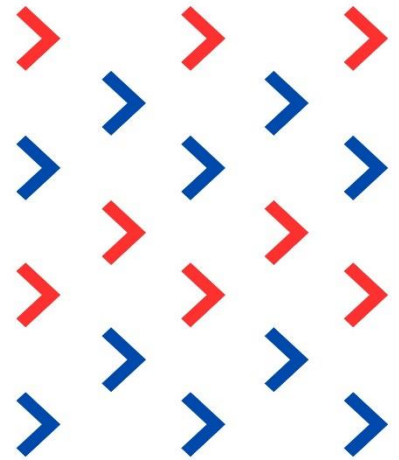


U.S.-CHINA STRATEGIC COMPETITION OPTIONS FOR PAKISTAN



Report of the Seminar
on
U.S.-China Strategic Competition:
Options for Pakistan

NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS)
NUST | Islamabad

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- Ambassador Dr. Raza Muhammad, President, Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI).
- Ambassador Zamir Akram, Former Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations (UN) and Advisor, Strategic Plans Division (SPD).

Moderator

- Dr. Ashfaque Hasan Khan, Director General, NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS).

Attendees

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- Mr. Malik Muhammad Habib Khan, Former Federal Interior Minister for Pakistan.
- Mr. Waseem Haqqi, Former Chairman, Board of Investment and Former Chairman Engineering Development Board.
- Mr. Iftikhar Ullah Babar, Former Secretary, Senate of Pakistan.
- Dr. Shoaib Suddle, One-Man Commission for Minority Rights, Supreme Court of Pakistan and Former Federal Tax Ombudsman; Former Director General IB; Former IG Sindh Police.
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Speakers' Profiles

Ambassador Dr. Raza Muhammad

Ambassador Dr. Major General Raza Muhammad (Retd) is currently President of the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI). He has held various prestigious command and staff assignments. He also served as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Defence Production. After retirement, he was appointed Ambassador of Pakistan to Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles, and Comoros. He has been Executive Director Services in the Army Welfare Trust and Advisor to President National Defence University Islamabad (NDU). He has served in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, attended Staff Course in Germany and Peacekeeping Course for the Decision-Makers in the United States. He has been on the faculty of premier military institutions such as Pakistan Military Academy Kakul, Command and Staff College Quetta, and NDU. Since 2018 he has been teaching in the Faculty of Contemporary Studies at NDU. He is a regular participant in national/ international conferences and seminars as a speaker on CPEC, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Security, and Counterterrorism etc. He has done MPhil in International Relations on "Post 2014 Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan" and Ph.D. from NDU Pakistan. He wrote his doctoral thesis on "CPEC and its Impact on Societal Emancipation of Pakistan and Afghanistan."



Ambassador Zamir Akram

Ambassador Zamir Akram is currently Advisor to the Strategic Plans Division. As Pakistan's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN and other International Organizations in Geneva from 2008 to 2015, he played a leading role in Disarmament, Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, among other issues.



In 2015, he was elected as Chair-Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council's Working Group on the Right to Development. In 2017, he was awarded the Star of Merit by the State of Palestine in recognition for his support and solidarity with the Palestinian people, while he served as Coordinator of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) group in the Human Rights Council. Prior to this role, he served as Additional Foreign Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office, where he was responsible for Pakistan's Foreign and Security policies from 2004 to 2008.

He joined the Pakistan Foreign Service in 1978 and has served in the (former) Soviet Union, India, the United States, and the United Nations. He has dealt with key issues including Kashmir, Afghanistan, nuclear disarmament, human rights, and counterterrorism during his distinguished career. He continues to write articles for major Pakistani newspapers and international journals covering these issues.

Ambassador Akram holds a Master's Degree in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science. He also served as the Honorary Dean of the Geneva School of Diplomacy in 2010, where he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate.

1. Executive Summary



The NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS) organized the seminar on “U.S.-China Strategic Competition: Options for Pakistan” on Wednesday, July 3, 2024. The seminar, moderated by Dr. Ashfaque Hasan Khan, Director General, NIPS, witnessed substantial participation by veteran policymakers and diplomats, public officials, academics, scholars, researchers, and students.

In his opening remarks, DG NIPS Dr. Khan noted the climacteric changes taking place in the contemporary international system like the great-power competition between the United States and China, the rise of new major powers, the increasing vulnerability of the world to conflict and various kinds of disruptions, the emergence of new transnational integration and multilateralism mechanisms like BRICS, and the hard choices confronting the Global South in terms of alignment with the U.S.-led global system of alliances or the Chinese system of global partnerships.

During his keynote address, Ambassador Dr. Raza Muhammad, President, Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), emphasized that, amid U.S.-China competition, Pakistan faces multiple challenges but has a host of opportunities too. He said success consists in maximizing opportunities and minimizing challenges. President IPRI highlighted Pakistan's unique geostrategic location as a trade and energy hub, its youth bulge as a potential asset, and its natural resources worth trillions. These could be optimized as key anchors for the attainment of comprehensive approach to national development, regional connectivity, and diplomatic success. He further recommended that Pakistan must adopt a pragmatic approach, remain flexible and adaptable to the evolving regional and global dynamics to safeguard its interests, and gradually and patiently emerge as a significant major power respected by friends and foes alike.

During the second keynote of the seminar, Ambassador Zamir Akram, former Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, stressed that in the contemporary geopolitical scenario, Pakistan's options are constrained, making balanced relations between the U.S. and China unfeasible due to a lack of strategic convergence with the U.S. He pointed out that the Indo-U.S. alliance has strengthened Pakistan's strategic partnership with China, leading to the latter's unmatched support in political, defense, economic, and technological spheres, notably through CPEC, worth \$24 billion since 2013. He advised that China's status as Pakistan's strategic partner, largest trading partner, and the major source of FDI demand a pragmatic and coordinated approach for sustained common development and security.

The keynotes were followed by a full-throated discussion session that led to important insights from the veteran members of diplomatic community, scholars and academia on the need for geopolitical and geoeconomic innovation to deal with new challenges of the 21st century, the dialectics of domestic national management and foreign policy management, the emergence of powers of different magnitudes in the evolving international system, the formulation of new development and diplomatic value proposition to be able to benefit

from the current and future phases of the global redistribution of capabilities, the rise of both inclusive and exclusive multilateralism and middle-power strategies to deal with them, the need for the renunciation of zero-sum self-aggrandizement of nations, and the national and global prioritization of common prosperity, balanced development, and sustained stability. There was a consensus among the participants on the urgent need for putting the house in order, improving governance, revitalizing the economy, and smart narrative-building and media engagement.

2. Recommendations



One of the stark features of contemporary global politics is that bloc politics has once again made its appearance, but the post-Cold War liberal institutionalist rhetoric is making a level-headed comprehension of today's hard geopolitical facts and geostrategic compulsions difficult. The window for nations to work with both the great powers simultaneously, thus enjoying the best of both worlds, has virtually closed for some countries and will close soon for others.

Recent developments in world politics are making the inter-state relations more complex and challenging. The trade and technology wars between the two superpowers (the U.S. and China), which were already raging since 2016, as well as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have deepened the rivalry between these two superpowers. It has also changed the global politics monumentally forever. The rising tensions between these two superpowers have accelerated the expansion of BRICS; movement toward a new global financial architecture and discussion on de-dollarization are gaining traction. Policy-level

discussions in the NATO, European Union, and the U.S. on de-coupling and de-risking are gaining momentum. All these developments have fragmented the global economy, global finances, and global trade and investment.

The world is, therefore, currently passing through the initial phase of what will be a long struggle between two global powers – the United States and China – for global, nay planetary, pre-eminence. At the same time, different regional powers, far and near, are pushing vigorously to break out of their middling status and become great powers. The vortex of geostrategic currents, unleashed by this multidirectional, multipower struggle, has permanently ended the anodyne certainties of the previous era of international relations. What this means for one is that partnerships and friendships forged to navigate bipolar and unipolar worlds will no longer be a reliable reference to deal with the new challenges of emerging times.

In this maelstrom of regional and global shifts of power, Pakistan, like any key regional power in the 21st century, will need to safeguard its vital interests by means of a robust foreign policy, which should be guided by the precise priorities of domestic and regional growth, development, stability, and security, to be implemented through a masterful, multidimensional diplomacy.

The following recommendations that emerged from the expert deliberations of the NIPS seminar on “U.S.-China Strategic Competition: Options for Pakistan” can help in the promotion of domestic, regional, and global peace, development, security and stability:

1. Pakistan’s policy of not participating in the contemporary evolving trend of bloc politics is understandable, but it should not deter the policymakers from fostering comprehensive cooperation with any country that can help advance Pakistan’s vital interests. In this regard, the only concern should be the comprehensive national development of Pakistan and the durable prosperity and well-being of its citizens. This singular focus will allow Pakistan to deal properly

with mixed-motives situations that will experience an upsurge in the age of intensifying great-power competition.

2. In line with its policy of non-participation in camp politics, Pakistan should avoid joining interstate coalitions founded on the principle of exclusive multilateralism weaponized against a specific state and welcome interstate coalitions that promote the principle of inclusive, non-weaponized multilateralism. In this regard, Pakistan should focus on international coalitions that foster growth, tackle climate change, promote sustainable development, address global health challenges, foster energy transition, and drive technological innovation.
3. This policy should be consonant with the fact that good relations of the developing world with both the United States and China are not only beneficial for the developing world but also the two global powers themselves. Their competition, though inevitable, will only serve to push the world out of the Goldilocks zone of great-power cooperation that benefited the whole world tremendously in the three preceding decades.
4. Pakistan should concentrate its developmental energies on the comprehensive, multidimensional, coordinated, and integrated development of CPEC Phase-II in particular, and the overall construction of CPEC in general. The government has repeatedly conveyed its seriousness with regard to the second phase of CPEC. The second phase should prioritize an integrated city cluster development approach based on the full operationalization and optimization of the functional zones identified in the CPEC Long-Term Plan.¹ Moreover, STI development should form a major strategic plank of CPEC development in 2024-2030. In addition, Industrial Revolution 4.0. and high-tech manufacturing form a major aspect of bilateral industrial cooperation under CPEC. Greater integration of the overall construction of CPEC with China's ongoing 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and the future 15th Five-Year Plan,

¹ CPEC Secretariat, *Long-Term Plan for China Pakistan Economic Corridor (2017-2030)* (Islamabad; Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, 2017).

as and when it is unveiled, should be sought actively and smartly. This necessitates a deep knowledge of China's development model, patterns, strategies, and roadmaps. Pakistan should continue to deepen its long historical tradition of multi-domain cooperation with China.

5. Pakistan should take pro-active measures to ensure fool-proof security of CPEC projects and all Chinese personnel working in Pakistan on projects of bilateral cooperation.
6. Pakistan and China should explore viable ways of dealing with Pakistan's debt owed to China in a way that does not impede their mutual cooperation.
7. Partnership between Pakistan and the United States is an enduring one. The United States needs to decouple it from its ongoing competition with China and its relations with India. The United States should cease making this competition the sole criterion of its bilateral relations with other countries as this narrow focus does not behoove a global power like the United States. Pakistan should also seek to develop its partnership with the United States unencumbered by Indo-U.S. relations. Independent development of their bilateral relations will enable both the United States and Pakistan to cooperate in more robust and better ways across a host of sectors and domains.
8. Pakistan-China relations and Pakistan-U.S. relations should be conducted independently of each other as far as Pakistan is concerned.
9. Pakistan should pursue active public diplomacy to engage different types of audiences, stakeholders, and partners in Pakistan, China, and the United States at multiple levels of engagement.
10. Pakistan should map two sets of policies to navigate the current great-power competition; one set should consist of its strategic roadmap till 2049, and another set for guiding its interstate relations after 2049. Arguably the success of its policy after 2049 will to a certain extent hinge on its policy till 2049.

11. The world consists of a lot of countries. The current global polarity should not make our policymakers oblivious to this irreducible fact of international life. In this day and age, it is not possible to isolate a nation that is resolved to pursuing a multidirectional foreign policy. Undaunted, Pakistan should focus on the much-needed diversification of its foreign policy. This diversification should focus on deepening and broadening multi-sectoral cooperation with emerging economies, key developing nations, and major regional powers. It also involves working closely with critical small powers in South Asia and the surrounding regions so that these small powers cannot be used as Brzezinski's geopolitical pivots by forces inimical to Pakistan's vital interests.²
12. Pakistan should give special attention to repairing relations with Afghanistan and Iran. This effort should be driven by what is best for Pakistan rather than the exigency of aligning with the regional policy of any given great power. Focusing on what is best for Pakistan is like a highway that has many byways and intersections, while the latter is like a one-way street with nowhere to go in the end. The highway seems challenging but taking it allows greater strategic freedom of action. The one-way street looks promising and safe but taking it leads to the narrowing of strategic options.
13. Pakistan should fix its domestic contradictions and challenges as soon as possible, because it has been observed across the developing world that unenviable domestic conditions have driven countries to sub-optimal geopolitical situations. This logic has been captured well by Steven R. David's theory of omnibalancing.³
14. Political stability, foreign policy, economic development, and security should be pursued simultaneously. Political stability should be the foundation, economic growth and social stability should be the anchor, security should be the fundamental guarantee, and

² Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (Basic Books, 1998).

³ Steven R. David, "Explaining the Third World Alignment," *World Politics*, 43 (2), (Jan., 1991) pp 233-256, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010472>.

unconstrained foreign policy should be the critical support of national prosperity and modernization.

15. Unleashed by the U.S.-China competition, global trends like decoupling, friendshoring, and reshoring will only serve to undo the gains of globalization and economic interdependence. Pakistan should rather focus on non-ideological economic cooperation upholding the values of interdependence, free trade, and shared benefits. In this regard, Pakistan's application for the membership of BRICS is a welcome step that would allow Pakistan to promote and benefit from inclusive multilateralism. Pakistan should also focus in a single-minded manner to become one of the top 20 economies of the world and thus gain a place among G20.

3. U.S.-China Contest and Options for Pakistan

Ambassador Dr. Raza Muhammad



The Global Impact of U.S.-China Contest

U.S.-China strategic competition, the world’s most significant contemporary interstate competition, is fast morphing into a zero-sum rivalry giving rise to multiple impacts.

One of the most significant effects of this competition is the creation of an environment that curtails the foreign policy flexibility for medium-sized states like Pakistan and incentivizes other states, for instance, India, to join bloc politics which further complicates the regional geopolitics. Most of the smaller countries, however, choose hedging, a strategy defined as “a set of mutually counteracting policy initiatives that signal ambiguity to competing powers in order to preserve strategic autonomy.”⁴

⁴ Yuzhu Wang, “Hedging Strategy: Concept, Behavior, and Implications for China-ASEAN Relations,” *East Asian Affairs*, 1(2) (2021),

The intensification of U.S.-China antagonism also inhibits the interstate, intra-regional, and interregional economic cooperation based on trade and connectivity, which could help nations and regions overcome their development deficits, growth bottlenecks, and socioeconomic problems.⁵

Consequent to dissimilar U.S.-China geostrategic interests, major contemporary conflicts like the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War and the Israel-Palestine conflict have further exacerbated this competition. The recent Russia-North Korea defense deal has introduced a new dimension in the current global geopolitical calculus and the ongoing cold war 2.0. This deal is likely to aggravate the prevalent tenuous milieu in Asia Pacific.

Moreover, China's new maritime and coastguard regulations allowing the detention of up to 60 days of foreign ships that China considers have illegally entered its territorial waters in South China Sea could lead to escalation, as new rules may impact the freedom-of-navigation operations of the U.S. and its allies in the South China Sea as well as clash with the island and maritime claims of other states in the region.⁶

Further, the global rise of populism, especially in Europe, India, and even in the United States, will impact U.S.-China competition and the South Asian region through its exploitation of economic crises, social

<https://doi.org/10.1142/S2737557921500121>; Hunter S. Marston, "Navigating Great Power Competition: A Neoclassical Realist View of Hedging," *East Asian Affairs*, 21(1) (January 2024), 29-63, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcad001>.

⁵ Gregg Brazinsky, "U.S.-China Rivalry: The Dangers of Compelling Countries to Take Sides," *United States Institute of Peace*, March 30, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/03/us-china-rivalry-dangers-compelling-countries-take-sides>; Rashid Wali Janjua, "US-China Competition and South Asia," *The Express Tribune*, April 21, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2463312/us-china-competition-and-south-asia>.

⁶ Al Jazeera, "China Seeks Detention of Foreigners in Disputed South China Sea," *Al Jazeera*, June 15, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/15/china-seeks-detention-of-foreigners-in-disputed-south-china-sea>; AFP, "New Rules Allow Detention of Foreigners in South China Sea," *Dawn*, June 15, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1840146>.

change, and ethno-religious fault lines across national and regional boundaries and its intensification of anti-globalization sentiment.⁷

U.S. efforts at economic decoupling, friend-shoring, reshoring, and nearshoring will yield mixed results for itself and its allies; overall, they will further worsen the state of bilateral relations with China. These carry potentially negative side effects for revenues and profits of foreign companies doing business in China, that could result in real output losses globally, and lead to a world divided sharply into two economic blocs.⁸ Despite all these efforts, China's focus on the development of its energy-rich western regions, its dual circulation policy, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) would continue to be functional and thrive in the Global South, where there is a large appetite for growth and infrastructure development, but where the needed investment and resources are not forthcoming in a meaningful way, except in the case of those provided so far by China's model of globalization.⁹

⁷ Paul Haenle & Thomas Carothers, "The Rise of Populism and Implications for China: A China in the World Podcast," *China File*, April 2018, <https://www.chinafile.com/library/china-world-podcast/rise-of-populism-and-implications-china>.

⁸ Keith Johnson & Robbie Gramer, "The Great Decoupling," *Foreign Policy*, May 14, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/14/china-us-pandemic-economy-tensions-trump-coronavirus-covid-new-cold-war-economics-the-great-decoupling/>; J. Stewart Black & Allen J. Morrison, "The Strategic Challenges of Decoupling," *Harvard Business Review*, (May-June 2021), <https://hbr.org/2021/05/the-strategic-challenges-of-decoupling>; Beata S Javorcik, Lucas Kitzmüller, Helena Schweiger and Muhammed A Yıldırım, "Economic Costs of Friend-Shoring," in *Geoeconomic Fragmentation: The Economic Risks of a Fractured World Economy*, eds. Shekhar Aiyar, Andrea F. Presbitero & Michele Ruta (Paris & London: CEPR Press, 2023), 29-38, <https://cepr.org/publications/books-and-reports/geoeconomic-fragmentation-economic-risks-fractured-world-economy>; John Manners-Bell, *The Death of Globalization: How Politics, Ethics and the Environment are Transforming Global Supply Chains* (Edinburgh; Sea Pen Books Ltd, 2023).

⁹ Frank Tang, "Coronavirus, US-China Decoupling Prompt Beijing to Unveil New Western Development Plan," *SCMP*, May 18, 2020, https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3084915/coronavirus-us-china-decoupling-prompt-beijing-unveil-new?campaign=3084915&module=perpetual_scroll_o&pctype=article; Alicia Garcia Herrero, "What is Behind China's Dual Circulation Strategy," *CLM*, Issue 69, (September 1, 2021), <https://www.prclleader.org/post/what-is-behind-china-s-dual-circulation-strategy>; Vera Schulhof, Detlef van Vuuren, Julian Kirchherr, "The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): What Will It Look Like in the Future?" *Technological*

It also remains to be seen how the United States will compel the EU and its Southeast Asian partners to decouple from China, given their deep economic and trade linkages with China. China is the EU's third largest partner for EU export of goods and the largest partner for EU import of goods.¹⁰ ASEAN remains China's biggest trading partner; ASEAN-China bilateral trade stood at US\$468.8 billion in 2003, representing 15.9 percent of China total external trade.¹¹ President Xi Jinping's recent five-day three-nation European tour indicates that China-EU linkages will grow in the emerging multipolar world.¹²

Countries pursue and safeguard their interests undeterred by what other countries may think of this pursuit. The same is true in the case of countries working with Russia and Iran despite U.S. sanctions against these two countries. Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic have opposed western sanctions on Russia. Similarly, India continues to buy Russian crude, refining and selling it to Europe.¹³ While the U.S. has become the biggest exporter of gas and LNG to Europe as a result of Russia-Ukraine War, Russian gas continues to flow to Europe through Ukraine, allowing the latter to collect royalties from Russia despite the war.¹⁴ China's strategic partnership with Russia and its 2021 energy

Forecasting and Social Change, Volume 175 (February 2022),
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121306>.

¹⁰ Eurostat, "China-EU – International trade in Goods Statistics," *Eurostat*, February 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=China-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics.

¹¹ Arendse Huld, "China-ASEAN Trade and Investment Relations," *China Briefing*, August 9, 2024, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-asean-trade-and-investment-relations/>.

¹² Al Jazeera, "Key Takeaways from China's Xi European Tour to France, Serbia, and Hungary," *Al Jazeera*, May 10, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/10/key-takeaways-from-xi-jinpings-european-tour-to-france-serbia-and-hungary#:~:text=Chinese%20President%20Xi%20Jinping%20has,and%20Russia's%20war%20in%20Ukraine>.

¹³ *Times of India*, "Europe Bought Russia Oil via India at Record Rates in 2023 Despite Ukraine War," *Times of India*, January 12, 2024, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/europe/europe-bought-russian-oil-via-india-at-record-rates-in-2023-despite-ukraine-war/articleshow/106777423.cms>.

¹⁴ EIA, "The United States Remained the Largest Liquefied Natural Gas Supplier to Europe in 2023," *U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)*, February 29, 2024, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=61483#:~:text=February%202024>

deal with Iran highlight the limits of U.S. influence and its coercive capacity in the contemporary international system.

It may be that the aggressive approach of the United States has made China a more benign alignment option for many medium-sized and small-sized states in the developing world.

The exigencies of U.S.-China strategic competition have reordered U.S. priorities in South Asia. In fact, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan indicates a significant shift in its priorities, affecting regional security dynamics and key regional relationships, including U.S. relations with Pakistan. Captured in Biden's characterization of Pakistan as "maybe one of the most dangerous nations in the world," the current U.S. strategy of indifference, reduced interaction, and subtle coercion vis-à-vis Pakistan all point to diminished U.S.-Pakistan strategic interdependence.¹⁵

The waning global influence of the U.S. is not solely attributable to China's rise. In fact, its roots should also be searched in a long legacy of high-handedness in dealing with other countries, but, like all waning dominant powers, the United States considers China, the second-most powerful state in the system, as the key cause of its loss of systemic primacy.

Reading intentions backwards from capabilities, China-centric strategic thinking of the U.S. has led the United States to declare China as "the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it."¹⁶ Not surprisingly, NATO

<https://www.dw.com/en/war-in-ukraine-why-is-the-eu-still-buying-russian-gas/a-68925869>, "The United States remained the largest liquefied gas supplier to Europe in 2023" *and* "The United States was again, according to data from CEDIGAZ," Arthur Sullivan, "War in Ukraine: Why is the EU Still Buying Russian Gas?" *DW*, April 29, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/war-in-ukraine-why-is-the-eu-still-buying-russian-gas/a-68925869>.

¹⁵ News Desk, "Biden Calls Pakistan 'One of the Most Dangerous Nations in the World,'" *The Express Tribune*, October 15, 2022,

¹⁶ Department of Defense, *2022 National Defense Strategy*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2022), <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

has followed suit in declaring China a threat as well, and stated that it poses systemic challenges to Euro-Atlantic security.¹⁷ The final communique of recent G7 summit also mentions China 28 times in negative and adverse terms.¹⁸

China Vis-à-Vis the U.S.

China's economy, currently the second largest in the world at US\$18.533 trillion, is projected to surpass the U.S. economy by 2030.¹⁹ Mindful of the strategic challenges involved in the course of a country rising to become a global power, China has added US\$ 100 billion to its defense budget between 2014 and 2024, from US\$ 131.1 billion in 2014 to US\$ 231.36 billion in 2024, the latter representing a 7.2% increase from the defense spending in 2023.²⁰ In keeping with its great-power status, China is also building its blue-water naval capabilities.²¹

China's growing maritime and geoeconomic networking and integration in the Asia Pacific has alarmed the U.S. It has responded to this growing Chinese influence in the region with security and

¹⁷ NATO, *2022 Strategic Concept*, NATO, June 29, 2022, www.nato.int/strategic-concept/; Dylan Carter, "NATO labels China Threat to Global Security," July 1, 2022, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/247737/nato-labels-china-threat-to-global-security>.

¹⁸ David E. Sanger, "It's Not Just Russia: China Joins the G&'s List of Adversaries," *The New York Times*, June 15, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/15/world/asia/g7-summit-china-russia.html>.

¹⁹ IMF, *World Economic Outlook Database*, IMF, April 2024, https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2024/April/weo-report?c=924.&s=NGDP_RPCH,NGDPD,PPPGDP,NGDPDPC,PPPPC,PCPIPCH.&sv=2022&ey=2029&ssm=0&scsm=1&scc=0&ssd=1&ssc=0&sic=0&sort=country&ds=.&br=1; Ralph Jennings, "China's Economy Could Overtake US Economy by 2030," *VOA*, January 04, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/chinas-economy-could-overtake-us-economy-by-2030/6380892.html>.

²⁰ CSIS, "What Does China Really Spend on Its Military?" *China Power: Unpacking the Complexity of China's Rise*, CSIS, 2024, <https://chinapower.csis.org/military-spending/>; Liu Xuanzun, "China Raises Defense Budget by 7.2% for 2024, 'Conducive to Peace, Stability'," *Global Times*, March 05, 2024, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202403/1308188.shtml>.

²¹ Brad Lendon & Simone McCarthy, "Blue-Water Ambitions: Is China Looking Beyond Its Neighborhood Now It has the World's Largest navy?" *CNN*, September 02, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/01/asia/china-navy-overseas-military-bases-intl-hnk-ml/index.html#:~:text=But%20China's%20shipbuilding%20reveals%20blue,thousands%20of%20miles%20from%20Beijing>.

economic partnerships like Quad, AUKUS, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) and the Indo-Pacific Strategy. The U.S. Congress has passed the Strategic Competition Act 2021, authorizing almost “US\$15 billion over 5 years,” to enable a “unified, strategic response” to enhance “U.S. strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific” and underscore “alliances, partnerships, and U.S. global leadership” to face up to what the Act considers “China’s malign political influence and predatory economic practices” by reinvigorating “U.S. diplomatic and economic statecraft.”²² China is either leading or on the course to overtake the U.S. within a decade in Artificial intelligence, 5G, Quantum information science (QIS), semiconductors, biotechnology, green energy, cloud computing, robotics, and STEM.²³ General Stephen Whiting, Commander of the U.S. Space Command, has stated that China’s “on-orbit intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance satellites” have multiplied threefold since 2018 leading it to establish “a kill-web over the Pacific Ocean” that could “fix, track,” and “target United States and allied military capabilities.”²⁴ Chinese technological innovations include high-resolution Yaogan satellites, jamming technologies, and anti-satellite weapons.

China’s S&T development is stupendous in its own right. The British weekly, *The Economist*, notes that China has “become a scientific superpower;” spelling the end of “old science order, dominated by America, Europe, and Japan,” leading both the U.S. and the EU in “the number of high-impact papers produced each year,” meaning the publications that are cited most often by other scientists in their own,

²² Democrats Senate, *The Strategic Competition Act of 2021, Democrats Senate*, <https://www.democrats.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/The%20Strategic%20Competition%20Act%20of%202021%20-%20Section%20by%20Section.pdf>.

²³ Graham Allison, Kevin Klyman, Karina Barbesino & Hugo Yen, “The Great Tech Rivalry: China vs the U.S.,” *Avoiding Great Power War Project, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, December 2021, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/great-tech-rivalry-china-vs-us>.

²⁴ Mike Wall, “China Moving at ‘Breathtaking Speed’ in Final Frontier, Space Force Says,” *Space.com*, April 10, 2024, <https://www.space.com/china-space-progress-breathtaking-speed-space-force>.

later work.”²⁵ The British weekly records an Oxford professor stating that Tsinghua University has become the top S&T university in the world; moreover, China is the global leader in the disciplines of physical sciences, chemistry and Earth and environmental sciences, having landed its *Chang’e-6* robot spacecraft inside a massive crater “on the far side of the moon, making China the first-ever country to collect and bring back samples from the Moon’s far side.²⁶ China’s progress in AI is nothing short of miraculous, “contributing around 40% of the world’s research papers on AI,” leading both the U.S. with 10% AI papers and EU and Britain combined with 15% AI papers.²⁷ China, in 2020, awarded 1.4 million engineering degrees, seven times as many as the U.S. conferred.²⁸

China also aced the Forbes’ list of Fortune Global 500 Companies.²⁹ The number of Chinese companies in the list increased from 11 in 2003 to 142 in 2023, whereas the number of U.S. companies decreased during the same period from 192 in 2003 to 136 in 2023.³⁰

A comparison of the national security strategies of China and the United States reveals unique priorities, worldviews, and aspects. At

²⁵ *The Economist*, “China Has Become a Scientific Superpower,” *The Economist*, June 12, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2024/06/12/china-has-become-a-scientific-superpower>.

²⁶ *The Economist*, “China Has Become a Scientific Superpower,” *The Economist*, June 12, 2024; Dennis Normile, “China Retrieves First-Ever Samples from Moon’s Far Side,” *Science*, June 26, 2024, <https://www.science.org/content/article/china-retrieves-first-ever-samples-moon-s-far-side#:~:text=China's%20Chang'e%2D6%20omission,after%202%20p.m.%20local%20time>.

²⁷ *The Economist*, “China Has Become a Scientific Superpower,” *The Economist*, June 12, 2024.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Shanghai Municipal People’s Government, “Chinese Companies Excel in This Year’s Fortune Global 500,” *Shanghai Municipal People’s Government*, August 04, 2023, <https://www.shanghai.gov.cn/nw48081/20230804/2d49914657a74258a4a010346c5f4b28.html>.

³⁰ Einar H. Dyvik, “Number of Fortune 500 Companies in Selected Countries Worldwide from 2000 to 2023,” *Statista*, July 04, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1204099/number-fortune-500-companies-worldwide-country/#:~:text=From%202000%20to%202019%2C%20the,compared%20to%20121%20U.S.%20companies..>

least three elements are of note. First, while the U.S. emphasizes, depending upon who is in the White House, America First or the U.S. global system of alliances, and “Protecting the Homeland,” China prioritizes “National Rejuvenation” and the “Chinese Dream.” Second, while China concentrates its strategic energies on economic development, political stability, and social cohesion, the U.S. prioritizes military strength, economic primacy, and global political leadership. Third, while the U.S. is inspired by the evangelical mission of making the world safe and right for democracy, promoting peace through strength and upholding a long tradition of American exceptionalism, China prioritizes non-interference and win-win cooperation as its preferred mode of conducting interstate relations.

There is no doubt that the United States and China are increasingly being drawn into an intense systemic competition. This competition would decide the fate of the global interstate order and, to put it mildly, cause transformation of the international system. When trying to understand an evolving or a future state of affairs, it is but a common practice to use cases and examples from the past to illuminate the way forward. This is what we as human beings do; we use the past to make sense of a fluid present and an unknown future. It is precisely for this reason that the current edition of the U.S.-China great-power competition is being called, and perhaps also understood as, a new cold war with reference to the term used for designating the earlier 20th-century strategic competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. Using this term allows us to draw upon the rich conceptual, philosophical, and historical repertoire associated with it.

However, there are some notable differences between the old and the new cold wars that deserve to be spelled out.

The U.S.-Soviet Cold War was waged between two distinct blocs consisting of multiple states, one led by the United States and the other by the Soviet Union. The polarity of the international system during the Cold War was clearly bipolar. The blocs were guided by opposing ideologies of capitalism and communism/socialism and imbued with a millenarian conversionary zeal. The intra-bloc relations among

members of the two blocs were guided by formal treaties. The Soviet bloc was virtually isolated from the rest of the world. The term 'iron curtain' aptly defined the hermetic insulation of the communist bloc. Over time the isolation of the Soviet bloc states weakened, as the Soviet Union became increasingly beset with internal economic woes and political crises. Each bloc was characterized by the hub-and-spoke model, wherein the most powerful state led the bloc members in all major spheres. There was little political, economic, technological, cultural, or people-to-people contact between the two blocs. However, there was close integration and strong interdependence within each bloc. Also, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, as bellwether states of the two blocs, remained diplomatically engaged to avoid escalation and minimize the risk of nuclear war. The countries, not aligned with either bloc, were distinguished as non-aligned countries and were formally part of the global Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), but, in actual fact, enjoyed different degrees of simultaneous interaction with both the blocs. With regard to non-aligned countries, the leader states of both blocs vied with each other for their ideological and political affiliation. Each bloc tried to win the allegiance of as many countries as possible and prevent the other bloc from doing so as much as possible. This was considered a major indicator of the success and attractiveness of each bloc.

The new cold war is altogether different from the old one. There are no sharply divided blocs led by the United States and China. There is a high degree of interdependence between the two competing major states. This competition is taking place in a highly globalized world. There is also no ideological competition between the two states. Although China is formally a communist country, it does not espouse the old revolutionary philosophy of exporting either communism or revolution to other parts of the world. Unlike previous rising powers, China has no ambition to remake the world in its image. Its main domestic and global concern is development and growth. There is also no avowed competition between the political models of both the states. While the United States likes to bring up the contrast between democracy and what it calls authoritarianism as a rallying cry in the

competition, it lacks the intense ideological investment of the old cold war. Called one of China's top strategic thinkers, Prof. Yan Xuetong, Director of Tsinghua University's Institute of International Studies, highlights three major differences between the former U.S.-Soviet competition and the ongoing U.S.-China competition: the unwillingness of both the U.S. and China to "undertake excessive international responsibility," unlike the U.S.-Soviet struggle for global preeminence; the absence of ideological competition between the U.S. and China; and China's "strategic preference for peaceful competition with the U.S." unlike that of the Soviet Union.³¹

Impact on Pakistan

From the perspective of Pakistan, U.S.-China competition carries much more strategic weight than did the U.S.-Soviet competition because of Pakistan's deep relations with China and enduring relations with the U.S. Pakistan, therefore, ill affords to take sides in this competition. While the global powers may not realize it at the time, there have to be states in the system that can talk to both the U.S. and China on friendly terms. Such countries would be in a position to communicate what is in the best interests of both the major powers. And it is perfectly within reason for their interests not to be zero-sum in nature. The higher the number of such countries in the world and the greater the coordination among them, the higher the chances for peace in the world.

The growth of Indo-U.S. strategic partnership, which can be attributed more or less directly to America's competition with China, is impacting South Asia in critical ways. The visualization of India as a strategic partner and the net strategic provider in what is called the Indo-Pacific in the U.S. strategic calculus has serious implications for South Asia. It is creating conventional asymmetry that may destabilize the region leading to the lowering of the nuclear threshold in the region. U.S.-China competition also affects other countries in the region. This

³¹ Yan Xuetong, "Trump Can't Start a Cold War with China, Even If He Wants to," *Washington Post*, February 06, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/theworldpost/wp/2018/02/06/china-trump/>.

naturally means it affects their relations with Pakistan and Pakistan's relations with them. The enduring U.S. failures in Afghanistan continue to haunt the region and rankle in Washington, naturally leading to the tendency to scapegoat Pakistan. Perhaps, this unfounded resentment fuels in part America's decision to throw in its lot with India. Pakistan wishes to benefit from China's peaceful development but is under pressure to align with the U.S. It is important to note that economic strength has been traditionally proven to build durable resilience against coercion. This also happens to be one of the findings of a policy brief by a leading European think tank.³² The route to building economic strength is through sustained economic growth, domestic development, political harmony, and social stability, all bolstered by strong national defense capabilities.

India's implacable rivalry with Pakistan and China has been reinforced by its partnership with the U.S. India is rankly misusing this association, evident in its opposition to BRI and CPEC and its support of acts of terrorism in Pakistan, especially against CPEC and the Chinese personnel in Pakistan.³³ Pakistan-China partnership irks India because it thwarts its ambitions of regional hegemony. These Indian ambitions remain the single biggest factor in the failure of regional integration and connectivity in South Asia.

Challenges, Opportunities and the Way Forward

The long conflict in Afghanistan followed by the security challenges Pakistan had to face due to the post-U.S. withdrawal situation in Afghanistan have badly undermined its economy and created social instability. Pakistan lost more than US\$150 billion and 120,000 lives

³² Jonathen Hackenbroich, Janka Oertel, Phillip Sandner & Pawel Zerka, "Defending Europe's Economic Sovereignty: New Ways to Resist Economic Coercion," *European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)*, October 2020, https://ecfr.eu/publication/defending_europe_economic_sovereignty_new_ways_to_resist_economic_coercion/#strength.

³³ Huang Lanian & Cui Fandi, "GT Investigates: Evidences, Sources Prove India 'Supports Terrorism' in Pakistan's Balochistan," *Global Times*, January 22, 2024, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202401/1305842.shtml>; Abid Hussain, "March of 'Terror': Pakistan Grapples with Deadly Attacks on Chinese Interests," *Al Jazeera*, March 29, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/29/march-of-terror-pakistan-grapples-with-deadly-attacks-on-china-interests>.

due to the conflict in Afghanistan.³⁴ Violent extremism and terrorism that the conflict spawned have badly impacted Pakistan's economy and society and increased the country's security challenges. Continued instability in Afghanistan has proven detrimental for growth and development in Pakistan. India's irrational and psychotic animus toward Pakistan also plays a big part in Pakistan's problems. Ties with Iran have been normalized but could be better.

Pakistan's geostrategic location is potentially a major factor that can enable the country to play a key role in promoting regional integration and connectivity, but different sorts of pressures prevent the full realization of this potential. Pakistan's massive youth bulge, potentially a guarantee for economic and social dynamism, still remains to be channelled gainfully for national development and socioeconomic progress. The country is endowed with immense and diverse natural resources worth trillions of dollars.

To navigate this complex geopolitical landscape, safeguard its interests, and emerge as an important player in the region, Pakistan needs to adopt a pragmatic approach. We have to be flexible and adaptable to evolving global dynamics.

China and the U.S. are Pakistan's largest trading partners. Pakistan's majority exports are to the U.S., while its largest share of imports is from China.³⁵ Pakistan should refrain from choosing sides, but should try to manage its bilateral relations with both the major powers, one independently of the other.

Pakistan should expeditiously seek to settle disputes with other countries in the region on a basis mutually acceptable to the parties involved. In the contemporary interstate system, commonality of

³⁴ Khurshid Ahmed, "Officials Say, 'War on Terror' Caused Over \$150 Billion in Losses for Pakistan Since 9/11," *Arab News Pakistan*, September 11, 2021, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1926731/pakistan>.

³⁵ APP, "US Becomes Pakistan's Top Export Destination," *The Express Tribune*, June 27, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2474320/us-becomes-pakistans-top-export-destination>; Mettis Link News, "China Dominates As Pakistan's Top Import Partner in May FY24," *Mettis Link News*, June 22, 2024, <https://mettisglobal.news/china-dominates-as-pakistans-top-import-partner-in-may-fy24/>.

interests could be woven around global issues like counterterrorism, countering violent extremism, antinarcotics, climate change, and sustainable development.

Pakistan should seek to undertake diplomatic and trade diversification and try to benefit from the great diversity of nations in the current system, capitalizing on its unique geographical location at the crossroads of multiple regions. It should seek creative and workable ways of regionalizing CPEC, properly leveraging its geographic location.

There is a need at the same time to focus on internal cohesion, stabilize the volatile economic situation, speed up socioeconomic development, foster industrialization, promote science, technology, and innovation-based development to gradually reduce our reliance on foreign sources of capital, technology, and expertise. Business-friendly environment to attract investments from home and from abroad and the continuity of policies are considered crucial for speedy socioeconomic development of the country.

Proactive, focused, and serious participation in regional and global forums and organizations is likely to help promote our vital interests and build multilateral partnerships and coordination, leading to greater diplomatic capital of Pakistan. Pakistan should promote cultural exchanges and people-to-people contacts with all countries in the region, the surrounding regions, and the world at large. Cultural diplomacy, knowledge diplomacy, education diplomacy, science diplomacy, commercial diplomacy, economic diplomacy, media diplomacy, defense diplomacy, and different types of tourism should be priority areas of the internationalization strategy of Pakistan. This involves, among other things, the intensification of military and diplomatic cooperation, the establishment of strategic dialogue mechanism with different countries, encouragement of academic exchanges, promotion of scientific mobility, creation of collaborative research hubs, building regional universities, and scholarships and studentships.

In sum, it must be remembered that the global center of gravity is gradually shifting to the East. The U.S.-China strategic competition is further accelerating the process of the redistribution of capabilities in the international system, intensifying the anarchy effects, which is a normal consequence of systemic transition.

Confronted with multiple challenges, Pakistan has to carefully keep its focus on internal cohesion and socioeconomic progress for realizing comprehensive security. Hedging combined with keeping its relations with the U.S. and China independent of each other seems to be a good but formidable option. Regardless of pressure and coercion, Pakistan must stand up for itself and strongly safeguard its vital interests including CPEC. Last but not the least, resolution of conflicts with countries in the region, and friendly relations with all countries in general, can prove to be a good way of promoting regional stability and peace.

4. U.S.-China Strategic Competition: Options for Pakistan

Ambassador Zamir Akram



U.S.-China Strategic Competition

We are witnessing massive global transformations in terms of the global distribution of capabilities. The polarity of the international system is shifting palpably, making the world increasingly multipolar. In fact, this shift has been going on ceaselessly ever since the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991. The post-WWII bipolar world ended with the end of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War. This led to the unipolar international system characterized by preponderant economic and military might of the United States, buttressed by its extensive system of global alliance and partnerships. The victory of the U.S.-led Western capitalism over Soviet-led world communism led many around the world to believe that the process of historical evolution, apparent in the historical struggle of opposing systems and ideologies during the Cold War, had ended with the near universal acceptance and promulgation of western-style democracy, economic liberalism, and free market

fundamentalism as the dominant framework of global affairs. This mood was captured and epitomized by the Japanese-American scholar, Francis Fukuyama, in his book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).

The systemic triumph over the Soviets led the U.S. policymakers to develop an outsize notion of the global indispensability of the United States, nourished by a long-cherished belief in the American exceptionalism. This self-image reinforced the unrestrained pursuit by the United States of zero-sum self-aggrandizement in Post-Cold War years, projected as efforts to spread democracy around the world. This pursuit was enabled by the absence in those years of any peer competitor coupled with the near-total acquiescence of the comity of nations in undisputed U.S. hegemony.

Unsurprisingly, these millenarian views, backed by preponderant military power, have led every U.S. national security strategy since the end of the Cold War toward the establishment and maintenance of the global military posture of full-spectrum dominance to counter and contain every rival, whether it be Russia or China. The United States is approaching its competition with China with essentially the same strategic mindset with which it dealt earlier with the Soviet Union. What has changed is the relative threat perceptions of Russia and China. Where formerly Russia was the bigger threat, now China has displaced Russia to become the top concern in American threat perceptions. Therefore, the contemporary U.S. policy should be understood as a logical continuation of its bipolar and unipolar policies during and after the Cold War. While NATO has unremittingly sought to expand eastward under American direction, ultimately resulting in the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, the U.S. Pivot to Asia, backed by alliances and partnerships, is aimed at containing and confronting China. This is the nub of the Eurasian crisis raging since the last 10 years.

Engagement with China that the United States initiated as the result of the Nixonian triangular diplomacy as part of Soviet containment morphed in the 21st century into the most significant bilateral

relationship in the world. This bilateralism proved to be exceptionally beneficial for both the United States and China as well as the world as a whole. However, the dawning consciousness during President Obama's second term that unchecked peaceful development of China could one day relegate the United States to the second position in international system led to the pivot to Asia. All significant American initiatives in Asia Pacific like the Quad, Aukus, and its so-called Free and Fair Indo-Pacific Strategy are the results of this pivot. U.S.-China Trade War involving sanctions, especially technology sanctions, that it gave rise to, all of which continue in one form or the other, can be traced to America's Asian pivot, underwritten by its strategic need to stymie China's rise. Similarly, U.S.'s freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China and East China Seas as well as the Straits of Malacca and Taiwan are designed to dominate the Asia-Pacific sea lanes which are crucial for almost 80% of China's global trade.³⁶ The façade behind which this policy is being conducted is the U.S.-led rules-based international order.

The United States also continues to interfere in China's internal affairs, as indicated by the former's positions on the Falun Gong Movement, Uighur separatism, and 2019-2020 Hong Kong protests. More dangerously, the United States continues to provide advanced military hardware to Taiwan, enhancing its military capabilities in violation of its 'One China' Policy. Beijing considers all these steps as undermining its core interests of state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity, national reunification, constitutionally established political system and social stability, and fundamental safeguards for ensuring

³⁶ Liz Sly & Julia Ledur, "China's Global Leap: China Has Acquired a Global Network of Strategically Vital Ports," *The Washington Post*, November 6, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2023/china-ports-trade-military-navy/>.

continued economic and social development.³⁷ China has clearly warned the United States that its red lines should not be crossed.³⁸

In order to counter and contain China, the United States wants to promote India as a Net Security Provider in the so-called Indo-Pacific, involving the expansion of Indian out-reach from the Indian to the Pacific Oceans.

To bolster India's military and technological capabilities, is geared to this effect. The United States has signed four foundational agreements with India, viz., the 2002 General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and, its extension, the 2019 Industrial Security Agreement (ISA), the 2016 Logistics Exchange Memorandum Agreement (LEMOA), the 2018, Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the 2020 Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence (BECA). Washington has also extended the Tier 1 Strategic Trade Authorization for India and in 2023 concluded the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) for cooperation in AI and other new technologies.³⁹

The enhancement of Indian military capabilities directly serves to destabilize the region, involving serious security implications for Pakistan and the region at large. The logical extrapolation from this state of affairs is that disturbing the strategic balance does not appear

³⁷ Information Office of the State Council of PRC, "China's Peaceful Development," *Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China*, September 6, 2011, https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content_281474986284646.htm.

³⁸ Tom Bateman & Kelly Ng, "China Warns US Not to Step on Its 'Red Lines'," *BBC*, April 26, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2547ll8z0ro>.

³⁹ U.S. Department of State, U.S. Security Cooperation with India: Fact Sheet," *U.S. Department of State*, January 20, 2021, [The White House, January 31, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/01/31/fact-sheet-united-states-and-india-elevate-strategic-partnership-with-the-initiative-on-critical-and-emerging-technology-icet/>.](https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-india/#:~:text=Commensurate%20with%20this%20designation%2C%20in,by%20the%20Department%20of%20Commerce; The White House,)

to be a major concern for the United States as long as this promotes American interests.

In the United States, such moves are facilitated by the growing bipartisan support for containing China. Republican-Democrat policy divide that exists on several issues has been bridged on China by the recognition that the United States is in a long “protracted struggle for economic primacy and military advantage.”⁴⁰ The United States intends to outcompete China across the board using all available tools, especially adapting its expansive global system of alliances and partnerships to the demands of the competition with China.⁴¹ For this purpose, the Biden administration has made a budget request of US\$ 4 billion in mandatory funding for the 2025 fiscal year to be used for infrastructure assistance and made a separate request of US\$ 4 billion for foreign assistance and diplomatic engagement in the region.⁴² While the United States has clearly said it does not seek regime change in China, hardliners want to see “some form of regime collapse” as an active aspiration of Washington’s China policy.⁴³

The Chinese Response

The five generations of Chinese leadership since 1949 have devoted themselves to the extraordinary task of making China one of the foremost nations of the world. Since at least the late 1970s, when the

⁴⁰ Robert Kuttner, “Containing China,” *The American Prospect*, April 30, 2024, <https://prospect.org/economy/2024-04-30-containing-china/>.

⁴¹ Antony J. Blinken, “The Power and Purpose of American Diplomacy in a New Era,” *Secretary Antony J. Blinken’s Remarks to the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)*, September 13, 2023, <https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/the-power-and-purpose-of-american-diplomacy-in-a-new-era/>.

⁴² Simon Lewis & Humeyra Pamuk, “US State Department Requests \$4 to Outcompete China,” *Reuters*, March 12, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-state-department-requests-4-billion-outcompete-china-2024-03-11/>.

⁴³ Matt Pottinger & Mike Gallagher, “No Substitute for Victory,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/no-substitute-victory-pottinger-gallagher>; Fareed Zakaria, “The Dangerous New Call for Regime Change in Beijing,” *The Washington Post*, May 3, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/05/03/china-republicans-strategy-biden-weak/>.

reform and opening began under the able leadership of Chairman Deng Xiaoping, China has concentrated all its energies on domestic socioeconomic development. Incorporated into both the party and the state constitutions to proof them against leadership changes, the four modernizations of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense formed the crux of the developmental agenda of the reform and opening up that, within four decades, transformed China into the world's second-largest economy and a veritable global industrial powerhouse.⁴⁴

China's massive development has been all the more spectacular in that it has been neither predatory nor aggressive but by and large peaceful within and beyond its borders. It has been accompanied by social stability internally and peaceful co-existence based on non-aggression and non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations.⁴⁵ Chinese leadership has repeatedly stressed the importance of non-conflictual and cooperative relations among nations, characterized by the absence of conflict and confrontation coupled with the prioritization of mutual respect and win-win cooperation.⁴⁶

China has successfully followed Deng Xiaoping's famous advice of "Hide your strength, bide your time," not necessarily limiting it to a

⁴⁴ Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, *China Without Mao: The Search for a New Order*, Second Edition (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴⁵ The State Council of the People's Republic of China, "How China Has Achieved Long-Term Social Stability," *The State Council of the People's Republic of China*, June 29, 2021, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202106/29/content_WS60da77acc6d0df57f98dc0c5.html#:~:text=From%202016%20to%202020%2C%20China,feature%20and%20the%20biggest%20strength; The State Council of the People's Republic of China, "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence – A Timeless Guide to International Relations," *The State Council of the People's Republic of China*, June 29, 2024, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202406/29/content_WS667f6667c6d0868f4e8e8af9.html#:~:text=Experts%20say%20the%20five%20principles,decades%20and%20become%20a%20basic.

⁴⁶ Qi Hao, "China Debates the 'New Type of Great Power Relations,'" *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 8 (4), (Winter 2015), 349-370, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pov012>; Yang Danzhi, "Win-Win Cooperation," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Belt and Road*, Second Edition, eds. Cai Feng, Peter Nolan & Wang Linggui (London & New York: Routledge, 2022), 277-282.

specific historical phase or a particular situation.⁴⁷ It has practiced strategic patience in conducting its relations with the world. It has avoided confrontation and generally manifested forbearance in its diplomacy except when it has believed that its core interests are not being regarded seriously. It is important to note here that the impression that China was non-assertive before and is assertive now is therefore not exactly accurate, and has been created mainly in the West in keeping with its own recent hardening of attitude toward China.⁴⁸ What is more accurate to say is that China's diplomacy has always been, and continues to be, flexible and accommodating, except when other powers try to disregard or act contrary to China's core interests. China's diplomacy has consistently consisted of firmly safeguarding its core interests and readiness to come to a mutual understanding that is win-win in nature.

On the one hand, China has consciously sought integration into the international economic, financial, and political order built largely by the United States and its allies in the wake of WWII. China's accession to WTO in December 2001 is a concrete instance of its ambition to fully integrate into the global order. On the other hand, China has also made painstaking efforts to bolster the global order by taking the lead to create new international organizations, institutions, and initiatives like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO, 2001), BRICS (2009), Asia-Pacific Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP, 2011), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, 2013), and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB, 2016) to promote regional and global economic growth, security, and stability. Always utilizing the past to enlighten its present and future steps, China in the post-Cold War world made special efforts to improve its relations with Russia through the 20-year friendship treaty signed in July 2001 and extended for

⁴⁷ Huang Youyi, "Context, Not History, Matters for Deng's Famous Phrase," *Global Times*, June 15, 2011, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/661734.shtml>.

⁴⁸ Goh Choon Kang, "Framing China's Actions: From 'Assertive' to 'Aggressive'," *ThinkChina*, June 17, 2022, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/politics/framing-chinas-actions-assertive-aggressive>.

another 5 years in June 2021.⁴⁹ China further signed a 30-year US\$ 400 billion gas deal with Russia in May 2014 to deepen bilateral trade, especially trade in energy.⁵⁰

China has assumed greater leadership role in regional and global affairs during the ongoing fifth generation of Chinese leadership under President Xi Jinping. As mentioned above, this involves, among other things: a policy of firm response to efforts that disregard China's core interests; support for the global multipolar trend; rejection of power politics and hegemonism by any major power or a bloc of powers; construction of deeper economic, trade, and infrastructure connectivity regionally and globally; and the development of new types of international and regional organizations, institutions, and initiatives.

This enhanced leadership role has perturbed and alarmed the United States, the dominant power of the post-WWII global order. Lee Kuan Yew, the great Singaporean leader, thought that China's rise was "emotionally very difficult to accept" for the U.S., but he believed that "Americans have to eventually share their preeminent position with China."⁵¹ Because the U.S. "cannot stop China's rise," so Lee believed that it should just learn to "live with a bigger China," warning that if "the U.S. attempts to humiliate China, keep it down, it will assure itself an enemy."⁵²

⁴⁹ The Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation was signed on July 16 2001. For the treaty's text, see, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110605071535/http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/2649/t15771.htm>.

⁵⁰ Alexei Anishchuk, "As Putin Looks East, China and Russia Sign \$400-Billion Gas Deal," *Reuters*, May 21, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/as-putin-looks-east-china-and-russia-sign-400-billion-gas-deal-idUSBREA4K07L/>.

⁵¹ Lee Kuan Yew, Graham Allison, Robert D. Blackwell & Ali Wyne, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master's Insights on China, the United States, and the World*, (Cambridge, Mass. & London: The MIT Press, 2013).

⁵² *Ibid.*

Lee Kuan Yew advised that if the U.S. “accepts China as a big, powerful, rising state and gives it a seat in the boardroom, China will take that place for the foreseeable future.”⁵³

Lee further stressed that the “fundamental choice” facing the United States was “to engage or to isolate China. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot say you will engage China on some issues and isolate her over others. You cannot mix your signals.”⁵⁴

Leading U.S. policymakers and experts are of the view that during “past two decades, China has risen further and faster on more dimensions than any nation in history,” having become “a serious rival of what had been the world’s sole superpower.”⁵⁵ The United States considers China a “strategic competitor,” treating it as the “overall pacing challenge for U.S. defense planning” and believing what it considers to be China’s efforts to “refashion the Indo-Pacific region and the international system to suit its interests” as “the most comprehensive and serious challenge to U.S. national security.”⁵⁶

Major Domains of U.S.-China Strategic Competition

Diplomacy, military, economy and trade, and science and technology have been identified as the four major domains of U.S.-China strategic competition.

In the diplomatic domain, the meeting in Anchorage, Alaska, in 2021 captured the dominant tenor of the U.S.-China diplomatic exchanges. China asseverated that the United States was not qualified to speak to

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Graham Allison, “The Great Rivalry: China vs. the U.S. in the 21st Century,” *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School*, December 7, 2021, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/great-rivalry-china-vs-us-21st-century>.

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>; U.S. Department of Defense, *2022 National Defense Strategy*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2022), <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

it from a position of strength, declaring that moving forward it will engage the United States from a position of strength unapologetically.⁵⁷ However, there is a recognition that China's wolf warrior diplomacy, which was at the peak in the late 2010s, has now subsided, and that "Chinese diplomats," "not fundamentally different from those of other countries," "have gradually returned to a more traditional approach," but the decline of wolf warrior diplomacy may be reversed, if China's interests are perceived by its leaders to be threatened or attacked.⁵⁸

In the military domain, the United States is increasingly cognizant of three harsh facts. First, it has realized that the "era of U.S. military primacy is over" resulting in a situation in which "every domain is contested—air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace" compelling the United States to "retreat from a strategy based on primacy and dominance to one of deterrence;" second, it recognizes that the "unique" status of "America's position as a global military superpower" notwithstanding, "both China and Russia are now serious military rivals and even peers in particular domains;" and third, the United States understands that in the event of a "limited" future conflict "over Taiwan or along China's periphery, the U.S. would likely lose—or have to choose between losing and stepping up the escalation ladder to a wider war."⁵⁹

In the domain of economy and trade, the U.S.-China competition is going on in "four pillars of economic power: GDP, trade, business and

⁵⁷ Yan Xuetong, "Becoming Strong: The New Chinese Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, (July/August 2021), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-06-22/becoming-strong>; Graham Allison, Alyssa Resar, Karina Barbesino, "The Great Diplomatic Rivalry: China vs the U.S.," *Avoiding Great Power War Project, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School*, August 2022, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/great-diplomatic-rivalry-china-vs-us>.

⁵⁸ Tyler Jost, "Have China's Wolf Warriors Gone Extinct? Why Beijing Embraced Combative Diplomacy—and Why it Might Do So Again," *Foreign Affairs*, June 27, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/have-chinas-wolf-warriors-gone-extinct>.

⁵⁹ Graham Allison & Jonah Glick-Unterman, "The Great Military Rivalry: China vs the U.S.," *Avoiding Great Power War Project, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School*, December 2021, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/great-military-rivalry-china-vs-us>.

investment, and finance.”⁶⁰ The U.S. experts note with concern that the “global economic order has been “redefined” by “China’s sustained ‘miracle economic growth’ over the past four decades at an average rate four times that of the U.S.”⁶¹

According to the experts, in terms of the market exchange rate China’s GDP, having increased from US\$1.2 trillion to US\$17.96 trillion since 2000, will surpass the U.S. GDP inside of a decade, but in terms of purchasing power parity, considered the best measure for “comparing national economies,” “China has already surpassed the U.S. to become the world’s largest economy.”⁶² The experts further note that China, not the U.S., is now “the manufacturing workshop of the world,” the No. 1 trading partner of most nations in the world,” “the most essential link in the world’s critical global supply chains,” “the primary engine of global economic growth” accounting for “one-third of all growth in the world’s GDP,” “home to the largest number of the most valuable global companies on Fortune’s Global 500,” “the leading country in attracting foreign investment,” and going “neck and neck with the U.S. gross R&D investments.”⁶³ Where the United States leads the world is the status of the U.S. dollar as the “world’s dominant reserve currency,” which is currently “60% of foreign exchange reserves.”⁶⁴ The “U.S. equity markets” are “the world’s largest” and it leads in “venture capital investments.”⁶⁵ The United States also remains the world’s destination of choice for the global talent.⁶⁶

In the domain of science and technology, the U.S. is cognizant of the extraordinary S&T development of China. U.S. policymakers and strategists are aware of the fact that science, technology, and innovation are the major domains of competition and struggle between

⁶⁰ Graham Allison, Nathalie Kiersznowski & Charlotte Fitzek, “The Great Economic Rivalry: China vs the U.S.,” *Avoiding Great Power War Project, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School*, March 2022, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/great-economic-rivalry-china-vs-us>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

the United States and China. Eric Schmidt, Google's former CEO, considers that "innovation power," defined as the "faster and better" "ability to invent, adopt, and adapt new technologies," "will determine the outcome of great-power competition between the United States and China."⁶⁷

In 2020, China left the United States behind to become the world's No. 1 high-tech manufacturer, turning out 1.5 billion smartphones, 250 million computers, and 25 million automobiles, and became a serious competitor in cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence, quantum information science, semiconductors, biotechnology, and green energy.⁶⁸ China seems "to be the global leader or a peer of the United States" in terms of the "numbers of patents granted for technologies of strategic significance" such as "semiconductors, computer technology, telecommunications, energy technology, and biotech."⁶⁹ In 2022, China surpassed the United States in numbers of patent applications, having filed 68,600 patent applications against about 58,200 of the U.S.⁷⁰ Between 2012 and 2022, the AI-related patents of China grew from 650 to more than 40,000 compared to the growth of "U.S.-associated AI patents" "from about 920 to 9,400 during the same time."⁷¹

China's 2015 *Made in China 2025* plan and 2016 *Outline of the National Innovation-Driven Development Strategy* provide

⁶⁷ Eric Schmidt, "Innovation Power: Why Technology will Define the Future of Geopolitics," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/eric-schmidt-innovation-power-technology-geopolitics>.

⁶⁸ Graham Allison, Kevin Klyman, Karina Barbesino & Hugo Yen, "The Great Tech Rivalry: China vs the U.S.," *Avoiding Great Power War Project, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, December 2021, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/great-tech-rivalry-china-vs-us>.

⁶⁹ Alexander Kersten, Gabrielle Athanasia & Gregory Arcuri, "What Can Patent Data Reveal about U.S.-China Technology Competition," *CSIS*, September 19, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-can-patent-data-reveal-about-us-china-technology-competition>.

⁷⁰ Alison Snyder, "Patent Applications from Chinese Inventors Pass U.S. for the First Time," *Axios*, March 01, 2024, <https://www.axios.com/2024/03/01/china-us-patents-science-tech>.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

comprehensive development roadmaps in the field of high-tech innovation and industrialization. President Xi Jinping said in 2018 that “Innovation determines the future” so China “should be committed to independent innovation” prioritizing “technological and institutional innovation” with deep engagement in “global scientific and technological governance.”⁷² China’s total R&D expenditure exceeded \$485.5 billion in 2023, with R&D spending accounting for 2.55 percent of its GDP in 2022.⁷³ According to Global Innovation Index 2023, China came ahead of the United States, with the highest number of science and technology clusters ranking among the top 100 globally.⁷⁴ China is reported to have the lead over the United States in 37 out of 44 critical and emerging technologies.⁷⁵

Impact on South Asia

U.S.-China strategic competition has created double jeopardy for Pakistan, since Indo-U.S. strategic partnership against China poses existential threat for Pakistan, on the one hand, and undermines Pakistan-China partnership, on the other. America is building up India as a strategic counterweight to China, leading to an unprecedented increase in India’s conventional and strategic capabilities, enhancing Indian attempt at regional hegemony, encouraging Indian belligerence

⁷² Xi Jinping, “Making China a Global Center for Science and Innovation,” May 28, 2018, in *The Governance of China*, Vol. III (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd, 2020), 287-298.

⁷³ The State Council, “China’s R7D Expenditure Exceeds 3.3 Trillion Yuan in 2023: Minister,” *The People’s Republic of China*, March 05, 2024, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202403/05/content_WS65e6ff4dc6d0868f4e8e4b66.html#:~:text=BEIJING%2C%20March%205%20%2D%2D%20China's,Technology%20Yin%20Hejun%20said%20Tuesday; The State Council, “China’s Spending on R&D hits 3 Trillion Yuan in 2022,” *The People’s Republic of China*, January 23, 2023, https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/statistics/202301/23/content_WS63ce3db8c6d0a757729e5fe5.html#:~:text=After%20deducting%20price%20factors%2C%20China's,points%20from%20the%20previous%20year.

⁷⁴ PR Newswire, “Science and Technology Daily: A Closer Look at China’s Innovation Efforts,” March 06, 2024, <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/science-and-technology-daily-a-closer-look-at-chinas-innovation-efforts-302081266.html>.

⁷⁵ Reuters, “China Leads US in Global Competition for Key Emerging Technology, Study Says,” *Reuters*, March 02, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/china-leads-us-global-competition-key-emerging-technology-study-says-2023-03-02/>.

toward its neighbors, especially Pakistan. American bolstering of Indian capabilities seriously undermines Pakistan's security and that of the region as a whole. Washington is demanding unilateral restraint by Islamabad to empower New Delhi against Beijing.⁷⁶

At the same time, the U.S. and Indian opposition of both BRI and CPEC is an established fact.⁷⁷ The United States has alleged that CPEC has pushed Pakistan into a debt trap, cautioning against the use of the IMF bailout for CPEC-related debt payments, and linking the so-called debt trap and the IMF bailout, thereby having created an impression of the lack of transparency and mishandling where CPEC was concerned.⁷⁸ In fact, CPEC has been a major boon for Pakistan's economy.⁷⁹ However, it needs to be stressed that Pakistan's debt problems overall, not just loans under CPEC, are mainly a function of the challenges of the country's domestic political economy rather than any so-called notion of "Chinese malfeasance."⁸⁰

What is extremely alarming is that the United States has turned a blind eye to the irrefutable evidence of Indian support for terrorism against Pakistan, which involves targeting Chinese personnel and facilities in Pakistan.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Zamir Akram, "Strategic Discrimination," *The Express Tribune*, May 02, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2464798/strategic-discrimination>.

⁷⁷ Anwar Iqbal, "CPEC Passes Through Disputed Territory: US," *Dawn*, October 07, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1362283>; Sarmad Ishfaq, "India and America Collude to Disrupt the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," *OpenDemocracy*, June 03, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/india-and-america-colludes-disrupt-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/>.

⁷⁸ RFE/RL, "US Warns Against IMF Bailing Out Pakistan's Loans from China," *VOA*, July 31, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-mike-pompeo-warns-against-imf-bailout-for-pakistan-that-aids-china/4506960.html>; Anwar Iqbal, "CPEC to Push Pakistan Deeper into Debt Burden, Cautions US," *Dawn*, November 23, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1518319>.

⁷⁹ Naveed Hussain, "Situationer: Is CPEC a 'Debt Trap' for Pakistan?" *The Express Tribune*, July 05, 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2424827/situationer-is-cpec-a-debt-trap-for-pakistan>.

⁸⁰ Uzair Yunus, "CPEC and U.S.-Pakistan Relations," *South Asian Voices*, *Stimson Center*, November 2020, <https://southasianvoices.org/cpec-and-u-s-pakistan-relations/>.

⁸¹ Huang Lanian & Cui Fandi, "GT Investigates: Evidences, Sources Prove India 'Supports Terrorism' in Pakistan's Balochistan," *Global Times*, January 22, 2024, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202401/1305842.shtml>.

Options for Pakistan

In the prevailing geopolitical scenario, Pakistan's options are limited. Balanced relations between the U.S. and China no longer seem possible. There is no strategic convergence between Pakistan and the U.S. On the contrary, the rationale for Pakistan-China strategic partnership has grown stronger as a result of the Indo-U.S. alliance. This is something that Pakistan needs to consider seriously.

Pakistan-China cooperation has continued to grow since at least the 1962 Sino-Indian War. China has continued to provide broad-based support to Pakistan in political and diplomatic spheres, defence and security domain, and economic and social development sectors. This support has also included crucial and strategic technology transfer. CPEC has represented the diversification and deepening of the selfsame support. The fact of the matter is that no other country has done as much for Pakistan for as long. Interestingly, according to a mapping exercise carried out by MoFA covering the last 10 years, China-Pakistan bilateralism figured as Pakistan's most consequential partnership with a score of 73%. Now with China's emergence as a global power, even greater opportunities beckon, that can enable Pakistan to complete several stages of development rapidly and become a regional connectivity hub with dynamic regional geostrategic and geoeconomic linkages.

China is Pakistan's single largest trade partner. In 2023, bilateral trade stood at US\$ 20.04 billion, with CPEC having brought a total of US\$25.4 billion in direct investments.⁸² Beijing remains a crucial source of financial support and emergency lender, has provided a 24%

⁸² Trading Economies, "China Exports to Pakistan," *Trading Economies*, August 2024, <https://tradingeconomics.com/china/exports/pakistan#:~:text=China%20Exports%20to%20Pakistan%20was,updated%20on%20August%20of%202024>; Trading Economies, "Pakistan Exports to China," *Trading Economies*, August 2024, <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/exports/china>; Zhao Shiren, "Pak-China Ties Are Beyond Reproach," *Dawn*, March 01, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1739728>.

to 30% of overall credit to Pakistan, and has repeatedly offered debt rollovers to Pakistan.⁸³

It is best to remember that perhaps Pakistan needs China more than China needs Pakistan. Over the last couple of years, Chinese regional options seem to have increased. This becomes apparent when one considers the 25-year US\$400 billion China-Iran deal (2021). During the same period, problems, including security, terrorism, political instability and economic crisis, have aggravated for Pakistan. It is also worrisome that our lack of advanced multidimensional national development planning and management skills may further complicate the smooth conduct of our diplomatic relations.

Pakistan should also develop the city of Gwadar comprehensively and manage the Gwadar Port efficiently, resolving to make it one of the most efficiently-operated, and in time one of the biggest, ports in the region. Pakistan should also be keenly attentive to the impact of the visit of the U.S. ambassador to Gwadar last year on Pak-China mutual trust.⁸⁴ During his recent visit to Pakistan to attend the third meeting of the Pakistan-China Joint Consultative Mechanism (JCM), a high-ranking Chinese official, Liu Jianchao, Minister of the Central Committee of the International Department of the Communist Part of China, cautioned that “security threats are the main hazards to CPEC cooperation,” stressed the need for a united political front in Pakistan to combat the threats, and underlined that “Only when all political

⁸³ Mengdi Yue & Christoph Nedopil Wang, “Brief: China’s Role in Public External Debt in DSSI Countries and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2020,” *Green Finance & Development Center*, March 21, 2022, <https://greenfdc.org/brief-chinas-role-in-public-external-debt-in-dssi-countries-and-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri-in-2020/?cookie-state-change=1723411357381>; Faseeh Mangi, “China’s Funding to Pakistan Stands at 30% of Foreign Debt,” *Bloomberg*, September 02, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-02/china-s-funding-to-pakistan-stands-at-30-of-foreign-debt>; Farhan Bokhari & Benjamin Parkin, “Pakistan Pins Hopes on Chinese Help in Debt Crunch,” *Financial Times*, May 25, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/46a8e11b-6c03-44cf-8c00-ad0eb55ac1a7>; Shahbaz Rana, “China Agrees to Rollover \$2b Debt on Existing Terms,” *The Express Tribune*, February 28, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2457855/china-agrees-to-rollover-2b-debt-on-existing-terms>.

⁸⁴ Muhammad Amir Rana, “Sino-US Competition,” *Dawn*, September 17, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1776329>.

parties in a country join hands to ensure political and social stability can there be sustainable development.”⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Security Threats Endanger Future of CPEC, Warns Chinese Official,” *Dawn*, June 22, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1841194>.

5. Discussion



The keynotes were followed by an extensive, full-throated discussion session in which seasoned experts and attendees critically dealt with various facets of the U.S.-China strategic competition with specific reference to Pakistan's relations with both the global powers.

Strategic Autonomy

One of the attendees pointed out that the strategic convergence between India and the United States and that between China and Pakistan shows there are two sharp geopolitical dyads in the region. The senior attendee pointed out that, despite its security partnership with the U.S, India also signed a ten-year (2021-2031) military cooperation agreement with Russia in December 2021.⁸⁶ The attendee

⁸⁶ President of Russia, "Partnership for Peace, Progress and Prosperity. India-Russia Joint Statement Following the Visit of the President of the Russian Federation," *President of Russia*, December 6, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5745>; Saheli Roy Choudhury, "India and Russia Broaden Defense Ties Despite Potential Risk of U.S. Sanctions," *CNBC*, December 7, 2021, <https://www.cnb.com/2021/12/07/india-russia-broaden-ties-and-military->

said that Pakistan needs to exercise greater strategic autonomy. The attendee remarked that India's economic heft allowed it greater freedom of action in the interstate domain. The attendee further said that Pakistan's economic and financial throes seem to account for the geopolitical constraints it faces from time to time. The attendee stressed that national security is linked to national economic health and political stability, and that if Pakistan acquires economic strength and financial influence and enjoys long-term political stability and social harmony, then the question of systemic polarity and its impact becomes relatively immaterial, because a country blessed with economic heft and military power can exist equally well in unipolar, bipolar, tripolar, or multipolar worlds.⁸⁷

Another senior participant responded by pointing out that Pakistan possessed strategic autonomy as evidenced by its close and strong relations with China and its enduring partnership with the U.S. despite the fact that both the U.S. and China are currently locked in a great-power competition, further adding that a better and clearer example of strategic autonomy could not be furnished in the present circumstances.

Great Diplomats, Strategic Stock-Taking, and Horses for Courses

A veteran policymaker and state functionary underscored the primary importance of putting our house in order. The attendee said world history yields no example of a great power or a major power that became an influential global or regional player in the presence of economic weakness, political polarization, and social instability at

[cooperation.html](#); Huma Siddiqui, "India-Russia Relations: New Military Cooperation and Logistics Agreement," *Financial Express*, June 25, 2024, <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-india-russia-relations-new-military-cooperation-and-logistics-agreement-3534647/>.

⁸⁷ APP, "Political Stability Key to Economic Strength: PM," *Business Recorder*, June 15, 2023, <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40247920>; Michael Beckley, "Economic Development and Military Effectiveness," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 33 (1), (2010) 43-79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402391003603581>; Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Security Threats Endanger Future of CPEC, Warns Chinese Official," *Dawn*, June 22, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1841194>.

home. The attendee acclaimed what was considered as the extremely talented and resourceful civil service of Pakistan. Citing one particular example, the attendee reminded the house of the extraordinary corps of Pakistani diplomats that had, since 1947, played a key role in developing and nurturing Pakistan's diplomatic relations with the world at large.

The attendee further suggested that the government and state need to carry out a detailed strategic review of the past 50 years of our diplomacy, security, political evolution, economy and finance, and social change to identify positive and negative drivers that have impacted national progress. The attendee stated that such a stock-taking was crucial for avoiding the mistakes and wrong turns of the past. The attendee advised a "horses-for-courses" policy for getting things done properly, while conducting the duties of the state. The attendee cautioned that the combination of business and politics could never prove beneficial for the state, as this combination interferes with efficient and judicious transaction of the affairs of the state. The attendee stressed the importance of improving relations with countries in the region, as high levels of Pakistan's trade with the region could help it reduce its reliance on more distant markets.

Influence Strategy and Offshore Balancing

One of the distinguished former diplomats of Pakistan, who had in the past served as foreign office's spokesperson, underscored the need to communicate and convey the findings of think tanks' knowledge events and activities to national policymakers and implementers. The attendee stressed that policy makers and researchers alike needed to study the multiple tactics of offshore balancing, lawfare, and coercion. The attendee considered that Asia Pacific had become the most significant region in the world because of the U.S.-China strategic competition. The attendee pointed out that the U.S. policies in the region hold the clue to grasping the real purposes, tools, and instruments of the U.S. foreign policy and strategy for the great-power

competition.⁸⁸ The attendee further suggested that the foundational agreements signed between the United States and India deserve to be studied closely by policymakers and analysts alike. The seasoned diplomat also stressed the urgent need for economic self-reliance and political stability.

The moderator responded by sharing with the attendees that knowledge events of NIPS are meticulously reported and the comprehensive reports are widely disseminated to relevant public offices as well as the general public. One of the speakers, heading a leading Islamabad-based think tank, agreed that think tanks in Pakistan generally disseminate their policy research well.

Interest Alignment, Development Focus, and Regional Peace

A former federal minister stressed the need for the alignment of national interests and leadership interests. This alignment, the former policymaker highlighted, becomes the guarantee for correct policymaking, because the leadership's correct decisions benefit them and their bad decisions harm them in the same measure in which they benefit or harm the nation.⁸⁹ The veteran policymaker expressed concern that Pakistan needs to have more friends than foes in the region, advising the urgent need to repair relations with Afghanistan. The former minister said that good relations with neighbors were

⁸⁸ John J. Mearsheimer & Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, July August 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/United-States/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing>; Stephen M. Walt, "The United States Forgot Its Strategy for Winning Cold Wars," *foreign Policy*, May 5, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/05/offshore-balancing-cold-war-china-us-grand-strategy/>; Zafar Khan, "AUKUS: US Offshore Balancing Strategy to Contain China," October 06, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2323416/aucus-us-offshore-balancing-strategy-to-contain-china>.

⁸⁹ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, the Lebanese-American thinker, calls this state of affairs having "skin in the game," meaning that "If you have the rewards, you must also get some of the risks, not let others pay the price of your mistakes. If you inflict risk on others, and they are harmed, you need to pay some price for it. Just as you should treat others in the way you'd like to be treated, you would like to share the responsibility for events without unfairness and inequity." See Nasim Nicholas Taleb, *Skin in the Game: Hidden Asymmetries in Daily Life* (New York; Random House, 2018).

crucial for growth and development.⁹⁰ The seasoned statesman further forecast that the Indo-U.S. partnership would unravel in the years ahead.

On the point of pursuing peace and cooperation with neighbors, another veteran statesman recounted that the Chinese leadership had advised Pakistan a couple of decades earlier to focus exclusively on economic growth and comprehensive development as a long-term but a reliable road to settling disputes with other countries in the region.⁹¹

Bilateral Naval Cooperation, Becoming No. 1, and Indian Antics

A former senior defense official, now heading the maritime affairs think tank of a leading national university, pointed out that Pakistan-China naval and maritime cooperation was strong and developing smoothly. The veteran defence official highlighted the Hangor-class submarines and Type 054A frigates as two key examples of China-Pakistan cooperation in the naval domain.⁹² The expert underscored the importance of the duration of the ongoing U.S.-Competition, stressing that the time factor will impact the outcome of the competition. The attendee pointed out that in terms of nominal GDP, China trailed the U.S. by US\$10 trillion.⁹³ The attendee said that it has been forecast that

⁹⁰ Hu Zhengyue & Zhang Ying, “Good Ties with Neighbors Key to Prosperity,” *China Daily*, June 09, 2019, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201906/05/WS5cf71878a310519142701152.html>

⁹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Set Aside Dispute and Pursue Joint Development,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2024, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/wjls/3604_665547/202405/t20240531_11367540.html.

⁹² Liu Xuanzun, “Exclusive: China Delivers Two Type 054A/P Frigates to Pakistan navy, Wraps Up Four-Ship Deal,” *Global Times*, May 10, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202305/1290458.shtml>; Arab News Pakistan, “China Unveils First Hangor-Class Submarine Developed for Pakistan,” *Arab News Pakistan*, April 27, 2024, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2500156/pakistan>.

⁹³ IMF, *World Economic Outlook Database*, 2024, https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2024/April/weo-report?c=924.&s=NGDP_RPCH,NGDPD,PPPGDP,NGDPDPC,PPPPC,PCPIPCH.&sy=2022&ey=2029&ssm=0&scsm=1&sc=0&ssd=1&ssc=0&sic=0&sort=country&ds=&br=1; IMF, *World Economic Outlook Database*, 2024,

China could overtake the U.S. by 2030, while it has also been predicted that the “U.S. economic growth will eclipse China’s by 2031,” and that it could never overtake the U.S.⁹⁴ The attendee also stated that there have been other forecasts that say that while China will become the No. 1 economy, it will not become “the No.1 economic power in the foreseeable future,” explaining that the “economic power of a country is measured by both the size and the quality of its GDP;” and that China will become the world’s largest economy by 2036 rather than 2030, and then will be surpassed in turn by the U.S. around 2057, which would then retain its position as the world’s leading economy till the second-last decade of the 21st century.⁹⁵

The expert also noted that China will also have to either equal or surpass the massive military might of the U.S. This, the expert pointed out, includes gaining “command of the sea,” which “means controlling the lines of communication that crisscross the ocean’s surface,” including chokepoints like Bab-el-Mandeb and Malacca Strait, “so that a state’s commercial and military ships can freely move across them.”⁹⁶ The expert pointed out that “80 percent of global trade by volume and

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2024/April/weo-report?c=111,&s=NGDPD,PPPGDP,NGDPDPC,PPPPC,&sy=2022&ey=2027&ssm=0&scsm=1&sc=0&ssd=1&ssc=0&sic=0&sort=country&ds=.&br=1>.

⁹⁴ Ralph Jennings, “China’s Economy Could Overtake US Economy by 2030,” VOA, <https://www.voanews.com/a/chinas-economy-could-overtake-us-economy-by-2030/6380892.html>;

Jason Ma, “U.S. Economic Growth Will Eclipse China’s by 2031, and the Transformation Beijing Needs for a Revival May Take ‘Several Decades, If Not Longer,’ Top Demographer Says,” May 27, 2024, <https://fortune.com/2024/05/27/china-economy-outlook-growth-us-gdp-forecast-aging-population-demographics-high-income/>;

Jasmine Ng, “China Slowdown Means It May Never Overtake US Economy, Forecast Shows,” *Bloomberg*, September 05, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-09-05/china-slowdown-means-it-may-never-overtake-us-economy-be-says>.

⁹⁵ Hengzhong Liu, “Will China Surpass the U.S. to Become the Number One Economic Power?” *The Economic Studies Group*, June 18, 2022, <https://esg.gc.cuny.edu/2022/07/04/will-china-surpass-the-u-s-to-become-the-number-one-economic-power/>; CEBR, “We Forecast that China Will Be the World’s Largest Economy for Only 21 Years,” *CEBR*, July 23, 2023, <https://cebr.com/reports/we-forecast-that-china-will-be-the-worlds-largest-economy-for-only-21-years-before-the-us-overtakes-again-in-2057-and-by-2081-india-will-have-overtaken-the-us-how-does-this-affect-geopoliti/>.

⁹⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of great Power Politics* (New York & London; W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 87.

70 percent by value is transported by sea,” and “of that volume, 60 percent of maritime trade passes through the Indo-Pacific.”⁹⁷ The expert further noted that, according to another estimate, 90% of traded goods are shipped by sea.⁹⁸ The expert pointed out that China is currently suffering hiccups in the maritime domain, as ocean cargo rates have spiked 63% due to Red Sea crisis leading to increased costs for Chinese companies exporting goods to western markets.⁹⁹ The expert pointed out that, drunk on the American ambition of making it the regional net security provider, India has also started acting up which led it to stop, for the third time in recent years, “Pakistan-bound ship from China” on the false pretext of dual-use technology.¹⁰⁰ Not long after, four companies, 3 Chinese and 1 Belarusian, were sanctioned by the U.S. on the charges of allegedly supplying parts for Pakistan’s ballistic missile program.¹⁰¹

The think tank leader stressed that the great power with the greater stamina will ultimately win this competition, since the U.S.-China

⁹⁷ Francoise Nicolas, “The Regional Economic Order: Four Scenarios,” *Futures Hub, National Security College, Australian National University*, 2020, <https://futureshub.anu.edu.au/the-regional-economic-order-four-scenarios/>.

⁹⁸ Spencer Feingold & Andrea Willige, “These Are the World’s Most Vital Waterways for Global Trade,” *World Economic Forum*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/02/worlds-busiest-ocean-shipping-routes-trade/>.

⁹⁹ Lisa Baertlein, “Ocean Cargo Rates Climb After New Red Sea Ship Attacks,” *Reuters*, January 04, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/ocean-cargo-rates-climb-after-new-red-sea-ship-attacks-2024-01-03/>; Jasper Verschuur, “Red Shipping Chaos Puts Strain on Chinese Exports,” *Think China*, January 24, 2024, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/economy/red-sea-shipping-chaos-puts-strain-chinese-exports>; Fitch Wire, “Some Chinese Exporters Face Increased Costs due to Red Sea Crisis,” *Fitch Ratings*, March 06, 2024, <https://www.fitchratings.com/research/corporate-finance/some-chinese-exporters-face-increased-costs-due-to-red-sea-crisis-06-03-2024>.

¹⁰⁰ Economic Times, “India Halts Pakistan-Bound Ship from China Suspected of Carrying Nuclear Cargo,” *Economic Times*, March 03, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-halts-pakistan-bound-ship-from-china-suspected-of-carrying-nuclear-cargo/articleshow/108175104.cms?from=mdr>.

¹⁰¹ News Desk, “US Sanctions 4 Firms Supplying Parts for Pakistan’s Missile Programme,” *The Friday Times*, April 21, 2024, <https://thefridaytimes.com/21-Apr-2024/us-sanctions-4-firms-supplying-parts-for-pakistan-s-missile-programme>.

contest would not be a 100-meter sprint but a long marathon, testing the very limits of each great power's endurance, as this was the lesson from previous U.S.-Soviet competition and it remained quite relevant for the current great-power competition as well.¹⁰² The expert also pointed out that one of the “strategic goals” of China for the development of its “national defense and military in the new era” is “to fully transform the people’s armed forces into world-class forces by mid-21st century.”¹⁰³ The expert said that, by 2049 or 2050, China will have become a military superpower, having caught up with or outdone the U.S. on most indicators of military strength. In the seasoned expert’s estimation, Pakistan’s position on U.S.-China competition between 2024 and 2049 should be different from what it would be after 2049.

Another senior participant pointed out that China has already either caught up with or surpassed the U.S. in terms of having “a bigger navy, a massively shipbuilding capacity, and a more capable missile force, that includes hypersonic missiles;” and that China has also “caught up with the U.S. air power advancements,” and “that America may be on track to losing its air superiority over China” by 2035.¹⁰⁴

BRI, Inter-Continental Connectivity, U.S.-China War, and Sino-Russian Military Alliance

One of the speakers of the seminar pointed out that the very objective of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was to obviate the challenges involved in maritime trade like the existence of chokepoints and the risk of disruptions in view of the current control of the seas by the U.S. and its allies, and that in this sense BRI, China’s strategy for inter-

¹⁰² Hal Brands, *The Twilight Struggle: What the Cold War Teaches Us about Great-Power Rivalry Today*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2022).

¹⁰³ The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s National Defense in the New Era* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd., 2019).

¹⁰⁴ Grant Newsham, “China’s Military Buildup Enough to Win a War with US,” Grant Newsham, November 2023, <https://asiatimes.com/2023/11/chinas-military-buildup-enough-to-win-a-war-with-us/>; John Xie, “Will China Surpass the US in Military Air Superiority?” VOA, October 12, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/when-will-china-surpass-the-us-in-military-air-superiority-/6270069.html>.

continental connectivity, was a response to the U.S. Asian pivot and the U.S. control over Indo-Pacific chokepoints.¹⁰⁵ The speaker pointed out that China does not need to gain complete military supremacy over the U.S. to achieve its strategic goals and safeguard its core interests, and that China has never claimed global military dominance. The speaker further said that China's military and naval capabilities in the South China Sea and East China Sea are sufficient to achieve its objectives. The speaker said that the U.S. recognized that the Chinese forces would deploy faster than the U.S. military in a war over Taiwan.

The speaker highlighted that the report of a leading U.S. think tank concluded that the U.S. defense industrial base, suffering from "supply chain constraints" and lacking the "surge capacity" required for a "major war," would possibly "run out of some munitions" including "long-range precision-guided munitions" in a conflict with China.¹⁰⁶ The speaker further pointed out that China's growing arsenal of new missiles, including its latest medium-range missiles like Dongfeng-17 and Dongfeng-26, and its hefty investments and growing capabilities in submarine development and anti-submarine warfare (ASW), will not allow the U.S. to establish "its traditional strengths of air and naval dominance" during the war.¹⁰⁷ The speaker said that the pace of China's development of "satellites and space-based capabilities" have also deprived the U.S. of its dominance in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), according to a senior U.S. military commander.¹⁰⁸ The speaker also highlighted that defense experts have expressed the concern that the loss of U.S. conventional military superiority over China in waters close to Taiwan may drive it to use

¹⁰⁵ See the seminal 2012 paper by Prof. Wang Jisi, one of China's top strategic thinkers, that anticipated BRI. Wang Jisi, "Marching Westward, The Rebalancing of China's Geostrategy," *Peking University's Center for International and Strategic Studies*, International and Strategic Studies Report No. 73, October 07, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Seth G. Jones, *Empty Bins in a Wartime Environment: The Challenge to the U.S. Defense Industrial Base* (CSIS: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).

¹⁰⁷ Kathrin Hille, Demetri Sevastopulo & the Visual Storytelling Team of Financial Times, "The Battlegrounds That Could Decide a US-China War over Taiwan," *Financial Times*, May 19, 2024, <https://ig.ft.com/taiwan-battlegrounds/>.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

nuclear weapons in the event of a war.¹⁰⁹ The speaker pointed out that the prospect of a joint Sino-Russian military alliance and simultaneous wars with Russia and China was the biggest threat facing the United States.¹¹⁰ The speaker said that the most important thing for the U.S. and China is to ensure that the war does not break out between them and that the Americans and the Chinese, he added, are themselves aware of it.¹¹¹

One of the attendees remarked that a leading western historian has recently said that China will most probably win the war against the U.S. over Taiwan.¹¹² The attendee added that though China does not want war, preferring peaceful reunification of Taiwan with the mainland, it will not hesitate to fight if its red lines are crossed.

The Civilizational State, Strategic Patience, and The Three World Orders

One of the speakers of the seminar, heading a leading national think tank, stressed China's uniqueness as "a civilizational state" that

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Tom Porter, "Russia and China Are on the Brink of a Military Alliance That Could Overwhelm the US," *Business Insider*, December 25, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-china-brink-military-alliance-may-overwhelm-us-putin-xi-2023-12>; Rainer Meyer zum Felde, "What a Military Alliance Between Russia and China Would Mean for NATO," pp. 245-266 in *Russia-China Relations: Emerging Alliance or Eternal Rival?* Eds. Sarah Kirchberger, Svenja Sinjen & Nils Wormer (Cham; Springer, 2022); Al Jazeera Staff, "US Must Be Ready for Simultaneous Wars with China, Russia: Commission," *Al Jazeera*, October 13, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/13/us-must-be-ready-for-simultaneous-wars-with-china-russia-commission>.

¹¹¹ Bloomberg News, "Xi Says China Seeks to Be Friends With S, Won't Fight 'Hot War'," *Bloomberg*, November 16, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-11-16/xi-says-china-seeks-to-be-friends-with-us-wants-peaceful-ties>; Al Jazeera, "China and US Should Be 'Partners, Not Rivals', Xi Tells Blinken," *Al Jazeera*, April 26, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/26/china-and-us-should-be-partners-not-rivals-xi-tells-blinken>; David Rising, "US Defense Secretary Says War With China Neither Imminent Nor Unavoidable, Stressing Need for Talks," *AP*, June 1, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/shangrila-dialogue-austin-china-taiwan-philippines-defense-46868bec3799f5043276d9fdeca62a41>.

¹¹² Saurabh Sharma, "China Most Likely to Win War Against US over Taiwan: Naill Ferguson," *Business Today*, January 17, 2024, <https://www.businesstoday.in/wef-2024/story/china-most-likely-to-win-war-against-us-over-taiwan-niall-ferguson-at-wef2024-413626-2024-01-16>.

conducts itself with strategic patience, pragmatism, and studied sobriety, waiting for long periods of time to ensure its plans come to fruition.¹¹³ The speaker highlighted that, historically speaking, China never colonized other peoples or regions but rather built relations with other states and societies on the basis of trade-based complementarities and privileges. This is how, the speaker said, the fabled silk road came into being in antiquity and thrived for centuries.

The speaker said that there were at least three distinct world orders currently; the military world order, the economic world order, and the technology world order, adding that while China has come close to dominating the economic world order, the U.S. still dominates the military and technological world orders. The speaker highlighted that the technological world order comprises primarily, not state actors, but 100 big global tech firms which operate across national borders and set the high-tech agenda of the world, adding that, according to Forbes, 15 out of the top 100 are from China, 39 are from the U.S., and 14 from Japan.¹¹⁴ The speaker further emphasized that the full-throttle development of CPEC Phase-II was an indispensable aspect of Pakistan's future growth and progress.

Realism, Realism, and Realism!

One of the veteran attendees drew attention toward the warning of a leading Chinese strategic thinker, Prof. Yan Xuetong, that the disparity of national strength between China and the U.S. could widen, not lessen, during the next decade.¹¹⁵ The attendee said that overoptimism could hurt the Chinese as much as Pakistan, as it would hurt any country. The attendee said that excessive pessimism and dread of the U.S. was also not healthy. The attendee said the correct thing was to make realism the yardstick of geopolitical analysis. The attendee said

¹¹³ Zhang Weiwei, *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State* (Hackensack, NJ; World Century Publishing Corporation, 2012).

¹¹⁴ Forbes, *Top 100 Digital Companies*, *Forbes*, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/top-digital-companies/list/#tab:rank>.

¹¹⁵ Orange Wang, "China's Strength Gap With the US Will Widen As Competition Deepens, Top Political Scientist Says," *South China Morning Post*, January 17, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3248647/chinas-strength-gap-us-will-widen-competition-deepens-top-political-scientist-says>.

that it was important to nurture our strategic imagination at the same time by allowing it to create viable strategies by feeding it on facts.

Commitment Gap and Looking Inward

A former top law enforcement official, currently constituting a Supreme Court-mandated one-man commission, remarked that all countries should fulfil their commitments. The esteemed veteran civil servant said that failing to keep one's commitments can lead to the loss of credibility. The attendee underscored that Pakistan needs to look inward rather than outward to discover the sources of its problems, adding that Pakistan was ranked 130th out of 142 countries in the Rule of Law Index.¹¹⁶

The senior attendee cautioned that unless the irritants affecting CPEC were seriously addressed and dealt with, there would be no respite for Pakistan, that IMF was a temporary relief, and that FATF was a serious issue linked to U.S. perceptions of Pakistan. The veteran civil servant said that Pakistan's real issue was not the choice between the U.S. and China but its domestic problems clamoring for immediate indigenous solutions. The attendee said that the way forward consisted in setting our own house in order and continuing to work with both China and the U.S. as long as we could. The attendee said sensitizing the decision makers to the scale of problems was another priority area that perhaps required a concerted effort by the national think tank community.

Interdependence, New G8, and CPEC

A veteran diplomat, who had also served as Pakistan's ambassador in China and whose tenure witnessed extraordinary development of Pakistan-China cooperation including the launch of CPEC, remarked that the U.S.-China strategic competition was a long-term feature of the international system. The former ambassador said that, owing to the high degree of U.S.-China economic interdependence, both the countries would strive to manage their competition rather than allow it to spiral into a major war. The veteran diplomat remarked that the U.S.

¹¹⁶ WJP Rule of Law Index, *Pakistan Overall Score, 2023*, World Justice Project (WJP), <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2023/Pakistan/>.

and China each needed to address their own domestic challenges as well as work together to fix the challenges of their interdependence, and above all, look at each other objectively rather than through the lens of their fears and suspicions.¹¹⁷ The ambassador pointed out that China, like any country in the world, was also faced with unique domestic challenges, that different regions in China stood at different levels of development, that this developmental unevenness was both an opportunity and a massive challenge.

The ambassador said that the U.S. should desist from demonizing China as demonization shows U.S. desperation, and could lead to the hardening of China's attitude toward the U.S. The ambassador said that the mimetic tendency of the U.S. in responding to China's BRI, evident in programs like the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), also indicated its growing desperation. The ambassador said that the U.S. was increasingly pushing its allies and partners to work against China.¹¹⁸ The ambassador said that such desperation was counterproductive and risked permanent tensions with China.¹¹⁹ The ambassador said that U.S. allies were not on the same page with the U.S. nor was it a prudent strategy for the U.S. to have a large number of partners without clear terms and commitments.¹²⁰ The ambassador said that China's rise was inevitable;

¹¹⁷ Stephen Roach, *Unbalanced: The Codependency of America and China* (New Haven & London; Yale University Press, 2014); Stephen Roach, *Accidental Conflict: America, China, and the Clash of False Narratives* (New Haven & London, 2022).

¹¹⁸ Sarah Anne Aarup, "Washington Calls on Allies to Band Together Against China's 'Economic Coercion'," *Politico*, March 24, 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/washington-calls-on-allies-to-band-together-against-chinas-economic-coercion/>; John Grady, "U.S. Needs to Push Allies to Prepare for a Potential Conflict With China, Panel Says," *USNI News*, November 30, 2022, <https://news.usni.org/2022/11/30/u-s-needs-to-push-allies-to-prepare-for-a-potential-chinese-conflict-panel-says>; Qi Xijia, "US Coerces Allies into Targeting China at IPEF," *Global Times*, May 28, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202305/1291505.shtml>.

¹¹⁹ Bloomberg News, "US Risks a 'Forever' Trade War With China, Economist Stephen Roach Says," *Bloomberg*, May 31, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-05-31/us-risks-a-forever-trade-war-with-china-stephen-roach-says>.

¹²⁰ Jonathan Fenton-Harvey, "Why Alliea Are Unlikely to Back US Strategy to Contain China," *TRT World*, November 1, 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/why-allies-are-unlikely-to-back-us-strategy-to>

that China was seeking its rightful place in the international order; that this order, created after WWII, needed positive readjustments and changes that were already long overdue; that a new G8, including China, made much more economic and organizational sense than G7.¹²¹

The ambassador underscored that it was in Pakistan's interest to fully cooperate with China for promoting regional cooperation and connectivity, benefiting from China's strengths in the process. The ambassador said that China needs Pakistan just as Pakistan needs China.

The veteran diplomat said that criticisms of CPEC were unwise and naïve, since it was good for Pakistan in more ways than one. The ambassador said that CPEC's benefits to Pakistan precede its benefits to China, urging the local critics of CPEC to keep this vital fact in mind. The ambassador said that China's commitment to CPEC was solid and served as a strong guarantee of its continuation. The veteran diplomat pointed out that the problems, issues, and delays related to CPEC's development were entirely on the Pakistani side. The ambassador counselled that the Pakistani side should focus on the smooth and efficient execution of CPEC projects. The ambassador further highlighted the crucial support extended by China to Pakistan in

[contain-china-12798945](#); Sun Xihui, "US Not in a Position to Force Allies to Take Sides," *Global Times*, November 20, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202211/1279977.shtml>; Filippo Fasulo, "US Allies Cold on Competing with China," *ISPI 90*, December 5 2022, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/us-allies-cold-competing-china-36942>; Gregg A. Brazinsky, "U.S.-China Rivalry: The Dangers of Compelling Countries to Take Sides," *United States Institute of Peace*, March 30, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/03/us-china-rivalry-dangers-compelling-countries-take-sides>; Deng Xiaoci, "US Assembles 'Squad' of Allies to Counter China," *Global Times*, May 05, 2024, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202405/1311678.shtml>; Andreas Kluth, "America Has Many Allies. Maybe Too Many." *Bloomberg*, June 03, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2024-06-03/america-has-many-allies-maybe-too-many>.

¹²¹ Harry G. Broadman, "It's Time to Engage China in a New 'Economic G8'," *Forbes*, October 31, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/harrybroadman/2023/10/31/its-time-to-engage-china-in-a-new-economic-g8/>.

international forums like FATF, UNSC, and NSG.¹²² The ambassador concluded by stressing that Pakistan's security is linked with China and cautioned that any vacillation on this key point would harm Pakistan.

Security of CPEC and Its Makers

One of the seminar's speakers stressed that the impression that the Chinese help and facilitation would always be at hand is sheer folly and can breed complacency, laziness, and a sense of entitlement, a lethal combination for people and nations even in the best of times. The speaker emphasized that Pakistan needed to adopt an extremely serious attitude toward its strategic cooperation with China across all areas, especially ensuring the security of Chinese personnel working on joint projects. The speaker mentioned that the Chinese military had even offered to help Pakistan jointly combat terrorism and together ensure regional peace and stability.¹²³

One of the speakers of the seminar proposed that the best way to ensure CPEC's security was to weave it into the warp and woof of people's livelihoods.

Pro-Active Public Diplomacy

One of the veteran ambassadors, who had served as Pakistan's envoy in countries in Europe and South Asia, stated that the role of soft power, cultural diplomacy, and public diplomacy was very important in interstate relations. The seasoned diplomat said that the U.S. had an advantage in the domain of soft power as its outreach was at the societal

¹²² The CPEC Portal, "China Praised, Supported Pakistan in FATF," *The CPEC Portal*, February 23, 2020, <https://cpecinfo.com/china-praised-supported-pakistan-in-fatf/>; Dawn, "China 'Thwarts' Indian Move Ahead of FATF Moot," *Dawn*, October 21, 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1716090>; Syed Raza Hassan, "Pakistan Says Will Move to U.N. Security Council With China's Support Over Kashmir," *Reuters*, August 10, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-kashmir-pakistan-un/pakistan-says-will-move-to-un-security-council-with-chinas-support-over-kashmir-idUSKCN1VooK6/>; AFP, "China Supports Pakistan for NSG Membership," *Geo News*, June 04, 2015, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/98846-china-supports-pakistan-for-nsg-membership>.

¹²³ APP, "Chinese Military Offers Pakistan Help to Fight Terror," *The Express Tribune*, March 28, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2460857/chinese-military-offers-pakistan-help-to-fight-terror>.

level, with American and western cultures enjoying massive appeal around the world, Pakistan being no exception in this regard. The veteran ambassador stressed that there was a need to undertake proactive public diplomacy focused on CPEC, as it would increase public's ownership and understanding of the project, further mentioning that during the visit to Balochistan, people in general shared that they had virtually no knowledge of CPEC projects.

The former diplomat considered that there was a need to formulate and put into action a comprehensive plan of engagement and outreach across Pakistan, especially, Balochistan to improve public understanding and support of CPEC. The seasoned diplomat considered that such a public diplomacy initiative would also build support for China among people. The veteran ambassador highlighted the need for studying the global and regional impact of Sino-Russian strategic partnership as one of the crucial determinants of the evolving international system. The ambassador pointed out that BRICS and SCO, among other things, deserve special notice as multilateral security and economic coordination and cooperation platforms involving China and Russia. The former diplomat also underscored the importance of studying China's relations with Afghanistan, Iran, and other countries in the Middle East and West Asia.

One of the speakers of the seminar clarified that public diplomacy has been part of the efforts to deepen China-Pakistan relations. The speaker recognized that people-to-people exchanges needed to be enhanced, but security issues and infrastructure gaps on the Pakistani side prevented the flow of Chinese tourists to Pakistan.

The speaker pointed out that China had built the Tashkurgan Khunjerab Airport in 2020-2022 close to Pak-China border to support the land-based CPEC route into Pakistan, but any corresponding efforts or facilities on the Pakistani side were missing.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Hua Xia, "Xinjiang Opened First High Plateau Airport," *Xinhua*, December 23, 2022, <https://english.news.cn/20221223/ceb744967cd0489cb9791c7b39b365fe/c.html>.

Finlandization: Never!

A former senior military official, with expertise in defense diplomacy and extensive experience of arms control and disarmament, supported the conclusion that both Pakistan and China need each other.

The seasoned expert added that the U.S. perhaps wanted Pakistan to Finlandize to India, which from the Pakistani perspective, was an impossibility. The expert further noted that Pakistan's economic woes were the actual debt trap constraining the country.

The expert further cautioned that Pakistan's diplomatic approach to the U.S. needed to be finessed, nuanced, and of a very high quality at the same time. The expert said that there was a need to come to an urgent understanding with China in the short term about Pakistan's debt obligations to China.

Honor Thy Commitments!

One of the speakers said that it all came down to the obligation to honor one's commitments. The speaker said that if country A makes a commitment to country B, then country A needs to honor that commitment, instead of its leaders reneging or wavering because of the asymmetry between their perceived interests and real interests. The speaker said that good leaders possess the ability to keep sectional interests separate from national interests, consistently work to prevent perceived interests from prevailing over real interests, and correctly interpret national interests as real interests.

Perception Building

A senior academic heading an important social science department in a leading university of Pakistan stated that perception building and management was important. Speaking from the personal experience of teaching, the senior academic shared that young people in Pakistan aspire to pursue higher education in both the U.S. and China, but perhaps aspire to seek further educational opportunities a bit more in America. The academic expert noted, that despite this aspirational

imbalance in favor of the U.S., Pakistani students studying in China (28,023) far outnumbered those studying in the U.S. (10,164).¹²⁵

The academic noted that proper youth engagement could help in aligning youth aspirations with the actual trends of studying abroad. The academic further proposed that Pakistan needs to think in terms of strategic collaboration with both China and the U.S. instead of strategic competition. The academic considered that generating a debate on options for Pakistan amidst the intensifying U.S.-China strategic competition could potentially polarize the youth on the two global powers and make them believe in bloc politics, whereas the youth, the academic thought, should learn to prize cooperation with both China and the U.S. Further, the seasoned academic stressed the need to sensitize the Chinese to the reality that there were spoilers that were carrying out terrorism inside Pakistan to damage China-Pakistan cooperation, especially CPEC. The academic said that Pakistan urgently needs to improve its strategic communication skills. The academic also stressed the importance of promoting the discipline of human geography nationally to be able to come to terms with the complexity of interactions with the world around us.

The moderator responded that the worthy suggestions were well-known and everyone recognized their merit, but the fact that the world had become increasingly zero-sum in recent years could only be ignored at one's own peril.

The Indian Lobby and U.S. Politics

Responding to a question about the different tone and tenor of statements regarding Pakistan coming out of the U.S. State Department and Pentagon, on one hand, and out of the U.S. Congress on the other, one of the speakers said that perhaps the difference in the tone and tenor of the statements of the U.S. Congress could be

¹²⁵ INP, "China Top Destination for Pakistani Students," *The News International*, April 13, 2023, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1060100-china-top-destination-for-pakistani-students>; Open Doors International Student Data, "Leading Places of Origin," *Open Doors Report 2023*, <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/leading-places-of-origin/>.

explained by the increased influence of the Indian lobby in U.S. politics as well as the Indo-Israeli strategic nexus which had also caused the incredibly influential Jewish lobby in the U.S. to be aligned with the Indian lobby. The speaker said that the Indian lobby was also hugely influential in the U.S. administration, academia, media, and business. This, the speaker said, was the reason for the U.S. Congress's hardline on Pakistan.¹²⁶

Financial Solutions and CPEC SEZs

In response to a question about how China could help Pakistan deal with the debt owed to China, one of Pakistan's former ambassadors to China, noted that China will not be able to take any unilateral decision on the debt owed by Pakistan, because China has financial relations with many nations and any such decision will impact those relations as well, but what China and Pakistan could do was to bilaterally explore different viable ways of dealing with the issue like debt reprofiling, which Chinese and Pakistani financial experts were well aware of. The ambassador further said none of the SEZs under CPEC had been operationalized so far which had in turn prevented the relocation of Chinese industry to Pakistan.

One of the speakers of the seminar added that sub-optimal, non-strategic, non-scientific locational decisions were the primary reason behind non-operationalization of CPEC SEZs.

Five Key Variables of the New Cold War

An eminent scientist, former head of one of the engineering schools of the leading S&T university of Pakistan, identified four variables – which were absent in the old cold war but existed in the new cold war and could not only help capture the difference between the old and the new cold wars but also lead to different outcomes – namely: global connectivity; social media; virtual economic parity; and increasingly unpopular and decreasingly strong leadership in the western world.

¹²⁶ Masroor Khanam, "The Impact of the Indian Lobby on the United States' Pakistani Policy," *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs*, 5 (3) (September, 2022), 159-171, <https://doi.org/10.58575/pjia.v5i3.651>.

One of the speakers responded by agreeing with the merit of the variable identification and added climate change as the fifth variable which was non-existent as a policy issue in the old cold war. The speaker said that the pandemic and climate change theoretically offered the opportunity to build inclusive multilateral coalitions that could enable China and the U.S. to work in common but, in fact, actual cooperation was not transpiring. The speaker pointed out that the geopolitical interest, understood as power maximization and influence acquisition, often overshadowed cooperation among nations and the self-same logic was playing out in the current international system.

6. Moderator's Note

Dr. Ashfaque Hasan Khan



One of the stark features of contemporary global politics is that bloc politics has once again made its appearance, but the post-Cold War liberal institutionalist rhetoric is making a level-headed comprehension of today's hard geopolitical facts and geostrategic compulsions difficult. The window for nations to work with both the great powers simultaneously, thus enjoying the best of both worlds, has virtually closed for some countries and will close soon for others.

Recent developments in world politics are making the inter-state relations more complex and challenging. The trade and technology wars between the two superpowers (the U.S. and China), which were already raging since 2016, as well as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have deepened the rivalry between these two superpowers. It has also changed the global politics monumentally forever. The rising tensions between these two superpowers have accelerated the expansion of BRICS; movement toward a new global financial architecture and

discussion on de-dollarization are gaining traction. Policy-level discussions in the NATO, European Union, and the U.S. on de-coupling and de-risking are gaining momentum. All these developments have fragmented the global economy, global finances, and global trade and investment. Trade and investment flows are now being redirected along geopolitical lines. On the other hand, a large number of countries are re-evaluating their heavy reliance on the dollar for their international transactions and reserve holdings.

Clearly, the world appears to be divided in three blocs – a U.S.-leaning bloc; a China-leaning bloc; and a non-aligned bloc.¹²⁷ The fragmentation of the global economy would force the third bloc, sooner or later, to choose sides one way or the other. The ‘new normal’ in international relations is that “either you are with us or against us;” in other words, the zero-sum game has become the norm. The fragmentation of the global economy, global finances, global trade and investment, and most importantly, global politics would exacerbate geopolitical and geoeconomic tensions.

Hard choices confront all the countries. Countries which will make these hard choices will be able to navigate the world of future better than those countries which will dither.

It is interesting to note that countries that will make these hard choices well will be those countries which have relatively high levels of domestic order, political organization, state capacity, economic health, financial soundness, and social stability. Indecisive nations in geopolitical terms will be disordered nations economically and politically.

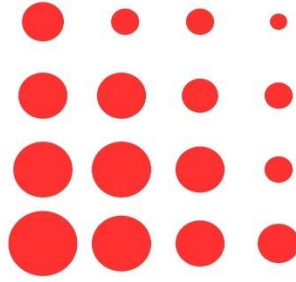
The geoeconomic manifestation of this new world will be G7 and BRICS. G7 will consist of U.S. partners and BRICS will mainly comprise countries leaning toward China. G20 is fated to peter out soon. What is BRICS? BRICS is essentially G20 minus G7. BRICS will continue to

¹²⁷ Gita Gopinath, “Speech: Geopolitics and its Impact on Global Trade and the Dollar,” *International Monetary Fund*, May 07, 2024, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2024/05/07/sp-geopolitics-impact-global-trade-and-dollar-gita-gopinath>.

expand both in terms of membership and the size of GDP in contrast to G7 which by its very nature does not admit of expansion in membership.

For Pakistan, the greatest priority is to put its house in order. Domestic order will enable the success of our regional ambitions. Stability at home will promote regional connectivity and lead to the speedy development of CPEC.

As far as the question of the options in the evolving interstate system is concerned, it is helpful to remember that there have been countless forecasts that 21st Century is going to be the Asian Century. In this regard, Prof. Kishore Mahbubani's *The Asian 21st Century* (2021) deserves to be read. It will be odd to head west when the rest of the world is heading east. Asia is the quintessential East. Asian Century is the Century of the East. 21st Century is the Century of the East. To go west in the Century of the East will be against the flow of time and tide.



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