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# The Geopolitical Implication of US-China Rivalry in the Region A Realist Perspective of Pakistan and India

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#### **Abstract**

The dynamics of the global system are changed by America versus China competition, which has bearing on how economies work, trade maps make as well as security networks, and defense partnerships take form. The research on how this competition shapes states is done by the means of realism via power politics. The results of this research show that superpower tensions and trade wars in the form of tech competition and economic fragmentation have affected worldwide logistics networks and altered international market relationship and made financial instabilities worse. Large military investments and cooperation of regional alliances are changing the world security both countries, in areas such as the Indo-Pacific. The difference lies in fact that China is leading through its Belt and Road Initiative while the United States uses QUAD and AUKUS systems to achieve similar end of global expansion and superiority. The competition erodes global governance systems through the loss of power of many institutions inhabiting the power of the region. This research project investigates gaps related to scholarly gaps in examining new developments such as AI and cybersecurity, their effects on world order. The examination provides the base for the information that is essential to the policy creators, academic researchers and practitioners to grasp the nature of the international effects brought about by US-China confrontation and its effects on security stability and economic development. This is followed by results, which suggest diplomatic action, and strategic partnerships are necessary to stop unwanted acceleration of these confrontations.

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### Introduction

The rising tensions by the United States and China has made the geopolitical landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century more and more driven by these two countries. However, this rivalry is not purely bilateral, not even in the literal sense of the word. The existing situation is characterized by the rising competitiveness and complex

environment because China is the major economic and military power and challenges the longstanding hegemony of the United States. In this competition, the economic structures, trade patterns and the nature of international alliances follows; the security arrangements (Allison, 2017). Given the importance of belated US-China relations for the future of international relations and global stability, it is of high priority to understand the dynamics of their relations. In this more connected and interdependent world, this rivalry is intensifying between these two superpowers (Ikenberry, 2018). Looking from this context, the US-China rivalry allows us to evaluate the ways in which global order is formed in a non-idealistic sense.

The aim of this study is to look into how US-China rivalry affects the global order from the realist perspective. The realist theory is very popular in international relations, a dominant theory put the stress of the power politics and competition between states (Mearsheimer, 2001). This study focuses on regional dimensions of political, economic and military aspects of the US-China rivalry to offer a global perspective to the unfolding struggle to define global structures and alliances (Waltz, 1979). An important part of this study is to investigate the possible outcome of that rivalry on international security and economic development. The study provides some information on these aspects and adds to the wider discussion surrounding global order and future international relations. The insights presented in this paper will be invaluable to policymakers, academics and practitioners of the US-China rivalry (Keohane, 1984).

The US-China rivalry is a realist relationship from a realist perspective since the US-China rivalry emphasis and in fact has a bearing on global economic structures, security arrangements, and international alliances. However, this competition makes states involved to quest for power and security at the cost of cooperation and stability (Walt, 1987). With both nations struggling to gain absolute power, the world order is overlaid by a new alliance and conflict (Gilpin, 1981). This rivalry between the United States and China is important not merely in terms of reducing both countries economically, and not just in terms of restraining China metallurgically and culturally, but also in terms of the world-structures which these countries will shape. The purpose of examining this rivalry through the lens of realism is to provide insight into how the competition structures and alliances in the world. This rivalry will also be studied by the research for its possible implications to the international security and economic development (Huntington, 1996).

The present trade war is a main example of the US-China rivalry, which has the role of determining the world economic frameworks and international trade relationships. Since 2018, such actions were launched by the US imposing trade tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of Chinese merchandise, which was met by retaliation from China by the means of trade policy shifts. Meanwhile, the US and China tensions have escalated, breaking the regular supply tool chains and raising business prices and consumers costs, and those worldwide economic shifts. Besides trade barriers this commercial dispute is more than that because it includes intrusions into rival markets, disputes over intellectual property and technology as well as market access. Both of these powers continue to fund research in areas of cutting-edge artificial intelligence, 5G and quantum computing to strengthen their presence in the global markets. Industrial competition through technology has substantial effects which shape both global economic management structures and future international business relationships. The trade conflict has quickened worldwide supply chain adaptations as numerous countries integrate alternative

international business partnerships while decreasing their China-based trade dependency. The transformation has driven countries to form regional alliances with new trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) as well as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The separation of US and China economic systems prompted nations to develop new commercial partners while China strengthened its Belt and Road Initiative and the United States expanded bilateral economic networks through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) (Siripurapu & Berman, 2024).

International security and military relations develop into a central part of the US-China competitive relationship while focusing especially on the Indo-Pacific region. The US mobilizes additional military power against Chinese military aggression by creating partnerships with three nations (Quad) and four nations (AUKUS). The United States must confront Chinese expansion in the South China Sea because Beijing has created artificial land formations and situated military equipment which increases regional conflict. The United States forms these partnerships to challenge Chinese strategic goals and strengthen its presence in crucial geopolitical areas. The global institutions undergo shape changes because each country desires to align international framework rules with their individual strategic priorities. China aims to increase its power in established bodies such as the United Nations and World Trade Organization by heading dual initiatives like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The United States targets support for the existing international rules system through democratic partnership development to monitor China's international growth. Strategic military developments involving hypersonic missiles as well as cyber warfare systems and space-based weaponry have made the rivalry more competitive because both nations compete for dominance in advanced military technology. Global stability needs diplomatic solutions combined with confidence-building practices because the rivalry poses risks to worldwide peace and security by its ability to escalate through unpredictable means (Dollar, Stromseth, & Finan, 2021).

#### **Research Questions**

To achieve the objectives of research, the following questions will guide this research project:

- 1. How does the US-China competition influence global economic structures and trade patterns?
- 2. What are the consequences of the US-China rivalry for international security and military coalitions?

#### **Literature Review**

Realist international relations theory organizes itself through three key principles based on power politics and state interests as well as the balance of power. Realism embraces a basic premise that states exist in a world without dominant power to regulate conduct which drives states to make security and survival crucial factors above all else. The lack of external supervision in the international system compels states to maintain active power acquisition predominantly through armed forces as they track down opportunities to enhance their global strength while defending against potential adversaries. Realists place national interests at the core of their worldview because states supposedly operate to achieve economic power as well as military strength. Under the realist principle of balance of power international system stability occurs when states divide power between themselves so no one state can achieve

dominance. The emergence of new global powers including China creates challenges to dominant world powers such as the United States which according to the concept of Thucydides' Trap may result in international disputes. Through its realist framework one can understand international relations by emphasizing that states remain active in perpetual competition leading to conflicts (Carver, 2021).

US-China relations experienced several important developments throughout history which today determine their intense strategic competition as nations. When the Cold War ended China rose as a major power while the US and Soviet Union formerly led a bipolar global order until the Soviet disintegration happened. Amongst world superpowers the United States emerged as the single dominant power while Chinese economic growth together with military development brought China back to Asia Pacific great power status. China's aggressive maneuvers throughout the South China Sea together with its Belt and Road Initiative have increased the regional rivalry which caused the US to reassess its foreign and military strategy in the Asia Pacific. Foreign policy experts recognize that the United States pursues revival of its alliances and renewed military capability assessment to block Chinese expansion since power relationships transformed throughout multiple decades. Both countries in the US-China relationship operate under offensive realism principles to achieve maximum power and influence while navigating their interests through a historical lens of a fast-changing political world (Tahir, 2024).

From a realist perspective in international relations the strategic standoff between China and the United States focuses on political power and national self-interests. Realist theories demonstrate that Chinese global power expansion forms opposition to US leadership which produces security dilemmas between the nations. China interprets all US military interventions in the South China Sea as hostile acts that fuel tensions regarding Taiwanese control along with territorial sovereignty disputes. Each country dedicates most of its efforts to reach its strategic aims even though these efforts undermine possible collaborative possibilities. Economic competition is conducted in both nations in such a way that includes the technology race and the struggle for holding the control of important resources, namely microchips. The analysts argue that through realism tension will not abate because stares clash over who has the basic national interests to dominate over and the historical animosity between these powers produces conflicting policies which leads to conflict over dominance (Bodker).

As the US and China are in the midst of the US-China rivalry, their opposing national identities lead to more diverse foreign policy directions and corresponding geopolitical events. A decline in American political conditions and the corresponding increase of China to foreign policy is a rise in a China that expands through foreign policy and an American decline that leads to a political withdrawal concentrating on strategic restraint. Such consequent disagreements in approaches among the nations lead to intricate dynamics leading to increased Chinese assertiveness in face of American cautious behavior thereby making space for cooperative as well as unclear situations. The rivalry between Chinese and American nationalisms leads the United States to reduce its international commitments but China attempts to expand globally - reshaping the associations and power dynamics in Asia-Pacific institutions. The economic strained nature of this competition forces each country to protect its national interests at the expense of global governance structure resulting in fragmented markets across world economic systems. Under security matters the US needs to handle China's military power growth in East and South China Seas through the implementation of offshore balancing to prevent open confrontation. The global

governance's stability framework depends heavily on future US-China relations because their active nationalisms shape how the international system develops potentially leading to controlled transitions into this new bilateral situation (Schweller, 2018).

The international power contest between the United States and China is transforming the global system through global geopolitical and economic and security mechanisms. The trade war intensifies national skepticism while boosting border control measures which causes countries to integrate with their partner nations and become more independent. The economic consequences from the trade war have led to trade channeling changes and supply chain disturbances together with business uncertainty which has directed trade toward Brazil and similar countries. The security conflict between these nations intensifies through trade instrument usage such as sanctioning which further destabilizes global stability. Future academic investigation needs to evaluate how the rivalry will influence global cooperation patterns and stability across the long-term period according to this research (Parsapour, 2024).

The paper engages with the principles of Realist Theory in International Relations, particularly focusing on power politics, state interests, and the balance of power. Realism posits that the international system is anarchic, meaning there is no overarching authority to enforce rules, which leads states to prioritize their own security and interests. This perspective aligns with the notion that states act as rational actors, primarily motivated by the pursuit of power and national interests. In the paper, the structural realism is criticized for its the unfair neglect of cultural and ideological factors affecting the change in the behavior of a state, because it focuses on it ignoring ideas such as cultural realism, which considers all these factors when analyzing the U.S. China relations. The author observes that alliances formed among states based on a common agenda do not necessarily suggest homogeny in ideological differences, which can create difference in how they perceive threats and opportunities, dictating the workings of strategic competition among the partners. Additionally, the case of U.S.-UK relations after World War II serves as negative example to the expected power transition conflict, where cooperation was possible, despite a stark transformation in international power. The paper finally concludes that the future trajectory of U.S.-China competition will be determined by the interplay of cultural factors and state interests, which are significant for an ultimate grasp of the international relations (McDonagh, 2024).

Although it goes without saying that the US-China rivalry is a recent issue being seen from a realist perspective, there is still a gulf in understanding the impact of this strategic competition on the global economic structures, trade patterns, as well as the international security and the military alliances. Until relatively recently, most analyses have been dominated by power politics and state interests but, as cyberwarfare, artificial intelligence and digital governance become more prominent, so they also become more relevant. In response to this rivalry, both nations have turned away from free economic trade and restructured the flows of global supply chains, which has an impact on international trade and economics as a whole. The competition also affects military alliances and the security dynamics as the US focuses on building alliances in the Asia Pacific and China grows its military capabilities. In order to understand fully the impact of the US-China rivalry in terms of the global order, particularly economic interdependence and security frameworks, the gaps herein need to be bridged.

#### Discussion

#### **Impact on Global Economic Structures and Trade Patterns**

Thus, intensely engaging in the US—China rivalry in terms of trade wars and tariffs has výrazнo affected the global economic structures and trade patterns. The result of this conflict has been a tremendously adverse impact on the economy of, not only, the two countries involved but the entire world economy as a whole. The two countries both experienced decreased growth of GDP of 1.41% and 1.35% respectively as a result of the trade war. The reduction in sectoral imports and outputs in both countries has been seen because of the conflict as this has led to a reduction in the economic impact of higher tariff and trade restrictions (Itakura, 2020). Trade war has exerted broader disruptive impact on the world economy because of global value chain (GVC) disruption. The negative effect on bilateral trade is global, thus reducing world GDP about \$450 billion when GVCs are accounted for (Tam, 2020). Not only has trade tensions reshaped multinational investment patterns as the European firms upped their investment in China and American firms shifted their focus to Southeast Asia. Economic equilibrium on a global supply chain scale is being affected by this shift, which is a strategic realignment to respond to the trade conflict (Jung & Park, 2024). Both countries have been moving away from multilateralism of the trade system to unilateral actions, creating a challenge to the multilateral trading system, and this have been the rivalry. This behavior has contributed to a crisis within the World Trade Organization (WTO), challenging the global trade regime (Altemöller, 2022). The trade conflict has increased economic policy uncertainty, affecting global markets such as stock, credit, energy, and commodities. While China has gained influence, the US remains dominant, with political factors driving concerns over China's competition with the US (Zhang, Lei, Ji, & Kutan, 2019).

The US-China rivalry has significantly disrupted global supply chains, affecting multinational corporations worldwide. The trade conflicts between these two economic giants have led to shifts in multinational investment patterns, with American firms withdrawing from China and redirecting their focus toward Southeast Asia to reduce dependence on the Chinese market. Such a shift reflects changes going on in international business strategy due to geopolitical and economic changes, as well as major changes within the global supply chain (Jung & Park, Winners and losers in U.S.—China trade disputes: A dynamic compositional analysis of foreign direct investment, 2024). The rivalry has also brought great uncertainty in the world's markets: from stock markets to credit, energy, and commodity markets, the US stays dominant, while China gains weight. But they have also contributed to shrinking the global economy by shrinking the international trade, reducing the output, dampening the investment and the stock prices plunging so that it has an effect on the economic welfare of the global economy (Tam, 2020).

To meet the challenge of the US-China rivalry, there are new economic alliances, trade agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Thus, the rivalry between the US and China has caused a fragmentation of the global order where countries have formed alliances to overcome the economic and geopolitical tensions between Washington and Beijing. Not only is the rivalry reshaping the global economic landscape but it is shaping newly born economic alliances on how countries are trying to skirt the economic impacts of the trade war and maintain economic stability (Li, 2024). More and more recently the US and China have abandoned trade multilateralism in favor of aggressive unilateralism,

which only works to reinforce the formation of new economic alliances to protect their interests in an ever-changing global order (Hopewell, 2022)

#### **Implications for International Security and Military Alliances**

Such a rivalry between the United States and China also has profound implications for the global military strategies and expenditures. In the wider current geopolitical rivalry, both are conducting a strategic military build-up that is central to it. It is not just about raising the number of weapons or soldiers; it's also a move of strategic positioning to project power and influence of our control over critical regions, especially Indo-Pacific. But the United States has been adjusting its defense and security strategies in response to how it perceives China rising geopolitical power. This means a shift from the 'War on Terror' towards viewing China as the top political adversary worldwide. Indeed, in particular the US is building and filling in with such alliances that it can plug these into a larger vehicle with a declared aim of pushing back against China's influence in the Asia Pacific region more broadly stated (Kim, 2020). In the Indo-Pacific, it manifests itself in the increased defense presence and exercises; but also various alliances such as AUKUS and QUAD appear to be strengthened.

On the other hand, China is following the strategy where economic growth is accompanied by military modernization. It is part of a larger plan for lessening dependency on external powers and developing more self- sufficiency in technology and defense capabilities (Lomanov, 2021). China's military strategy is also based upon regional dominance, in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait where they strongly assert their territorial claims and influence. The Chinese military build-up it sees as a response to US actions, and aimed at deterring US influence in Chinese perceived sphere of influence (Kanellopoulos, 2023). Not only is the military moving toward build up but also the words and actions from the two nations involved. US and China rivalry is polishing global security structures although both the countries seek to influence across the world through alliances and partnerships. The result of such rivalry has given rise to a new conflict bipolarity where both nations engage in non-violent conflicts such as trade and techno war while at the same time enhancing their military capabilities (Degterev, Ramich, & Tsvyk, 2021).

In addition, this rivalry affects international security politics. So, the rivalry frames shift in alliances from the US embracing NATO and the QUAD, to China's Belt and Road. The US is actively strengthening its alliances to counter China's rise. This includes reinforcing NATO's focus on the China threat and forming new coalitions like the QUAD and AUKUS with countries such as India, Japan, Australia, and the UK. These efforts aim to create a robust coalition similar to NATO during the Cold War, focusing on balancing China's influence (Shah, Majeed, & Arshad, 2022). China is expanding its influence through initiatives like the Belt and Road, which aims to build economic and strategic ties across Asia, Africa, and South America. Additionally, China is strengthening its relationship with Russia, viewing it as a potential ally against US influence. This partnership is crucial for China to counterbalance US-led alliances and promote a multipolar world order (Klimenko, 2024). The rivalry leads to a reconfiguration of global security structures, with both nations vying for influence in key regions. The US's focus on integrating existing alliances into an anti-China grouping and China's efforts to weaken these alliances through economic and strategic means highlight the ongoing strategic competition (Kim, 2020).

The US and China are engaged in an arms race, particularly in emerging technologies like AI and cybersecurity, which are crucial for maintaining military superiority. This competition affects global technological norms and standards, influencing international security dynamics (Ahammad, 2024). The rivalry exacerbates tensions in regions like the Indo-Pacific, where both countries are increasing their military presence. This raises the risk of military conflicts and pressures regional countries to align with one of the superpowers, complicating international security.

Moreover, the US-China rivalry significantly influences regional tensions and conflicts, particularly in the South China Sea and Taiwan, from a realist perspective. This rivalry is characterized by both nations' strategic interests and military activities in these regions, which are crucial for their geopolitical and economic objectives. The South China Sea (SCS) has become a focal point of US-China tension due to its strategic importance and abundant resources. China views the SCS as a core interest, asserting historical claims and expanding its military presence through the construction of artificial islands. This assertiveness is perceived as a challenge to US influence and its allies in the region, leading to increased militarized disputes (Askari, 2021). The US, although not a direct claimant, supports freedom of navigation and has strengthened defense ties with regional states like the Philippines and Vietnam to counterbalance China's actions. The rivalry in the SCS is often compared to a new Cold War, with both powers engaging in military posturing and strategic maneuvers (Balakrishnan, 2019). Also, Taiwan is another critical flashpoint in the US-China rivalry. The US maintains unofficial relations with Taiwan and provides it with military support, which China views as interference in its internal affairs. This situation exacerbates tensions, as China considers Taiwan a breakaway province and is committed to reunification, by force if necessary. The US's involvement in Taiwan is part of its broader strategy to contain China's influence in the Asia-Pacific region. The military dynamics around Taiwan are a reflection of the broader strategic competition between the US and China, with potential implications for regional security and stability (Yuan, 2016).

#### Conclusion

On the one hand, the analysis shows that the US-China rivalry has a major influence on the global economic structures, international security, and military alliances. China's trade war and economic decoupling with the other power have disrupted the global supply chains, reshaping the patterns of trade, and they have also spurred the regionalization by RCEP and CPTPP alliances. On the security front, the contest has led to ever strengthening military buildups and strategic alliances where the US fortifies relationships such as AUKUS and the QUAD, against a Chinese push to strengthen the Belt and the Road and needle Moscow closer. These dynamics reveal how world power moves are changing and the consequent greater jeopardy of war in regions such as the Indo-Pacific, South China Sea and Taiwan. With regard to realism, this competition shows the protracted nature of power politics and state centric competition in influencing global order.

Reaching and navigating this top rival requires a moderate balance of moving away from risk and taking stability. It should hence include dipping the Foreign Ministry's hand into diplomatic engagement to lower tempers, support multilateral frameworks in the preservation of global trade norms, and taking confidence building measures to avert risk of unintended momentum in military escalation. Second, there must be a long, techno-policymaking effort to tackle the technological competition, so the emerging

technologies, such as AI and cybersecurity, do not hinder global security and governance along with having far reaching implications. It should hence include dipping the Foreign Ministry's hand into diplomatic engagement to lower tempers, support multilateral frameworks in the preservation of global trade norms, and taking confidence building measures to avert risk of unintended momentum in military escalation.

Future research should find what evolves in the rivalry in emergent areas of competition such as cyber governance, domestic climate change collaboration, and global public health. It is crucial for better understanding of the role of non-state actors, including multinational corporations, international organizations, in intermediating or exacerbating the competition. In addition, when compared with US-China rivalry to historical great power rivalries help in finding a deeper understanding of the cyclical nature of power transitions. In this regard, scholars and policymakers would do well to frame this rivalry through realism as by so doing they would better understand its implications for the stability of the globe and the blinding challenges of operating in a multipolar world order.

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