

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CONTEXTUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

In the development journey, conjuncture-specific and country-specific conditions matter. This article attempts to combine the enabling and constraining factors according to both country-specific conditions and geopolitical conjunctures. Evaluating the lessons of the unipolar era policies, it is essential for developing countries to prioritize their national interests first, rather than obey the tenets of the zeitgeist. In this regard, active state policies are a common denominator in successful development experiences, as the short references in this article to the Chinese and Indian cases remind. For the developing countries to deal with the constraints and opportunities imposed by international conjunctures, much will depend on domestic capacity development.

Keywords: Strategic Competition, Conjunctural Context, Chinese Development, Indian Development

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ULUSLARARASI POLİTİKA BAĞLAMI VE KALKINMA

Öz

Ülkelerin kalkınma yolculuğunda dış konjonktür ve ülkeye özgü koşullar önem taşımaktadır. Bu makale, jeopolitik konjonktüre göre kolaylaştırıcı ve kısıtlayıcı faktörlerin ülkeye özgü koşullarla birlikte dikkate alınması gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Tek kutuplu dönem politikalarından alınan dersler değerlendirildiğinde, gelişmekte olan ülkelerin zamanın ruhuna kapılmak yerine öncelikle kendi milli çıkarlarını önceliklendirmeleri esastır. Bu bağlamda, bu makedeki Çin ve Hindistan örneklerine yapılan kısa referansların da hatırlattığı gibi, aktif devlet politikaları başarılı kalkınma deneyimlerinin ortak paydasıdır. Gelecekte de, gelişmekte olan ülkelerin uluslararası konjonktürün dayattığı kısıtlamalarla başa çıkabilmeleri ve fırsatları değerlendirebilmeleri büyük ölçüde ulusal kapasite gelişimine bağlı olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Stratejik Rekabet, Konjonktürel Bağlam, Çin Kalkınması, Hindistan Kalkınması*

INTRODUCTION

How does contextuality in space (country) and time (conjuncture) matter for countries' development efforts? Should developing countries do what developed countries and their organizations advise? And what can developing countries do in the current geopolitical adjustment regarding the great power rivalry context? To think on these matters, this article aims to summarize the existing development paradigm professed by the founders of the world order with particular references to the unipolar era. Moreover, it refers to the role of active state policies with respect to country-specific development experiences in the examples of China's economic development and India's ICT industry example in the city of Bangalore.

Epochal changes in geopolitics can create new conditions for countries in their development journeys. Conditions are different during a hot war, cold war, unipolarity, and decoupling or a new cold war. In the present context, post-Cold War unipolar order is changing, and superpowers and politico-economic blocs or like-minded groups of states review their political and economic approaches. They contemplate new strategies and instruments and form alliances for their new purposes. How can developing countries protect their interests within this context? The crust of this article is the argument that developing countries need to be more vigilant to actively shape their developmental policies without passive receivers of ready-made policies promoted by superpowers within the context of competing development paradigms.

Successful developing countries, such as previously Japan, the so-called Asian Tigers, and later China and India, refused to wrestle with the developed countries' companies in the arena with the same rules when their companies were weaker yet. Rather, these late-developing countries actively strived to shape their political environment according to their country conditions (Kattel et al. 2022, 33). Comparing advanced capitalist countries' past development strategies with their current recommendations for developing countries, Ha-Joon Chang claimed in his famous book, *Kicking Away the Ladder*, that developed countries were withholding their development strategies from today's developing countries. In a way, after using the ladder to climb to the top of the pyramid, they were typically kicking it away, so that the followers cannot get an equal share



from the pie (Chang, 2002: 2). This is not surprising, as according to the realist international relations theory, states in international politics predominantly think in a zero-sum mentality (Mearsheimer, 2006: 75).

This article attempts to exemplify the opportunities and threats, or enabling and constraining factors that international geopolitics might pose for developing countries. For this purpose, first section refers to the unipolar era policies and refers how these policies in fact may not be fitting for the needs of the developing countries. The second section refers to alternative development experiences. In two sub-sections, this section firstly has a glimpse upon the Chinese approach to industrial development characterized with channelizing of foreign companies' appetite for the country's own development needs, and the second sub-section refers to India's ICT sector as a good practice among developing countries and the role of the state behind it. The third section analyzes the new geopolitical conjuncture regarding development. And, the last section concludes.

1. VICTORS' DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

During the Cold War, Western investments and technology transfers towards USSR were restricted as part of the Cold War strategy. However, the post-Cold War world order (or unipolarly led by the US) utilized globalization to extract resources and labour from all around the world. As a result, today, Congolese cobalt miners, including children, work merely \$3.50 a day (by 2021) in a very unhealthy conditions and take part in the global supply chain for the production of batteries to be used by the leading global car manufacturers', such as Tesla, Volvo, and Renault's electric car segments (Pattison, 2021). International economic activities, such as investment and trade, are not only the issue of morality but are also the instruments of statecraft (Blackwill & Harris, 2016; Baldwin, 2020). War is politics "by other means", as Clausewitz famously said (2007: 28) and reminded that it was the politics that was being played, indeed. Looking this way, unipolar era globalization was just "another means" used to reach certain political goals. Likewise, in the US-led unipolar world, new politics was being fought peacefully at the negotiation tables of the WTO; the postwar Bretton Woods institutions, other UN agencies; as well as bilaterally within diplomatic gentleness. As a

result, even though the agreements often “seem(ed) innocent” (Wade, 2003), developed countries successfully imposed their terms and conditionalities on developing ones to protect their companies and technologies. So, unlike the Cold War era, trade relations between the West and the East were not frozen, but did not become egalitarian, either.

During the unipolar era, the Western advanced capitalist countries took the advantage of being “the only game in town” upon the collapse of the Soviet Union. As part of the new world order, they imposed more aggressive agreements at the negotiation table, such as TRIPS and TRIMS, which considerably constrained developing countries’ industrial policy options (Wade, 2003). The developed countries used to employ terminology such as “free trade”, “nondiscrimination”, “most favorite nation”, giving a false impression that all countries were treated equally. However, the reality was that developed countries were manipulating the policy environment and tying the developing countries’ hands to exploit the latter’s markets, while they were sheltering theirs, such as in agriculture. Articulated broadly with the tenets of neoliberalism and Washington Consensus, they were preaching not to interfere in the market by state and this was the best way for catch-up, while in fact the developed country politicians were heavily subsidizing their agriculture and textile and creating competition disadvantage for developing countries (ibid.; Wade, 2020). Even as recent as 2014-2020 period, 37.8 % of the EU’s budget was allocated for the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) (Milicevic & Dupont, 2023). So, in the industries that the West is superior, it pushed for free trade in the developing markets, while subsidizing and sheltering its own weaker industries.

In fact, today’s developed countries had implemented protective industrial policies during their development process and today’s developing countries needed similar policies (Chang, 2002: 19-51). In other words, the state needed to be very active not to be “colonized” by the foreign interests. The handicap was that the developing countries lacked capital and technology, and needed to transfer them from those who have. During this process, developing countries were persuaded that if they opened their markets and do what the international organizations -dominated by the developed countries- profess, they would also have a fair share. The message of the developed countries was this: “trust us,



and we know what is best for you". Lambs' trust in wolfs would be an oxymoron, but without any credible alternative, what would they do? The main alternative -the Soviets- during the Cold War era had just collapsed spectacularly due to its own internal contradictions. And, now the victors of the Cold War had a clear upper hand to set the scene: At the top of the economic and political power pyramid would be developed countries, and the ladder would be kicked away, thereby, erasing the "development space" (Wade, 2003; Chang, 2002: 5) and "perpetuat(ing) the hierarchy" between these two blocs (Wade, 2020).

On the developing countries' side, trusting the advice of the capitalist countries aggravated income inequality between these two groups (Wade, 2020) and produced tragic results. It's a well-known story how the US neoliberal economists-engineered "shock therapy" led to the collapse of the Russian economy, worsening the life quality due to from alcoholism to decreased marriage rates, increased divorcing, and human trafficking (Pickup, 1997; Carlson & Vagero, 1998; King, 2003). Pickup (1997) pointed out that annually four million people were trafficked from Central and Eastern Europe to the West, and especially women trafficking had become "epidemic".

So, unipolar era policies established a transfer system from developing to developed countries, which Wade (2003) likens to a big "robbery". As Wade states, "between 2000 and 2016 the developing countries in the G20 (including the big ones like China, India, Brazil, Indonesia) transferred a yearly average of 2.3% of their combined GDPs to the developed countries, mainly the US, Japan, Germany and the UK" (Wade, 2023: 29-30). Moreover, the value of a developing country's labor is priced less than in developed ones due to the difference of "labour productivity" (Wade, 2020). Therefore, according to the division of production, the people of North work less hours and earn more than a worker in the South (Bick et al., 2019). This difference continues in pensioning ages, too. When one of the authors of this article visited the Bulgarian city of Varna, in 2017, he saw a big tourist population from the Nordic countries, who were able to pay holidays with their pensions. Plus, the EU's provision of free movement of people meant no extra requirement for them after taking the Ryanair's cheap tickets from various European cities to Sofia. Meanwhile, thanks to the EU expansion, now Bulgaria was enjoying a profitable tourism industry with many positive externalities, such

as introducing its otherwise unknown Bulgarian cosmetics made of its fragrant red roses. However, such economic and cultural opportunities for low-income developing country workers are only a distant dream.

2. COMPETING DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS AND ALTERNATIVE EXAMPLES

The end of the Cold War had concluded the bloc rivalry in science, technology and development. However, with the dawn of the new strategic competition, competing development paradigms resurfaced. China's Belt and Road Initiative has been on the spotlight, positively for China as a signature project, and negatively for the US-led West as it represents an alternative to the current development paradigm. So, development paradigms have been a part of the strategic competition, and developing countries are subject to these alternative policy frameworks, credit sources and value systems. While the superpowers tend to utilize developmental policies for accessing markets and raw materials and enlarging their spheres of influence, developing countries need to protect their interests and convert the geopolitical environment to a win-win strategy for development in science, technology, security, economy and welfare (Li, 2020: 177; Hameiri and Jones, 2018; Boreyko et al., 2022). Two examples below are to mention the national interest focus of China and India from their historical development practices.

2.1 Exemplifying the Chinese Approach

China took utmost opportunity from the unipolar era globalization policies through foreign direct investments, without leaving the driver's seat in determining domestic economic policies. Industrial policy was implemented in every stage during the interaction with the foreign economic forces. Its market was big, profitable and therefore attractive for foreign companies. China's nearly 10 % growth rate for the 34 years from 1978 to 2011 would not be possible without FDI growth (Macrotrends, 2023; Xing, 2008). However, China controlled foreign investment activities for the interest of the Chinese economy rather than what the developed countries professed especially after the Cold War, namely privatization, liberalization and deregulation.



In the prior stages of development, and the frenzy era of globalization from 1990s towards the mid-2000s, Chinese people suffered adverse labor conditions especially in the industries, such as textile and electronics. Majority of workers in the textile factories were coming from rural areas with poor living standards. A female migrant worker, who had saved 2,000 Yuan for her family in 1996, spoke on the striking difference between rural and the urban, however hard the factory conditions were:

The first time I saw my father and mother smile so happily, I knew that there is big gap between urban life and rural life. My parents at first could not believe that I earned two thousand yuan within five months (Ngai, 2005: 67).

Note that 2,000 Yuan was equal to about USD 240 USD in 1996. In those years, poor living conditions in the dormitories were reported regularly. According to the 1999 China Labor Watch report workers generally lived in dormitories just next to the factories and in each room 12 to 20 workers lived. Bath, water and toilet facilities were commonly used on each floor. In the mid-2000s, living conditions improved, with 4 to 8 workers living in each dormitory room (CLW, 1999; CLW, 2007). In other words, Chinese people endured hard conditions during its industrialization journey. Now, however, China is able to operate its own space station, bring mineral samples by Moon farming and picture entire land of the Mars, and the country has achieved breakthroughs in energy sector such as hydrogen generation without desalination of the ocean water (Zhu, 2022; Newcomb, 2022).

China's FDI strategy is exemplary: China does not liberalize all of its market. In banking, the Western governments still complains that the state-owned banks and "political priorities" dominate the sector in China (Bisio, 2020). As Wade (2023: 24) argues, China "treats equity markets as an assembly line to marshal private capital for its policy goals, with the aim of producing national champion firms in strategic sectors". China limited foreign participation in IPOs and channelized the domestic investors to planned fields of investment. In fact, the country treats finance sector as "a service provider to the real economy" (Wade, 2023: 24-25).

The Chinese governments tried to get most out of the liberalized global environment and the dissemination of science and technology. Claiming that it is a developing country, China conditioned technology transfer from foreign companies and opted for selective liberalization, even though it also used “special and differential treatment” right given by the WTO selectively (Schöfer & Weinhardt, 2022). Although foreign companies were reticent in transferring technology, China conditioned that foreign investors not merely use the China as a market for profit making, but they also become part of its development strategy, such as, through educating workforce and making joint ventures with the local Chinese companies. Of course, the West used to complain about this state intervention for decades. However, China behaved much as the Western states had done during their development process. As a state capitalism, it adopts dozens of strategy documents to guide the country in the development journey. China adopted the National Medium- and Long-Term Program for Science and Technology Development (2006-2020), in which the country targeted to increase “the rate of S&T contribution to the economy reaching 60% or above” and “reduce dependence on foreign technology...to 30 % or below” (PRCST, 2006). As Kattel et al. (2022: 58) state, the strategy demonstrated China’s aim “to shift from imitator to innovator” position. Likewise, in its 2008 Intellectual Property Strategy, China put strategies and targets for 2020, among them were the increase of domestic patent applications to developed country levels and the increase of overseas patent applications, as well as the creation of world-famous brands (PRCSIP, 2008). In addition, in its Made in China 2025, which was adopted in 2015, China targeted localization of technology and local content production in important technologies in higher proportions as well as the decrease of the share and influence of foreign companies in the domestic economy. In this process, China has become an innovator nation, and as a corollary of this, while the decades following the World War II, media incessantly informed about amazing innovations discovered or invented in the West and later Japan, nowadays more and more people are curious to learn what is next in China’s innovations in the space, 5G, nanochips, or robotics. All in all, China climbed the ladder of the global value chains with active state policies, while especially taking the advantage of globalization.



2.2 Exemplifying the Indian Approach

When it comes to development, Indian ICT industry has been an inspiration for other developing countries as well as being a scholarly topic. By the end of 2023, India's ICT services and software sector exports were expected to reach \$194 bn (MEIT, 2023). By the end of 2022, total exports stood at \$780 bn (Macrotrends, 2023) in this economy with a \$3.39-trillion GDP in nominal terms and a staggering \$14.59 trillion in PPP, and with a population of 1.4 bn (World Bank, n.d; IMF, 2024). In the country's ICT success, Bangalore city cluster -named as the 'Silicon Valley of India'- plays a prominent role (Turkina & Assche, 2019). India's success story in a non-traditional industrial field might seem to be surprising regarding that the country is still in a lower middle-income ranking with 229 million people living in Acute Multidimensional Poverty (which is a new measure going beyond the definition of acute poverty definition based on USD 1.9 in purchasing power parity per day). With this number, India is still the biggest reservoir of the world's poor (UNDP, 2022).

Like the Chinese example, governmental interventions aiming to catch-up technological progress was a key driver in Bangalore's ICT success. These interventions came both national and provincial level (Basant, 2008). Also, as Basant states, both pre- and post-independence policies contributed. In 1940, i.e., during the course of the World War II and seven years before the India's independence, the British colonial rule had established Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to meet the wartime production needs in Asia. The Radio and Electric Manufacturing Company in 1942 and Mysore Electrical Industries in 1945 were also established. The trained workforce in these industries provided an important capacity to be tapped in the later decades during the emergence of ICT industry, as for example, HAL was employing 21,000 by 1960. Similarly, after the independence in 1947, India configured policies to be among the forerunners in the new technologies. Among India's rich portfolio of industrial policies in the ICTs sector are: export promotion, tax incentives for hardware importation to be used as capital for software exportation, establishment of software parks, technical and engineering universities and colleges, and selective foreign investment promotion (Basant, 2008; Grondeau, 2007).

Another Indian state intervention was to encourage in-house ICT production and ensure the Indian nationals' majority ownership in companies. When India implemented this policy, IBM chose to exit from the Indian market in 1978. However, as Basant (2008) portrays, this market vacuum was filled by the local companies, e.g., Wipro. Later, in 1992, IBM re-entered the Indian market by obeying to establish a joint venture with Tata Consultancy Services. Today, multinational companies have a significant presence especially in Bangalore with substantial quality employment. For example, by 2008, IBM employed 3,100 engineers, Intel 1,400 engineers, Texas Instruments 1,000 engineers, General Electric "1,800 scientists, researchers, and engineers", among others (Basant, 2008). So, India's industrial policy initiatives, together with continuously accumulated capacities in engineering, made Bangalore an attractive cluster. In these favorable conditions and India's open foreign direct investment policy, multinational companies flowed to the country to tap into the existing pools of resources, especially in the educated workforce (Arora & Gambardella, 2005: 294-296).

India was also subject to technological restrictions during the Cold War, as the Western concern was that sensitive technologies could be channelized to the Soviets through the country. Moreover, India became subject to new sanctions after its nuclear explosion in 1974. It tested nuclear weapons in 1998, which also triggered new technological and financial sanctions, including the termination of the US aids and credit guarantees as well as prevention of funding by international financial institutions (Singh & Lee, 2011). Although economic effects of these sanctions were negligible, due to the wide coverage of dual-use items, sanctions could have affected India's technology acquisitions, notably supercomputers for the fear of their use for nuclear purposes. Still, India managed to purchase a less advanced supercomputer, Cray XMP-14, from the US in 1987 (Chellaney, 2002; Weisman, 1987).

In short, even though geopolitical framework was by no means perfect, state policies constituted the cornerstones in the Indian ICT development by channelizing the FDI according to national industrialization requirements and educating engineering workforce both on the job and formally. Other factors,



such as the English language use and workforce experience in Silicon Valley are also crucial factors mentioned in the literature (Grondeau, 2007).

3. CHANGING GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE AND DEVELOPMENT

With the intensification of geopolitical rivalry, also labeled as “decoupling” or “new cold war”, the US-led Western coalition re-launched their industrial policy initiatives to keep the technological leadership ahead of non-Western rivals, mainly China. As the backbone of the national defense industrial base, in the recent years, the US administrations provide enormous industrial supports for the US companies, such as a \$ 52.7 bn grant during the Biden administration (2021-2024) for R&D and manufacturing of chips. Meanwhile, the US imposed crucial restrictions on the companies to be eligible for the US industrial supports, such as not investing in “foreign countries of concern” such as China and Russia and engaging with technology development with these countries. Likewise, the US prevents flow of critical and emerging technologies to China and others defined as potential security threats (O'Meara, 2023; Business World, 2023).

In other words, while the “free market” and its institutions have largely been intact, the emphasis is more on national security and its industrial requirements than the merits of free trade per se. Moreover, great powers simply discredit international organizations when the latter do not serve the founders' interests, as in the example of the US attitude against the WTO (Seals, 2019). The new statecraft underlines domestic production chains, onshoring of the manufacturing, and at least friend-shoring, i.e., decoupling of strategic investments from the competing state markets and bringing them towards allies and partners' markets as part of. This strategy distributes “carrots” for allies and partners, while beating rivals with “sticks”. This change can be tracked in the new definition of national interest in the US National Security Strategies of the recent administrations (see Trump, 2017).

International system -as an organizing framework- constitutes external factor and dictates conditions at home. As Aitmatov fascinatingly described in his novel *Mother Land* (1963): when in the Kyrgyz lands Tolunay and her husband Savankul “walked together, the whole world would change before [their] eyes

and [they] would swim in a fairy tale world. And, the plowed gray land appeared to [them] as the most beautiful land in the world". Their son, Kasim, and bride, Aliman, were full of love for the life around them. However, the World War II had taken all of the beloved ones from each other: first the sons and the father -Savankul, Kasim, Masalbeg ve Caynak- at the war fronts in Russia, and later the bride -Aliman- while giving birth in psychological and physical pains. So, even though the mother land was rich and fruitful, and its inhabitants were hard working and loveful people, these natural and personal qualities in the domestic context didn't guarantee a life free of miseries. In other words, international politics mattered. Tolunay's family's experience was during a hot war. After that, the Cold War -known as tense peace to great powers- was however no less catastrophic for the developing countries: firstly, proxy wars between the two blocs were fought on the lands of weaker countries, such as in Korea and Vietnam (Wade, 2023, 13). Secondly, the great powers' policies subjected a lot of nations to famine and other misconduct. For example, the United States has used military coups to control domestic politics across a wide geography, including Latin America and the Middle East, and has influenced the shape of domestic politics to determine who will govern countries and who will not. Similarly, the Soviet policy against the intellectuals especially in Siberian camps and across the Central Asia are well-known (Kokaisl & Hejzlarová, 2023; Auyessova, 2010: v-viii). Then, during the unipolar era, the world experienced increasing trade relations and expanded capitalist development, albeit within an unequally structured Modern World-System as Wallerstein theorized (Lekon, 2019: 9). In other words, there are myriad evidence that dominant powers abused their powers, and persecuted the human capital in large geographies, which definitely reduced the "development space", as Wade (2003) uses the term. So, the external factors, whether in hot war, cold war, new cold war, or during any other major adjustment, impose structural limits on the performances of developing nations.



CONCLUSION

How can developing countries devise the best policies within the changing geopolitical atmosphere? Short glimpses over China and India's policies refer to the opportunities and constraints that international political environment provides to the developing countries in different political junctures. Even though merely two samples cannot offer definitive results to generalize, successful stories included active technology policies according to the country capacities within the context of a geopolitical atmosphere, rather than passive obedience of what is advised or dictated by the powerful nations, their companies, and the international organizations that they dominate.

In the case of China, we can see active industrial policy to steer the foreign capital to take the most out of it. China conditioned solid technology transfers in exchange for foreign companies' access to the Chinese market. Although this policy has still been criticized by the Western states and global companies, China benefited from this policy while becoming not only the world factory such as in textile and electronics as formerly known, but also an innovator at the frontiers of science and technology today. Whereas the country was subject to Western economic sanctions for much of the Cold War era, China actively utilized the boons of unipolar era zeitgeist of globalization. As the geopolitical rivalry between the US and China intensifies now, China has become already able to compete technologically so that it is unlikely to experience another "century of humiliation" -as it perceives- under the Western hegemons in a foreseeable future. India was a non-aligned country during the Cold War, but had significant relations with the Soviet Union. India's access to advanced technology was also restricted during the Cold War for various reasons, including its nuclear trials. India's human capital development in engineering was essential to gain a powerful ICT industrial base. Bangalore city has been studied as a good ICT clustering practice. In addition to educating the workforce in technical fields, India also actively channelized the preferences of incoming foreign investors according to the country's industrial policies.

Presently, a new geopolitical readjustment has been taking place within the context of the great power rivalry, which also brings competing development paradigms mainly between the West and China to the fore. This means that external enabling and constraining factors are changing, even if not always explicitly. International political environment is a core factor shaping the development opportunities and constraints. In order to get most out of the present conditions, developing countries can actively enhance their long-term domestic technological and developmental capacities. In order not to be caught off guard in vulnerable conditions during the times of political, economic, or health crises (such as COVID-like epidemics), and to gain resilience against tomorrow's crises, development should be attained first at the national level by increasing the quality of domestic security, education -especially in scientific and technical fields- and welfare state for all citizens. Today's technologies offer good opportunities in human development and public service delivery at central and local government levels. In addition to national strengthening at the domestic level, developing nations can also build common platforms and organizations at the regional level to respond to the economic and political challenges collectively. In this respect, rather than taking development merely as a domestic matter, developing nations can take it holistically within their regions and be vigilant against regional fragmentations and destabilizations, which might arrest a whole region's development. A Kyrgyz proverb reminds this: *The wolf eats the divided, and the enemy destroys the fragmented.*



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