 (the White House, 2022d). According to Gill (2022), the African nations of Senegal and South Africa were invited to participate in the G-7 summit; therefore, Africa should leverage multilateral platforms and strategic initiatives to push for a US-led regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific. The study findings further suggest that one of the dominant areas of competition between the two rivals is in the telecommunication sector, driven by Africa's growing economies, consumer base and young population. Agbebi (2022) remarks that China's digital Maritime Silk Road vision has observed an influx and influence of Chinese telecommunication corporations, such

as Huawei and Zhongxing Telecom Ltd (ZTE), in Africa. These corporations have established Africa's digital infrastructure "... from internet backbone networks to last-mile solutions" (Agbebi, 2022:2). Meanwhile, the Biden administration announced an \$800 million investment supporting Africa's digital transformation through the Digital Transformation with Africa (DTA) – an initiative narrated as a "... programmatic approach" (Alayande, 2023:3; Boag-Guehe, 2023). Under the PGII, the US committed \$300 million in financial assistance as a loan to establish interconnected data facilities named Africa Data Centres (ADCs) in Ghana (the White House, 2023a). The study contends that Africa's approach to the ongoing US-China rivalry will determine the extent to which it may mutually benefit and push for its regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific as both rivals will invest and, therefore, exert an influence in the continent in an attempt for one to outdo the other.

### **5.2.3 US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific: Africa-Indo-Pacific nexus**

From the findings of this chapter, it was established that Africa shares strategic and direct linkages with the Indo-Pacific region. The WIP region, as asserted by Nkala (2021), is strategic in trade and the BE. Nkala expands on his observation by asserting that the WIP accounts for around \$333.8 billion in the region's asset base (shipping, fisheries, mining, etc). Therefore, Monyae (2021) contends that the Indian Ocean is of importance to Africa's political economy and that as part of the larger IOR, the regional geopolitics of the Indian Ocean implicate Africa. Sneyd (2022) asserts that the Eastern African seaboard has observed a rise in maritime security threats such as piracy in the Horn of Africa, and similarly, the rise of piracy in the Indo-Pacific's critical Bay of Bengal and the Strait of Malacca. The AU and ASEAN recognised the necessity for regional engagement, demonstrating Africa's close connection to the larger Indo-Pacific (Sneyd, 2022).

Khan (2023) contends that the African littoral nations in the Indian Ocean encounter 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' maritime security threats. He continues that non-state actors, such as the Al Shabab extremist groups in Somalia and Mozambique, hold spillover effects on the maritime domains of these littoral nations and that, the wider IOR encounters traditional security threats, such as internal conflicts and organised maritime crime. These crimes include piracy and illegal trafficking of people, arms, and narcotics. Similarly, the Indo-Pacific region encounters several security concerns, including the possibility of war breakouts over maritime sovereignty disputes, piracy, human, drugs, and arms trafficking and terrorism (Tertia & Perwita, 2018; Tuan, 2020). Maritime security is a fundamental aspect in shaping the Indo-

Pacific's security architecture and is a force for power projections in the region (Tertia & Perwita, 2018).

Rising regional concern over the SCS sovereignty disputes with an assertive China is the main concern for the US-led Quad (Putri *et al.*, 2020). Africa has expressed its position regarding extending the US-China geopolitical rivalry in the SCS. According to Robles (2016), Beijing pursued global support for peaceful negotiations to resolve the SCS dispute with the Philippines aiming to achieve a resolution. China garnered the support of forty African nations, sharing a peaceful sentiment on the matter; however, most Western policy experts underestimate Africa's contribution to the SCS issue, claiming its stance is solely based on China's reliance; therefore, Mlambo *et al.* (2021) contend that Africa's problems, such as underdevelopment and poverty, overshadow its international presence. This complicates competing and enforcing agency for developing nations (such as African nations) globally as decisions are often made on their behalf—a misconception of 'we know best' (Rodrik, 2016).

In Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, some remarked that China's BRI includes fifty-two African nations as recipients and signatories of the mega initiative. Taking from the new regionalism theory that has guided this study, the researcher contends that an initiative, such as the BRI, transcends traditional geographical boundaries to integrate like-minded nations and regions for common developmental purposes. Often overlooked, the BRI also includes some of the EU members. The Maritime Silk Road data indicates that eighteen EU members are signatories of the BRI (Devonshire-Ellis, 2020). As already established in the findings of this chapter, the EU released its IPS, outlining its regional aspirations and observations in the Indo-Pacific. It is important to emphasize that the EU-IPS recognizes Eastern and Southern African nations (Mattheis & Diaz, 2022). Like the US, China's 'assertiveness' is central to its strategy. Of commonality, however, is the links with Africa, Asia, and the broader Eurasia through the BRI—China's Indo-Pacific blueprint. The point raised here is that the BRI links Africa and the EU while the EU is an Indo-Pacific resident (according to its IPS) and a regional alliance partner of the US. The US-IPS recognizes the increasing presence of the EU in the Indo-Pacific and assures its commitment to align its regional approach in efforts to build regional connectivity (the White House, 2022f).

The study further established that Djibouti hosts four military bases belonging to the Indo-Pacific players (the US, China, Japan, and France). Wan *et al.* (2020) and Gurjar (2021a) agree that Djibouti is a great power playground — the only country globally to host multiple foreign military bases (Sun & Zoubir, 2016). Under Gurjar (2022a), Djibouti will likely become a

‘pivot’ owing to its growing strategic importance in the twenty-first century. The pivot is attributed to its historical, geographical, and demographic nexus of the Middle East and the Islamic linkages, Francophone colonial background, Africa, and strategic linkages with the broader WIO and the Indo-Pacific (Gurjar, 2022a).

According to Yimer (2021), the stability of East Africa is drastically declining as it becomes more vulnerable to the region’s militarisation, exacerbated by the US-China geopolitical rivalry. Yimer further argues that the militarisation of Djibouti by the latter Indo-Pacific players is intentional, as it serves as a channel for access to the oil-strategic Gulf of Aden and the natural resource-rich WIO. A parallel is drawn between the implications of the US-China geopolitical contest for East Africa and Southern Africa and the extension of regional nexus. The Mozambican Channel is considered geostrategic as 30% of the world’s oil passes through the channel (Fatima & Jamshed, 2020). therefore, the geostrategic Mozambique channel and natural abundance of oil and gas have entangled the region in the great power rivalry. Growing external interests surfaced over the burgeoned Mozambican offshore gas sector— This includes a \$50 billion investment to extract an estimated one hundred trillion cubic feet of gas, as well as a huge onshore gas liquification facility (Brewster, 2021).

France and the United States are major investors in the sector. Like the Horn of Africa, the Mozambican Channel has necessitated cooperation following the 2021 insurgency — the insurgency led to multilateral cooperation between the SADC and members of the Quad, reflecting strategic regional synergies (Brewster, 2021). In 2022, the US government designated Mozambique as its priority country for its Strategy to prevent conflict and promote stability (US Embassy in Mozambique, 2023). China-Mozambique cooperation under the BRI has also sufficed with major infrastructure investments such as roads, bridges and rail ways (Hejun, 2020). However, Bhatia (2022); Henwood & Wu (2022); Schoeman and Wu (2022) and Wu (2022) agree on Africa’s asymmetrical representations among the Indo-Pacific players and exclusion from regional debates.



### 5.3 Conclusion

This section of the study provides an extensive critical analysis of the implications of the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific region and Africa and such implications for Africa in the Indo-Pacific. The complexities of the Indo-Pacific complicate a successful hedging strategy as the US-China rivalry heightens; therefore, regional members encounter the dilemma of relying on close-knit alliances and partnerships as a coping mechanism in this highly contested region. In the same order, the US-China geopolitical contest overlaps with Africa, with strategic interests, such as resources, infrastructure, and telecommunication, at stake. While the great power rivalry turned Africa into yet another proxy playground, such as the Indo-Pacific, Africa needs to use the contest to its advantage to drive its agency and developmental agenda and to push for its regional and geopolitical inclusion in the strategic Indo-Pacific.

Africa must leverage the growing Indo-Pacific overlaps as the WIP/ WIO shares geographical and geopolitical links with the broader Indo-Pacific; therefore, Africa's connection to the BRI, regional implications of the heavy militarisation in East Africa and insurgency overlapping to the Mozambican Channel and maritime security, and the geostrategic importance of the Indian Ocean's maritime constrictions draw in strategic synergies between Africa and the broader Indo-Pacific. The former also implicates foreign policies of the African littoral nations across the Indian Ocean, disregarded in the Indo-Pacific debates and framework. Implicated WIO nations, such as Djibouti, already find themselves heavily entangled in the Indo-Pacific strategic competition through its host of regional military bases; therefore, Djibouti is evident that Africa holds direct synergies with the broader Indo-Pacific. The subsequent chapter presents the findings and discussion on how Africa can benefit from its regional integration in the Indo-Pacific region, based on the theoretical framework established in this chapter.



## CHAPTER 6

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR AFRICA'S REGIONAL INCLUSION IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter emphasises strategic opportunities and prospects for Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific, focusing on economic, security, and geopolitical aspects. The chapter focuses on crucial areas of Africa's regional inclusion. These include the China-led BRI and FOCAC, US-led IPEF, Quad and FOIP, India-Japan-led AAGC and their led FOIP, and the IORA-IPO. The chapter concludes with remarks on promoting Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific. The following are the remarks by the Quad leaders during the third in-person Quad leader meeting: "... There is no doubt at all about the fact that the Indo-Pacific region is the engine for global trade, innovation, and development. We agree that the security and success of the Indo-Pacific is important not just for this region but for the entire world" (the White House, 2023b). This chapter is dedicated to guiding the following Sub-research question 4 (RQ4) in particular:

- How can Africa benefit from being part of the Indo-Pacific region?

### 6.2 Presentation of findings on the opportunities for Africa's regional inclusion: Economic, Security and Geopolitical dimensions

- What are the potential opportunities that Africa stand to benefit from its regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific region?

#### 6.2.1 Africa and Indo-Pacific: Geoeconomic synergies

The Indo-Pacific emerged as the most geostrategic region of the twenty-first century. Besides the US as a residential power, the Indo-Pacific is the residence of three of the largest global economies—China, India, and Japan (Singh, 2014). According to the study's literature review, the Indo-Pacific accounts for 63% of the global GDP and 46% of the global merchandise trade (Kaushiva & Singh, 2014; Ghosh *et al.*, 2022). With shared waters of the Indian Ocean, 90% of Africa's trade relies on the seas, while "... around 65 percent of the world's oil reserves belong to ten of the Indian Ocean littoral states" (Singh *et al.*, 2017:244). The WIO region plays a vital role in the Indo-Pacific—the regional coastal tourism generates an annual estimation of

\$10.4 billion, while the fisheries and aquaculture sector generate an annual \$1.9 billion (Obura, 2017). Obura also remarks that the WIO is estimated to be valued at \$333.8 billion. Pursuing South-South cooperation has observed closer Asia-Africa ties with burgeoned Asian markets in Africa (Mutambara, 2013). Detailed findings of economic opportunities for Africa in the Indo-Pacific are assembled below. Presentations in this section are divided according to the BRI, IPEF, and AAGC.

### 6.2.2 The BRI and Indo-Pacific trade route linkages

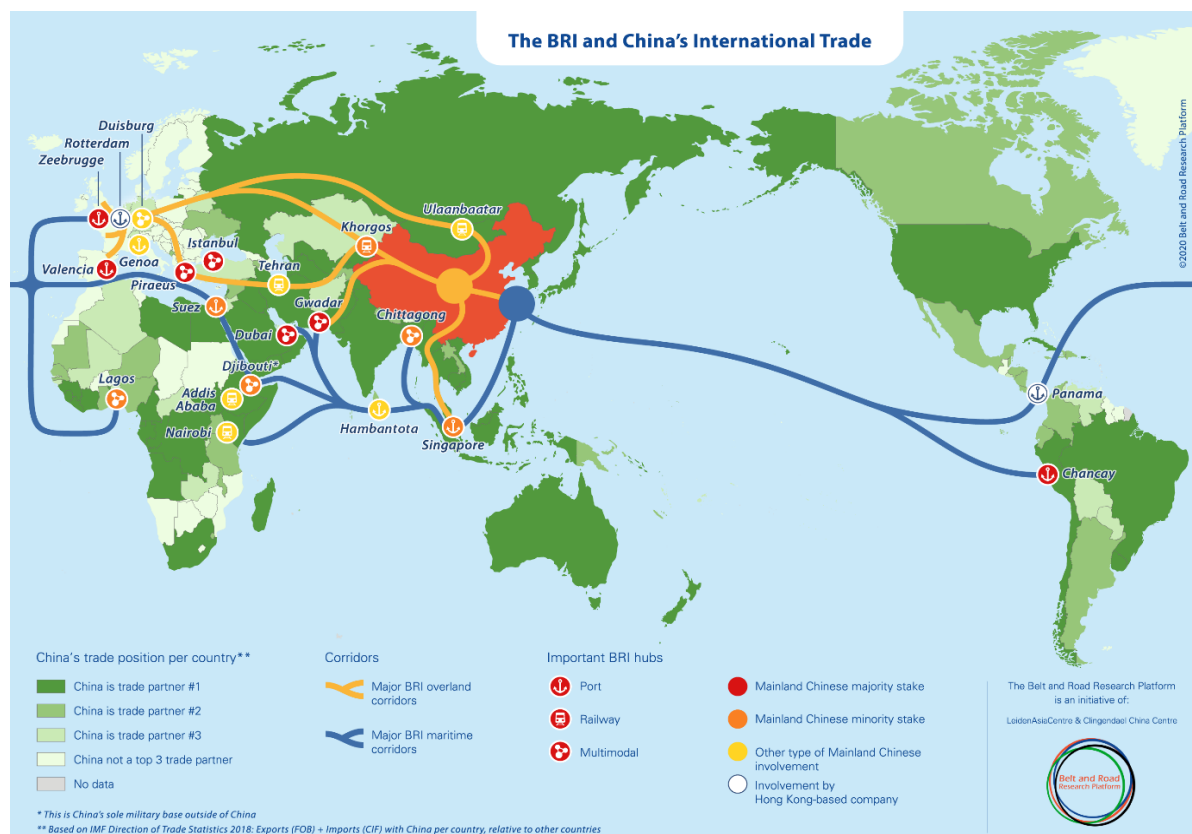


Figure 1: The BRI and China's international trade routes

Source: Martin and Lammertink (2021).

It is through Africa-ASEAN cooperation that the study establishes economic opportunities for Africa in the broader Indo-Pacific through expanded regional trade. This is because ASEAN is considered the Indo-Pacific's nucleus—the centrality of the Indo-Pacific region (Kominfo, 2023). Findings reveal interconnected overland and maritime corridors linking Africa and ASEAN, including critical BRI hubs, ports, railways, and multimodal channels, emphasised in the above BRI trade route depiction. These include ports in Singapore and Egypt and railways linking Mombasa, Nairobi, and Addis Ababa. The Mombasa-Nairobi and Addis Ababa-Djibouti railways strategically connect East Africa and the Indo-Pacific through the major BRI

maritime corridor channels (He, 2020). The multimodal channels also connect Africa and the wider Indo-Pacific through hubs, such as in Djibouti, Lagos, and Chittagong (from Bangladesh—an ARF member), as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 demonstrates major BRI overland and maritime corridors that not only connect Africa and Asia but include Europe and South America. The depiction specifies the BRI's six strategic economic corridors—the "... China-Pakistan economic corridor; Bangladesh China-India-Myanmar; the Eurasian Land Bridge; China-Mongolia-Russia; China-Central Asia West Asia; and the China-Indochina Peninsula" (He, 2020:146). According to Ndzendze and Monyae (2019), Africa can find constructive collaboration within the BRI's economic corridors by integrating the BRI and AU Agenda 2063. The BRI is an important channel for promoting and expanding Africa's geoeconomic landscape, as its "... infrastructure-building is valuable for promoting the AfCFTA" (Herman, 2022).

### **6.2.3 Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF): Economic implications for Africa**

The US sub-Saharan African strategy notes its intention to integrate Africa into the Indo-Pacific fora (the White House, 2022h). Although the United States engagements in the Indo-Pacific focus mainly on security (discussed in section 6.6.1), the study finds a strategic opportunity for Africa's inclusion in the 2022 establishment of the US-led IPEF, a trade framework aimed to strengthen relations in the Indo-Pacific region for technological innovation and the global economy (the White House, 2022a). The IPEF, comprising twelve Indo-Pacific nations, accounts for 40% of the global GDP and is open for the consideration of future membership (Tan, 2022; Widakuswara, 2022).

The IPEF surpasses traditional trade agreements and norms (focusing on trade tariffs) by centring the digital economy in broader Asia (Reinsch & Goodman, 2022). The digital component of the IPEF encompasses digital trade as part of creating an inclusive and resilient digital economy in the Indo-Pacific (Chen, 2022). The study finds strategic synergies between the digital IEPF, the US-Digital Transformation for Africa (DTA) (the White House, 2022c), the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy (AUDTS), and the AfCFTA, which hold geoeconomic implications for broader cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. By 2050, Africa's digital economy is expected to be worth \$750 billion. The US digital economy generated \$3.70 trillion in total output in 2021, with \$2.41 trillion in added value, \$1.24 trillion in compensation, and 8 million jobs. Between 2016 and 2021, America's digital economy grew by 10%, surpassing the net economic growth of 1.9% (Highfill & Surfield, 2022).

## **6.2.4 Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC): Synergies with the FOIP**

The AAGC was created by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to connect Africa and Asia (Prakash, 2018a). Findings suggest that the AAGC results from bilateral commitments to establish a FOIP region, combining India's Act East Policy and Japan's "expanded partnership for quality infrastructure" (Prakash, 2018a:7). Akin to the BRI, the AAGC offers Africa opportunities for expanded trade in broader Asia, establishing strategic links with East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. The AAGC includes the free movement of people, goods, and services between Africa and Asia (Prakash, 2018b). Strengthened India-Africa cooperation is established through strategic platforms, such as IORA, BRICS, G20, IBSA, and Japan-Africa cooperation through the TICAD (Makoni & Muqayi, 2018; Muresan, 2019). The AAGC resembles the BRI in that, it aims to establish a sea passageway connecting Africa to India, Oceania, and South-East Asia routes by reviving old trade routes and developing new ones; the AAGC aligns with the Quad structure and advice for collaboration in advancing the AAGC vision (Amaresh, 2020).

## **6.3 Security Opportunities for Africa: Regional peace and security**

### **6.3.1 Quad alliance: cooperation on common maritime security challenges**

Although the Quad is yet to become a formalised group (Cannon & Rossiter, 2022), it is mandated to play a leading role in maintaining a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific—encompassing free and open notions (Jash, 2021). Much of the scholarly attention to the Quad is positioned on the argument that the group is a countermeasure against China (Chapter 3). Emerging opportunities for Africa in the Indo-Pacific exist through the Quad conducting naval exercises in the Indian Ocean since 2020 (Haldar, 2023). The Quad's core priority is based on regional security. Findings indicate synergies between maritime security in the WIO and the broader Indo-Pacific, presenting security prospects for greater cooperation between Africa and the wider Indo-Pacific; common issues, such as piracy, insurgency, climate change, seaborne crime, trade, and pandemics, contribute to this link (Mohan, 2022).

## **6.4 Geopolitical prospects for Africa: Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific**

### **6.4.1 IORA Indo-Pacific Outlook: Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific**

The IORA is an important part of the Indo-Pacific, as it is the centrepiece of the Indian Ocean's governance (Islam, 2017). The IORA-IPO strives to cooperate with the Indo-Pacific members and existing multilateral fora (IORA, 2023b). Findings indicate that two of the four Quad

members, Australia and India, are permanent members of the IORA and are, therefore, the bridge holders between the IORA and the Quad (Halder, 2023). According to Henwood and Wu (2022) and Schoeman and Wu (2022), some African nations are already engaging in the Indo-Pacific discourse, therefore, representing their positions in the IORA's Indo-Pacific vision; the IORA is inclusive of major Indo-Pacific powers such as the US, China and France as dialogue partners (Niranjan, 2022). The geopolitical significance of the IOR implies the potential of the IORA to play a leading role side-by-side with ASEAN-centrality (Khurana, 2019). Findings demonstrate the IORA as a strategic mechanism for promoting Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific's regional membership framework while holding geopolitical benefits for its regional inclusion — it is diverse and inclusive, encompassing nations from three varying continents: Africa, Asia and Australia (Onyango-Ogutu, 2021).

#### **6.4.2 The BRI and FOCAC: Africa's regional inclusion**

Although Beijing has not publicly endorsed the Indo-Pacific notion, it continues its economic, strategic, and geopolitical cooperation in the Indo-Pacific through the BRI (Gong, 2020). The BRI's formalisation of Africa's integration is observed through the BRI-AU Agenda 2063 cooperation (Section 2.6 of the literature review). The study finds that the BRI is not just an economic or political weapon as prevalent among Western debates—it is a geopolitical channel for Beijing's interaction with Africa and a strategic pathway for Africa's inclusion in the Indo-Pacific framework and discourses through strategic linkages with ASEAN and the broader Eurasia. FOCAC—a blueprint for Sino-Africa relations, is a form of multilateral cooperation that "... aids the development of BRI projects in Africa" (Zhiqin & Lianxing, 2018). Further, the BRI encompasses a maritime dimension through the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) that creates strategic sea routes connecting Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East; and a digital dimension via the Digital Silk Road Initiative (DSI) aiming to facilitate cross-border connectivity between China and its BRI member countries through data sharing (Hlongwa & Vreÿ, 2021).

#### **6.4.3 US-FOIP: Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific**

The Biden administration is continuing the FOIP notion in the Indo-Pacific. The study also finds that the FOIP notion is supported by the Quad members and ASEAN (Vashisht, 2023). According to Szechenyi and Hosoya (2019), the FOIP is a key pillar of the Quad revival. America emphasises a rules-based order, governance, and the rule of law through the notion of the FOIP. The study's findings further suggest that recent geopolitical developments present

Africa with geopolitical prospects for a US-led inclusion in the Indo-Pacific construct and its various regional fora. As such, the US intends to foster bilateral collaboration with the WIO Island nations of Comoros, Mauritius, and Seychelles to promote a safe, secure, and prosperous Indian Ocean (US Department of State, 2023b).

## **6.5 A critical analysis of findings**

### **6.5.1 The Indo-Pacific and Africa's regional inclusion: Economic, Security and Geopolitical Prospects**

#### **6.5.2 Analysis of economic findings: BRI, AAGC, and IEPF**

The argument of the study has been that Africa is largely excluded in the geopolitical discourse of the Indo-Pacific as it is unequally accounted for among regional powers in their Indo-Pacific visions and discourses (Bhatia, 2022; Schoeman & Wu, 2022). However, the BRI, AAGC and IPEF have been established to hold geoeconomic opportunities for Africa's inclusion in the Indo-Pacific region. The BRI creates Africa-Asia linkages with economic implications for Africa and strategic Africa-ASEAN and the broader Eurasia linkages. The regional consensus on ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific region emphasised the need for broadened Africa-ASEAN cooperation (Ordaniel & Baker, 2021; the White House, 2022f; Zhang, 2023). ASEAN offers Africa diverse markets and trade opportunities, with a combined GDP of \$3.66 trillion in 2022 (O'Neill, 2023). Africa's geoeconomic importance has increased owing to global demand for natural resources and a growing population, and economic development (Kuyoro *et al.*, 2023).

ASEAN and Africa benefited from strategic BRI infrastructural projects, such as ports and railways (Section 6.2.2). According to Bi (2021), ASEAN nations are the central cooperation partners of the BRI, and China supports ASEAN centrality. China and ASEAN comprise 30% of the global population and a combined economic scale of more than \$15 trillion (Bi, 2021). The geostrategic significance of ASEAN pertains to its role as a "... major global hub of manufacturing and trade, and one of the fastest-growing consumer markets in the world" (Vinayak *et al.*, 2014:1). Therefore, the study asserts that ASEAN-Africa cooperation can help balance Africa's overreliance on its trade with China. As it stands, Africa only accounts for 2% of ASEAN's net trade (Kohnert, 2021); therefore, Africa can benefit through leveraging the BRI to broaden its market exports to the ASEAN nations and the broader Indo-Pacific and Eurasian regions.



The study also concedes that the geostrategic and geoeconomic significance of the BRI enables Africa to benefit from continental cooperation with ASEAN rather than bilaterally. This approach will likely experience the integration of key African policies and structures, such as the AU Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA, also benefitting smaller economies lacking a global trade agency. Ndzendze and Monyae (2019) assert that implementing the AU Agenda 2063 and BRI offers opportunities for Chinese investment along AU-determined channels. This study maintains that a China-led inclusion of Africa in the BRI-centred engagements with ASEAN in the broader Indo-Pacific may likely lead to mutually beneficial regional trade partnerships.

The BRI's broader linkages with the European, Middle Eastern, and South American regions also present opportunities for interconnected trade and integration of the AfCFTA. Already implemented is the regional trade cooperation among SADC, MERCOSUR (comprising the South American region) and the EU (Robbles, 2008). Although the BRICS as an entity has no formal agreement with the BRI, the two are connected; Chinese President Xi Xing Ping in his 2017 opening speech during the BRI Forum for International Cooperation reiterated that, "China plans to collaborate with international development organizations like the BRICS New Development Bank to support BRI and develop financing guidelines for development projects" (Singh, 2022:3). Following the BRICS expansion to include Egypt and Ethiopia, African BRICS members can mutually benefit from the latter in connection to the Indo-Pacific region through the BRI and the BRICS nexus (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, Taniguchi (2020) emphasises the importance of the AAGC in promoting connectivity, development, and cooperation between Asia and Africa. Although Taniguchi (2020) contends that its relevance has declined over time, the study suggests the AAGC remains a nuanced channel for Africa's economic benefit in the broader Indo-Pacific, worthy of reviving. Japan and India are supporters and pillars of the liberal order and a FOIP, as outlined in their Indo-Pacific visions (Basu, 2018; Das, 2021). The AAGC is part of Japan-India's 2025 Indo-Pacific Vision, aiming to establish an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific and integrate the AU Agenda 2063 to achieve "... sustainable development and interconnectedness between Asia and Africa" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2015; Basu, 2017). The AAGC's connection of Asia and Africa should be considered in a geoeconomic spectrum—as promising in integrating Asia-Africa markets with mutual opportunities in trade and investments. As an alternative to the BRI, the AAGC aims to foster strategic linkages between Africa and Asia in realising a FOIP (AAGC Vision Document, 2017). Japan and India demonstrated an interest in fostering closer relations with Africa. This is exemplified by India's credit to Africa through its

Export-Import (EXIM) bank, granting \$8 billion in loans to Africa (Beri, 2018); however, as contended by Taniguchi (2020), the AAGC will require shared support and effort in reviving it. African nations of the WIO/WIP will need to demonstrate a keen interest in pursuing the objectives of the AAGC to push for its regional inclusion in the realisation of the strategic opportunities of the AAGC and the broader Indo-Pacific.

The point of analysis for opportunities in Africa's regional inclusion stems from the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific (Opportunities for Africa through China-led inclusion through the BRI are already emphasised above). The study established economic opportunities for Africa in the Biden-led IPEF. Opportunities from the IPEF's prioritisation of the Indo-Pacific's digital economy encompass an aspect of the digital economy (including digital trade). Chen (2022) remarks that the IPEF is an opportunity for the US to consolidate its relations in the Indo-Pacific. Asia is becoming a leading hub for digital adoption, commerce, and innovation, accounting for 50% of global internet and cashless transactions (Raghuraman, 2022). The study established synergies between IPEF's digital drive and the Biden-led DTA, aligning with the AUDTS and the AfCFTA. The AUDTS emphasises its digital trade and financial services to develop "... a robust digital market characterized by the increased quality of financial inclusion, fair competition and advanced consumer protection with main focus areas on digital trade and financial services" (AU, 2020).

The AfCFTA and digital trade are crucial in Africa's economic growth (Gaither, 2023); however, Hagos (2022) contends that the AfCFTA is still a work in progress, particularly in digital trade; Africa still lacks digital trade volumes compared to the global region. Against Hagos' observation, the study acknowledges that the IEPF and AfCFTA are still in their implementing stages, which are promising. Integrating them would benefit Africa, the US, and the broader Indo-Pacific nations, as the AfCFTA is the world's largest trade area owing to its fifty-four member states (Maliszewska & Ruta, 2020). Chapter 4 established that Africa-Indo-Pacific engagements occur bilaterally; therefore, through integration in the Indo-Pacific construct, Africa could integrate and drive the AfCFTA goal of creating a single and liberalised African market (Lemma, 2022); therefore, the study positions that through regional collaborations and partnerships within the IPEF, Africa could expand its trade while broadening and attracting regional investments for its digital drive.

The study argues that the US assurance of integrating Africa in the Indo-Pacific fora requires action from Washington and Africa's force for US-led inclusion. Some IPEF members belong



to regional trade agreements, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Framework (RCEP). The RCEP includes China and the CPTPP members (which China has asked about joining) (Basu, 2022; Hongpei, 2023). ASEAN is fully present in the RCEP where all its ten member states are initiators and signatories to the framework (Kim, 2022). According to Scoles (2020), the implementation of the RCEP pivots it as the largest and most strategic global trade agreement, accounting for 30% of the global GDP and one-third of the world population; therefore, the multilateral scope of the IPEF members may likely allow Africa to collaborate and cooperate within the IPEF and the broader Indo-Pacific agreements and partnerships, integrating its strategic policies and programmes, such as the AU Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA.

The contrast between the IPEF and the RCEP provides Africa with broadened opportunities for regional collaboration. The study contends that collaboration between the AfCFTA and the RCEP will create the largest and most strategic trade area globally. The IPEF is more extensive and emphasizes on open digital trade by downsizing “localisation requirements and limitations on cross-border data flows and supporting reliable cross-border data flows, an inclusive digital economy with sustainable growth and responsible utilisation of emerging technologies” (Aulia & Alifia, 2023). The RCEP on the other hand is more focused on reducing tariffs, dispute resolution processes and trade remedies to promote collaboration and commitment to common goals; Africa can mutually benefit from both should it be included in the US Indo-Pacific vision and broader regional discussions (ibid).

## **6.6 Analysis of security findings: the Quad**

### **6.6.1 The Quad and the maritime security nexus of the Western Indo-Pacific**

Maritime security in the Indo-Pacific is a top priority for the Quad. According to Graham *et al.* (2018), the Quad’s informality should not overshadow its effective provision for maritime security. Although much literature has indicated the Quad’s core mandate of countering China predominantly in the SCS (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3), the study identified benefits for Africa regarding maritime security. As the Indian Ocean becomes highly contested, such as the broader Indo-Pacific, the Quad’s focus on the maritime security of the Indian Ocean has been apparent over recent years. In 2015, India hosted a joint Malabar maritime exercise with the US in the Bay of Bengal, a strategic maritime constriction of the Indian Ocean (Garge, 2015). Since 2020, Australia’s Royal Navy has participated in the Malabar exercises of the Quad with

the navies of the US, India, and Japan—a turning point for the Quad as it remarked its geopolitical restructuring (Pant & Matto, 2021).

According to Hamad (2016a:78), the Eastern seaboard of Africa faces increasing maritime security challenges, including “... piracy, armed robbery, drug smuggling, human trafficking, maritime terrorism, illegal fishing, and environmental destruction”. The Indo-Pacific faces similar challenges, necessitating collective action and military joint efforts (Mahnken *et al.*, 2013). The Quad’s security structure includes regional structures and alliances, such as the INDOPACOM, AUKUS, and Five Eyes, holding great potential to approach security issues in the IOR and wider Indo-Pacific. The US-IPS emphasises the Indo-Pacific’s importance as it hosts seven of the largest militaries globally and the largest US military presence outside the United States (the White House, 2022a). The Indo-Pacific, combined with Western partnerships, is the most protected region, offering a maritime security collaboration for the neglected WIP, encompassing the WIO.

As the US-China geopolitical contest takes greater heights, the WIP is presented with an opportunity to leverage the rivalry to its benefit in pushing for regional inclusion. According to Detsch (2023), the INDOPACOM attempts to expand its naval weapons, bases, troops, and air and missile defence sensors. The study contends that a security nexus of the WIP within the INDOPACOM and broader cooperation with the Quad would establish the inclusion of Africa in structuring the Indo-Pacific security framework. As Mozambique’s ongoing insurgency poses a great risk to the Mozambican Channel and the wider IOR, more forces from regional and international partners are required against the growing militant. The need for the INDOPACOM to extend its maritime coverage to include the WIO region is more significant; the INDOPACOM reflects America’s Indo-Pacific vision and ambition as a regional power (Chapter four).

Africa aspires the IOR as a zone of peace, as uttered by South Africa’s Minister of IR and Cooperation (Section 4.1). The IORA and various regional frameworks and institutions reflect this aspiration. For instance, the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCOC) encompassing twenty WIO nations focuses on countermeasures against piracy and armed ship robbery and has widened its scope through the Jeddah Amendment of 2017, allowing for active countermeasures against illegal activities threatening marine safety and security, such as hazardous waste dumping and animal trafficking, while also acknowledging the importance of the BE (Alden & Schoeman, 2022). The Quad’s recent Tokyo Summit resulted in the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime

Domain (IPMDA), aiming to enhance security in the Indo-Pacific (Mohan, 2022). Mohan further remarks that the IPMDA aims to develop and disseminate real-time information on dark shipping, helping littoral states acquire greater control over their waters; therefore, the Quad's mandate and IPMDA align with the maritime interests and security concerns of the Eastern African seaboard as sea crime issues, such as piracy and armed robbery of ships, have been prevalent (Bhatia, 2022).

According to Sawan (2020), the effectiveness of maritime cooperation in the IOR is often marred by doubt. This is largely because of the lack of the IONS as the IOR's regional security mechanism for effectively responding to real-life security threats, such as piracy and natural disasters (Swan, 2020). The study contends that greater cooperation between the IONS and the Quad is likely to respond to regional security challenges effectively. Although encountered with shortcomings, the IONS attempts to act as an open and inclusive mechanism for maritime security discussions and, comprises all nations of the Eastern seaboard of Africa (except for Somalia) (Van Rooyen, 2011; Katoch, 2018). In addition, SADC's naval capacity around the Mozambique Channel largely depends on South Africa's naval presence which has seen a budget cut over the years (Walker, 2020). Tanzania has sought to change the narrative, deploying a warship to assist the South African Navy (SAN) patrols in the Mozambique channel (ADF Stuff, 2023); however, integrated maritime efforts in the WIO and wider Indo-Pacific holds more potential to ensure regional peace and security and tackle maritime security threats.

The human security factor in maritime security is often overlooked. Post COVID-19, Africa is grappling with socio-economic and governance issues. According to Lamb (2023), the COVID-19 pandemic has proved to be more than a health crisis; it has led to increased poverty, food insecurity, socioeconomic inequality, social unrest, and authoritarianism. Lamb also establishes that Africa is most affected by conflicts, with fifty-six violent incidences recorded in 2021 and approximately 30% of its population living in conflict zones. The ISIS-linked insurgents in Mozambique have also targeted coastal areas and are believed to source funding from maritime drug trafficking; over nine hundred and forty-six thousand people had been displaced as of end of August 2022 in the conflicted Cabo Delgado province and surrounding areas (Walker, 2020; Columbo, 2022). A Quad-Africa regional collaboration is therefore necessitated in maintaining regional stability for the benefit of the IOR and wider Indo-Pacific region.

## **6.6.2 Analysis of findings for geopolitical prospects for Africa's inclusion: IORA, BRI FOCAC, the US and FOIP**

The study findings indicated geopolitical linkages for Africa's regional inclusion through the IORA-IPO. The Indo-Pacific has demanded a clear policy position amid growing US-China tensions. Wu and Alden (2022) contend that African nations of the IORA should formulate strategies towards the highly contested and strategic Indo-Pacific. Institutionally, Africa's geopolitical position in the Indo-Pacific is emphasised in the recently adopted IORA-IPO, recognising the Eastern and Southern African regions (chapter 4). The study findings confirm that some African nations are engaging in the Indo-Pacific. Following the recent IORA High-Level Strategic dialogue hosted by Mauritius, discussions with the dialogue partners are underway in the Indo-Pacific cooperation with the IORA (IORA, 2023a).

Bhatia (2022) considers that not all Indo-Pacific key players recognise Africa's presence in the Indo-Pacific. Africa remains excluded from the US and Australia's Indo-Pacific Strategies (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4). The US and Australia are yet to make any policy adjustments or indications regarding their recognition of Africa in their Indo-Pacific geopolitical construct following the IORA High-Level Strategic dialogue. Geopolitically, this study contends that the IORA-IPO serves as a holistic basis for Africa's regional inclusion and can guide the revision of existing strategies that exclude Africa from the framework of the Indo-Pacific region. Africa's monitoring of the High-Level strategic dialogues will likely create opportunities for further dialogue regarding its position in the Indo-Pacific. This will benefit in reasoning for its equal representation among the Quad members. Geopolitically, the study asserts that Africa will benefit from the investments, regional dialogues, strategic drives, and initiatives and fora, approaching geoeconomic and security aspects encompassing the Indo-Pacific as the region entails some of the largest global economies and militaries.

Africa-Asia relations have evolved with cooperations, such as the IORA, BRI, FOCAC, and AAGC. Africa's relations with Asia centre on its China relations, shaped by the South-South phenomenon and shared historical experiences (Cheru & Obi, 2011). The study identified the BRI as a nuanced channel for Africa's geopolitical inclusion in the Indo-Pacific. From a policy perspective, Zhang and Tesfaye (2018:127) assert that the BRI has "... embraced Africa as a partner and the agenda 2063 takes integration agenda as the means and result for the African renaissance"; therefore, integrating the AU Agenda 2063 with the BRI holds geostrategic implications for Africa, with the cooperation focusing on developmental aspirations.

FOCAC and the BRI focus on economic aspects, with FOCAC laying the foundation for BRI exposure to wider markets, particularly ASEAN markets, for Africa (Zhiqin & Lianxing, 2018). These observations are valid; however, the study contends that the BRI and FOCAC linkages structure a pragmatic basis for a China-led geopolitical integration of Africa in the Indo-Pacific framework and discussions. The Chinese government prides itself on its relations with Africa—China holds the observation that its relations with Africa have “... consolidated and developed and has withstood the test of time and international vicissitudes” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, n.d.). According to Medcalf (2016) and Wu and Alden (2022), China is active in the WIP and is a strategic partner in the political, economic, and security discourse of the region. As the most influential international partner in Africa, owing to nuances such as the BRI, strengthened China-Africa relations present greater opportunities for the two countries and the broader Indo-Pacific, particularly for Africa, which stands to benefit beyond the economic advantages of the BRI and FOCAC to include geopolitical prospects in broader Asia cooperation.

Amid the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific, the study contends that Africa stands in an advantageous position regarding its possible regional inclusion. The study findings indicate Biden’s continuation of the FOIP, where he echoed, “... [w]e envision an Indo-Pacific that is open, connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure ...” (The White House, 2022b). According to Grissler and Vargö (2021), the FOIP vision, which includes the merging of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and ASEAN as the centre, aligns with Japan-India-Africa cooperation through the AAGC. Geopolitically, Japan’s FOIP attempts to integrate African nations of the WIP into a complete Indo-Pacific construct (Grissler & Vargö, 2021); therefore, the study asserts that Biden’s reaffirmation of relations with Africa presents an opportunity for the US to include Africa in the Indo-Pacific framework and discussions. For the Biden administration, the FOIP represents an opportunity to restore US leadership in the Indo-Pacific (the White House, 2022b). This represents a restoration of US regional leadership, benefitting Africa and the US in pioneering Africa’s regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific.

Ideologically, the FOIP symbolises a liberal order in the Indo-Pacific, connecting the US-Quad vision and Africa (albeit democratic practices vary) (Gazibo, 2019; Hartman, 2022). Recently, the WIO has been experiencing increasing US engagement, with the US Embassy in Madagascar and Comoros partnering with the Ministry of Fisheries and the BE to tackle Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing (Blue Life Hub, 2023; US Embassy in Madagascar, 2023). Madagascar confirmed its intentions to join the nine SADC nations that endorsed the

SADC Charter, establishing the SADC Regional Fisheries Monitoring Control Surveillance Coordination Centre (MCSCC) (SADC, 2022). Furthermore, Seychelles and Mauritius have become key players in international counter-piracy efforts and have taken the initiative in marine security through the Indian Ocean Commission—the only regional body comprising Island states (Chelin & Reva, 2021; Martin, 2022). Therefore, the study asserts that emerging US regional engagements in the WIO presents geopolitical prospects for Africa’s push for a US-led Indo-Pacific integration.

### **6.7 Conclusion: Promoting Africa’s regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific**

Africa and Indo-Pacific cooperation offers economic, security, and geopolitical opportunities and prospects for its regional inclusion. The IORA-IPO presents geopolitical opportunities for Africa’s regional acceptance by the Indo-Pacific powers, particularly the US and Australia in their regional visions. Africa’s linkages with the Indo-Pacific are more prevalent in the Chinese-led BRI and India-Japan-led AAGC; regional engagements under the former are more pronounced. The study contends that the BRI can benefit Africa through expanded trade with ASEAN and the broader BRI regional expansions—a nuanced trade aspect. Africa is advancing a unified agency through AfCFTA, aiming for an African single market, while the BRI-Africa cooperation centres on the AU framework.

The strategic WIO is crucial in including Africa among the Indo-Pacific visions, where it is currently excluded, despite Africa’s geographical/geopolitical ties to the Indo-Pacific through the waters of the Indian Ocean. Regional ASEAN-Africa cooperation would benefit its geopolitical integration, including in ASEAN-led for a such as the ARF. The US initiated collaborations with African nations in the IOR to address maritime security issues, including illegal fishing. America’s re-direction of focus to the broader Indian Ocean indicates its openness to creating a regional unified order while demonstrating its readiness for regional leadership. This notion should serve as a strategic footing for a US-led regional inclusion of the WIO in its Indo-Pacific construct. That will demonstrate America’s affirmation to integrate Africa into the Indo-Pacific fora.

As a regional power, Africa stands to benefit from a US-led regional inclusion. This inclusion sets an example to other regional players, such as Australia, which follows a US-led Indo-Pacific vision. The security nexus of the WIO and the broader Indo-Pacific regarding common issues of piracy, climate change, and insurgency and its geoeconomic relations in aspects of trade in oil and other strategic resources, important sea lines of communication and growing

demand for developmental investments are more evident that the WIO region is connected to the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific nations should equally recognise this, more so by the US and Australia.

The US-China contest in the Indo-Pacific region holds economic implications for Africa through the BRI and FOCAC, creating strategic Africa-ASEAN linkages considering China's rising influence on ASEAN. Further, the US-led IPEF aligns with Africa's digital development aspirations through AUDTS and AfCFTA digital trade drive and the Biden-led DTA, aiming to bridge Africa's digital divergence. Africa's development, peace and security rely on extensive engagements with multilateral partners, and the Indo-Pacific region should be no exception, provided its strategic importance for regional peace and stability and a rules-based order. Africa would significantly benefit from its regional integration and key policies and structures, such as Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA with the Indo-Pacific fora.

Japan's FOIP vision lays the foundation for Africa's regional inclusion, connecting Africa and Asia through the confluence of the two seas concept and the AAGC. Briefly, African nations, such as Kenya and the Island nations, demonstrated their interests and identity position in the regional construct and dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. What these nations, their RECs and the AU require is a guiding cooperation in response to the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific to develop a clear and integrated policy vision. The Quad and China-ASEAN regional efforts are better positioned to integrate the WIO nations into the Indo-Pacific framework; therefore, African nations of the IOR should be equally regarded as part of the broader Indo-Pacific construct.

This chapter is crucial for laying the foundation of the study's conclusion and recommendations for Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific, which, with the summary and suggestions for further research, are to be solicited in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER 7

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.1 Summary

The study aimed to analyse the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific and its implications for Africa's regional inclusion. As remarked in chapter four, Africa remains largely excluded in the regional framework and discourses of the Indo-Pacific. This is despite its geographical/geopolitical connections to the region; however, as developing changes occur in the Indo-Pacific, the IORA-Indo-Pacific Outlook may serve as a frame of reference for regional inclusion amid the ongoing US-China regional contest. Adopting a content analysis provided a comprehensive understanding and analysis of the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific and Africa, Africa-Indo-pacific synergies, and the regional dynamics of the Indo-Pacific regarding the contest and its overlap with other regional members. The study adopted a qualitative method and design approach and the theory of new regionalism as a guiding framework for analysing Africa's geopolitical exclusion and opportunities for regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific.

Chapter 1 introduced the study and provided the study's aim, objectives and questions, research problem, conceptual clarification, ethics, study limitation, the methodology adopted and the outline of chapters.

Chapter 2 entailed a critical literature review and theoretical framework of the study. The literature review for the study analysis enabled identifying the research divergences that informed the research problem. The new regionalism theory emphasised the significance of multilateral cooperation in the globalised world. It also supports the emergence of new multilateral structures and non-hegemonic regions that cooperate on common issues and mandates. These served as critical points of departure that served as a framework for the analysis of Africa's geopolitical exclusion and opportunities for regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific region.

Chapter 3 examined US-China interests in the Indo-Pacific while responding to the first question of the research. In the findings analysis, US-China geopolitical interests are motivated by two strategic aspects of the Indo-Pacific—economic and security. Dominating interests for the US centre on regional security as it observes a rising China as a major threat to a rules-



based order in the Indo-Pacific. Much of this sentiment is shared by regional players in the Quad and AUKUS alliances and others who encounter maritime territorial disputes with China over the SCS. The US and China hold strategic interests shaped by the geoeconomic importance of the Indian Ocean to global trade; however, criticism emanates from a lack of clear policy focus on the Indian Ocean as the US strategic maritime policies only mention the Indian Ocean once.

China's economic and security expansions are much more pronounced in the Indian Ocean, especially aided by its BRI programme; however, Beijing's unilateral actions in the Indian Ocean are largely perceived by India and Australia who are also members of the Quad and IORA as threatening to regional cooperation and undermining the functionality of IORA as the Indian Ocean's architecture. The Pacific Ocean has also become another contested region besides the Indian Ocean.

The US has long-standing interests in the Pacific, which has for several years been important for its international trade; however, growing Chinese interest in the Pacific has directed much threat to the US and its Western partners as Beijing is rapidly exercising diplomatic, economic and security influence over the Pacific Island nations in return for voting support in the UN. Briefly, the Indo-Pacific is important to the US because Washington can get significant backing for its goal of limiting China, while for China, it displays its power capabilities and agency against a US-led FOIP vision.

Chapter 4 emphasised the exclusion of Africa from the Indo-Pacific construct and discourses. This chapter emphasised the exclusion of Africa from the US and Australia's Indo-Pacific Strategies and demonstrated its unclear position in ASEAN's Indo-Pacific vision. The chapter argued that despite Africa's geographical/geopolitical connections to the Indo-Pacific, it is unequally accounted for among regional players. In addition to the US exclusion of Africa from its IPS, the study findings also revealed that its INDOPACOM combat excludes the WIP where African nations are present; therefore, its geographical and geopolitical span only includes India in the wider Indian Ocean. The study also established that for Australia, the WIP is less strategic in its Indo-Pacific construct, while ASEAN observes the Indian Ocean as a separate but closely related entity to the broader Indo-Pacific. One of the most important discoveries in this study is included in this chapter—the finding of the IORA-IPO. The outlook identifies African nations in the Indian Ocean as part of the larger Indo-Pacific region; however, it is yet to be officially endorsed among regional members of the US and Australia, whose IPS exclude

Africa. The outlook is also yet to be endorsed within the AU and its RECs that share the waters of the Indian Ocean. Chapter 4 also emphasised the geopolitical oversights, accentuating Africa's regional exclusion. The geopolitical oversights emphasised ambiguities that, when approached, can lead to Africa's integration in the Indo-Pacific, especially with broadened cooperation with ASEAN as the region's centrality.

Equally significant, the study established a lack of coordination and a clear understanding of Africa's position in the Indo-Pacific region at continental and regional levels. For instance, the AU has no existing IPS that outlines its maritime aspirations, provided the importance of the Indian Ocean for Africa's trade and commerce. Africa's engagements with the Indo-Pacific actors occur bilaterally, leaving behind regional integration into the discourses and engagements of the Indo-Pacific. Africa lacks a common stance and unified voice in response to its geopolitical exclusion and the evolving regional developments of the Indo-Pacific region.

Chapter 5 elucidated the implications of the US-China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific and Africa and its implications for Africa's regional inclusion. The chapter categorised its analysis into three themes. On the first theme, the study established that the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific involves regional members competing for strategic interests with strategic alliances, such as Quad and AUKUS, emanating from big power rivalry. These alliances garnered support within and outside Asia, supporting US-led countermeasures against an assertive China. China is also building its own alliances with some of the regional members in the Pacific and within ASEAN. The implications of the strategic US-China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific have observed resistance towards regional members in being caught between the rivalry. Although most of the regional actors would rather hedge against the rivalry, the chapter contends that regional members are implicated in the complex dynamics of power struggles, regardless of their hedging strategy. This is evident from the numerous economic and security alliances with the US and China—many contributing to the regional rivalry between the competing powers.

Much like their regional rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, the US and China also compete for power and influence in Africa. On the second theme, findings suggested that a rising China in Africa stems from Africa's abundant natural resources, which observed China's rise as Africa's largest trade partner and creditor. Despite such progression, Beijing has encountered various criticisms of neo-colonial depictions in its engagements with African nations, leaving Africa highly indebted; however, much of China's engagements have been met with positive reviews from

African players with the BRI, FOCAC, and much of Chinese investments, still prevalent throughout the continent. This chapter reasoned that neither China nor the US provides a total win-win outcome for Africa lest Africa takes leverages their strategic rivalry to its advantage to push for its regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific construct, discourses, and fora.

The third and final theme of the chapter emphasised Africa's linkages with the Indo-Pacific through the WIP, comprising Eastern and Southern and Island nations of Africa. The Indian Ocean is important to Africa's political economy and as part of the larger IOR as the regional geopolitics of the Indian Ocean implicate Africa. Maritime security, economic cooperation and, oceanic linkages create strategic ties between Africa and the wider Indo-Pacific. Findings indicated that geopolitically, the BRI links Africa with the broader Indo-Pacific, spanning the broader Eurasia. Djibouti's host of four Indo-Pacific military bases and strategic sea lanes of communication bordering East and Southern Africa create strategic linkages between Africa and the Indo-Pacific. However, Africa's representation in the Indo-Pacific is asymmetrical, leading to its underrepresentation within the Indo-Pacific framework.

Chapter 6 emphasised strategic opportunities for Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific. These opportunities were categorised into economic, security, and geopolitical. The BRI, AAGC, and IPEF hold economic opportunities for Africa's regional inclusion. The BRI connects overland and maritime corridors that link Africa, ASEAN and the wider Eurasia, including important BRI hubs, ports, railways, and multimodal channels. As the centrality of the Indo-Pacific, the study contends that ASEAN offers Africa diverse markets and trade opportunities while the EU-IPS recognizes the African nations of the WIO. The BRI is of great geostrategic and geoeconomic importance, making Africa more likely to benefit from regional cooperation with ASEAN than bilateral cooperation. This approach could observe the integration of key African policies and structures, such as the AU Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA, benefitting smaller economies that global trade agency. The BRI and FOCAC linkages form a pragmatic basis for a China-led geopolitical integration in the Indo-Pacific where strengthened China-Africa relations present greater opportunities not only for the two partners but also for broadened Africa-Asia cooperation within the broader Indo-Pacific.

With a shared FOIP vision of Japan and India, the AAGC's connection of Asia and Africa should be considered in a geoeconomic spectrum—one promising in integrating Asia-Africa markets with mutual opportunities in trade and investments. Economic opportunities for Africa are also offered around digitalisation. According to the study, synergies exist between IPEF's

digital drive and the Biden-led DTA, aligning with the AUDTS and the AfCFTA. The US's commitment to integrating Africa in the Indo-Pacific fora, as outlined in the US strategy for sub-Saharan Africa, necessitates Washington's and Africa's efforts for US-led regional inclusion.

Common issues, such as maritime insecurity, seaborne crime, and trade, contribute to Africa and Indo-Pacific linkages. Strategic Indo-Pacific mechanisms, such as AUKUS, have a greater potential to approach security issues in the wider IOR and are part of the Quad's security structure mandated to maintain a rules-based order. This holds strategic benefit for security cooperation in the larger Indian Ocean, where maritime insecurity issues are common along the coasts of the Eastern seaboard of Africa. Institutionally, Africa's geopolitical position in the Indo-Pacific is emphasised in the recently adopted IORA-IPO, recognising the Eastern and Southern African littoral nations.

The study argued that the IORA-IPO is a holistic basis for Africa's regional inclusion. The Outlook can guide the revision of strategies that exclude Africa from the geopolitical construct of the Indo-Pacific. Geopolitically, the FOIP attempts to integrate African nations of the WIP into a complete Indo-Pacific construct. Biden's reaffirmation of relations with Africa presents an opportunity for the US to include Africa in its Indo-Pacific vision and reaffirm its regional leadership by leading Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific debates and structures.

## **7.2 Conclusion**

This study analyses the geopolitical contest between the US and China in the Indo-Pacific region and its implications for Africa's regional inclusion. It contends that despite Africa's geographical/geopolitical connections to the Indo-Pacific, it remains excluded from the regional construct and discourses of the region. Specifically, Africa's representation in the Indo-Pacific is unequally accounted for among regional members, such as the US and Australia. Their Indo-Pacific visions exclude Africa, while ASEAN observes the broader Indian Ocean as a separate yet closely related entity to the 'Asia-Pacific'. Africa also remains marginalized in most of the Indo-Pacific fora and structures such as the ARF and the INDOPACOM. Moreover, the WIO/WIP remains largely excluded from the regional dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. For instance, the WIP is excluded from the INDOPACOM, which extends only to India in the IOR. The study presents arguments shaped by the new regionalism theory, emphasising regional pluralism, multilateral cooperation, and non-hegemonic regions; however, the study concludes that some proponents of new regionalism lack the relevance of Africa and its Indo-

Pacific nexus. In this research, geography is an important aspect of the Indo-Pacific construct, as emphasised by the geopolitical definitions among the regional Indo-Pacific strategies. The study analysis contends that geographically/geopolitically, Africa is tied to the Indo-Pacific through the Indian Ocean and should, therefore, be equally integrated into the regional framework and discourses of the Indo-Pacific among regional players.

Geopolitically, the Indo-Pacific framework spans the boundaries of the broader Asia framework. For example, the EU has adopted its IPS, while the UK is engaged in the Indo-Pacific through AUKUS and other strategic partnerships; however, unlike the former, Africa is yet to demonstrate its regional position and demonstrate clear policies that affirm its position in the regional construct of the Indo-Pacific. Most African nations in the WIO are extensively engaging with the Indo-Pacific actors, however, the study findings revealed mixed reactions and responses from African littoral nations of the WIO. For instance, the study established that South Africa declined an invitation to the EU-France Indo-Pacific forum as it observed it as an anti-Chinese event; however, Kenya was found to champion Africa's geopolitical linkages to the broader Indo-Pacific and even regards itself as an Indo-Pacific nation; yet, findings indicated that engagements between Kenya and the Indo-Pacific members occur bilaterally, leaving behind regional and continental integration. Even then, bilateral relations are compelled by national interests, which may not reflect the AU goals as the continent's institutional mechanism.

Central to the Indo-Pacific regional dynamics is the ongoing US-China geopolitical rivalry, which implicates regional members and Africa. Most regional members worry that China's aggression and unilateral approach threaten their interests and regional peace and stability; therefore, several cooperate with the US for security assurance; however, most of the regional members are economically tied to China and provided their prioritisation for development, often get caught up in having to choose between the two rivals. Similarly, the US-China geopolitical contest extends to Africa, where competition over resources and influence are the main drivers of their rivalry. Most African countries are receptive to China's BRI despite concerns over the debt trap. For Africa, development is important in realising the AU Agenda 2063 vision; therefore, strengthened China-Africa relations have largely surrounded areas of development aid in the BRI, trade as well as economic and diplomatic relations through FOCAC and bilaterally. Further, the Biden administration attempts to rebuild relations with Africa when China-Africa relations are stronger after years of neglect during the Trump administration. However, opportunities for strengthened US-Africa cooperation remain

prevalent in areas of development and trade, especially with the emergence of the AfCFTA and its US support. Geopolitical prospects are equally prevalent for a US-led regional inclusion of Africa in the Indo-Pacific and the integration of AU maritime policies in the US-led regional policies and structures such as the IPEF.

Africa presents a strategic purpose in the broader Indo-Pacific. For instance, Djibouti hosts military bases of four Indo-Pacific powers. The Horn of Africa and the Mozambique Channel are also critical to international trade along the Indian Ocean and are home to some of the most important maritime constrictions. The BRI and AAGC also geopolitically tie Africa to the broader Indo-Pacific, creating Africa-Asia linkages; however, these strategic initiatives require shared action and commitment to integrate Africa into the Indo-Pacific framework and discourses. The US-China strategic contest in Africa and the Indo-Pacific serves as a pathway to broadened Africa and Indo-Pacific cooperation through the BRI and the IPEF. Africa must leverage the US-China strategic competition to its advantage in the continent for its developmental advances and as a strategic push for its inclusion in the Indo-Pacific's membership framework.

As the Indo-Pacific positions itself as the most strategic region globally, Africa must not lag. Opportunities, such as the IORA-IPO, serve as a frame of reference for a clear policy approach to the Indo-Pacific and should be strategically leveraged to benefit Africa's integration in the construct and various strategic fora and discussions of the Indo-Pacific. The study concludes that Africa's geographical/geopolitical linkages to the Indo-Pacific through the WIO qualify it within the membership framework of the Indo-Pacific and should, therefore, be equally represented in the Indo-Pacific construct. It concludes that the US-China geopolitical contest in the Indo-Pacific presents Africa with various channels for regional inclusion and broader regional cooperation.

### **7.3 Recommendations**

The Indo-Pacific's ideational, geostrategic, and geopolitical creation is too broad and complex to be narrowed into a collective understanding based on the study findings. This stems from the varying regional constructs or regional visions among regional members; however, as established, Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific's framework and discourses presents strategic opportunities for broader cooperation in the economic, security, and geopolitical aspects. This study presents several recommendations for governments, regional powers of the Indo-Pacific, policymakers, relevant institutions, such as the AU, ASEAN, EAC and SADC,

academic think tanks, and others who promote and advocate for Africa's regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific. The study recommends the following:

- A regional architecture mandated for the Indo-Pacific through integrating ASEAN, IORA, and the PIF must be established. This will enable coordinated cooperation and a clear membership base. Cooperation among these regional institutions for peace and security in the Indo-Pacific will enhance their ability to maintain regional order. Their integration as a regional unison will also present a clear meaning and definition of the Indo-Pacific concept and geopolitical framework.
- The AU should adopt its Indo-Pacific Outlook/Strategy. The AU needs a clear policy focus on growing developments of the Indo-Pacific and can effectively do so through adopting an Indo-Pacific Outlook. The Outlook should integrate key AU policies and structures, such as the AU Agenda 2063, AfCFTA, RECs, and strategic maritime policies. An AU-Indo-Pacific committee should be established to lead an integrated AU-IPS.
- The AU should demonstrate a keen interest in the Indo-Pacific discussions and fora through strategic regional mechanisms such as the AAGC and the BRI. It should also integrate its BE drive, South-South cooperation, and Pan-African ideals to expand on geoeconomic and geostrategic partnerships in the broader Indo-Pacific region.
- The Eastern African seaboard along the Indian Ocean should adopt an integrated regional maritime policy in response to the developments along the IOR and the wider Indo-Pacific. This maritime policy will enable a coordinated and unified regional response to regional security issues, strategic collaborations and engagements in the regional dynamics and fora of the broader Indo-Pacific that implicate the WIO/WIP.
- The US should lead in promoting Africa's regional inclusion in its IPS and regional fora and structures, such as the IPEF and INDOPACOM. As a regional power of the Indo-Pacific, the US should pioneer Africa's integration in the discussions and fora of the Indo-Pacific. Inclusion in the US-led Quad discussions about regional matters implicating African nations in the IOR should be embraced.
- China is a powerful and influential player in the Indo-Pacific and should lead Africa's regional inclusion through the BRI and FOCAC. The BRI already integrates the AU Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA and should, therefore, serve as a driver for broadened Asia-Africa cooperation with ASEAN, where China holds strategic influence.
- Africa should push for regional inclusion in the Indo-Pacific region through the IORA Indo-Pacific Outlook and the India-Japan-led AAGC, which aim to strengthen Asia-Africa



linkages. The former should inform African-led policies that affirm its agency in the broader Indo-Pacific.

#### **7.4 Future perspectives**

According to the literature, Africa's representation in the Indo-Pacific region is unevenly accounted for among regional members and remains excluded from regional discourses and fora. This geopolitical exclusion has been a topic of divergence among several scholars. Despite the synergies between Africa and the Indo-Pacific, there is a divergence in studies of Africa in the region. This study attempted to approach these divergences by examining the US-China geopolitical rivalry and regional dynamics of the Indo-Pacific regarding regional players. It has also explored the implications of these dynamics for Africa's regional inclusion, particularly the opportunities that Africa stands to acquire from its inclusion. The study recommends the inclusion of US-led and China-led regional powers while also emphasising the significance of rising powers like India and Japan in promoting Africa's regional inclusion; however, further research is needed to promote Africa's regional inclusion and, question and critique its geopolitical exclusion in the Indo-Pacific construct and discussions. As regional dynamics evolve, more research can be conducted to examine the progress of integrating the recently adopted IORA Indo-Pacific Outlook into the existing Indo-Pacific strategies that exclude Africa and Africa's consolidation of the IORA Outlook nationally, regionally, and continentally.





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